ANALYSING EDUCATION POLICY

THEORY AND METHOD

Edited by MEGHAN STACEY
and NICOLE MOCKLER

ROUTLEDGE

"How we theorise and analyse policy is an under-worked and under-written aspect of critical policy studies. This book fills a gap in an accessible and articulate manner and draws on the scholarship of an impressive and diverse set of policy scholars. Working with text and agency to explore how policy is understood and investigated, and posing searching questions about how policy is analysed and researched, this collection will be invaluable to educationalists, researchers, and policymakers, in sharpening current and future studies in the field."

—**Meg Maguire**, *Professor, King's College London, UK*

"As factors influencing the development and enactment of policy in education become increasingly varied and complex, new approaches to policy research are clearly needed. Drawing on recent developments in social and political theory, this book presents a collection of critical essays that constitutes a most accessible and helpful introduction to the shifting field of educational policy studies."

—**Fazal Rizvi**, *Emeritus Professor, The University of Melbourne, and the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, USA*

"[A] must-read primer to critical education policy analysis. This rich collection by renowned international experts spans a wide array of theoretical and methodological insights into text-based sources and the roles and experiences of human and non-human actors. Infused with concrete examples and sensitivity towards the variety of analytical approaches in the field, it is a true gift to all of us pursuing responsible, relevant, and robust research on education policy in national and global contexts."

—**Nelli Piattoeva**, *Associate Professor, Tampere University, Finland*

"The field of education policy research is a morass of epistemological turns and normative wrangling, making it a difficult space to navigate for students and researchers not familiar with its rich albeit complicated relationship to different intellectual histories and political projects. To aid readers through this muddy terrain and offer essential clarity and comprehension on the various theories and methods available, from network ethnography to visual discourse, problem representation and Foucauldian analytics, Stacey and Mockler bring together a stellar group of researchers to showcase some of the most innovative approaches to education policy research."

—**Andrew Wilkins**, *Professor, Goldsmiths, University of London, UK*

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ANALYSING EDUCATION POLICY

Analysing Education Policy: Theory and Method provides a comprehensive overview of key approaches in critical education policy research. With chapters from internationally recognised and established scholars in the field, this book provides an authoritative account of how different questions may be approached and answered.

Part 1 features chapters focused on text-based approaches to analysis, including critical discourse analysis, thinking with Foucault, Indigenist Policy Analysis, media analysis, the analysis of promotional texts in education, and the analysis of online networks. Part 2 features chapters focused on network ethnography, actor-network theory, materiality in policy, Institutional Ethnography, decolonising approaches to curriculum policy, working with children and young people, and working with education policy elites. These chapters are supported by an introduction to each section, as well as an overall introduction and conclusion chapter from the editors, drawing together key themes and ongoing considerations for the field.

Critical education policy analysis takes many different forms, each of which works with distinctly different questions and fulfils different purposes. This book is the first to clearly map current common and influential approaches to answering these questions, providing important guidance for both new and established researchers.

Meghan Stacey is Senior Lecturer in the Sociology of Education and Education Policy at the UNSW School of Education, where she takes a particular interest in the critical policy sociology of teachers' work. Her first book, *The Business of Teaching*, was published in 2020 with Palgrave.

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Theory and Method

Edited by Meghan Stacey and Nicole Mockler

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Introduction

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ANALYSING EDUCATION POLICY

An introduction

Meghan Stacey and Nicole Mockler

Introduction

In December 2019, the Australian Education Council released the Mparntwe, or Alice Springs Declaration. Being the fourth national declaration of its kind, this 24-page document signed by all Australian education ministers (state, territory and federal) is intended to provide overarching guidance for the direction of education policy in Australia. The document states two national goals for Australian education. Goal 1 is that 'the Australian education system promotes excellence and equity' (Education Council, 2019, p. 1), and Goal 2 is that 'all young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community' (Education Council, 2019, p. 1). These goals are to be supported through 11 'commitments to action', including – as some examples – 'supporting quality teaching and leadership', 'developing world-class curriculum and assessment' and 'strengthening accountability and transparency with strong meaningful measures' (Education Council, 2019, p. 1).

The Mparntwe Declaration is a core policy text in Australian education and an example of the kind of policy that those reading this book might be interested in analysing. Considering beyond the content of these two stated goals and 11 'commitments to action', what else might a researcher of education policy want to know about the Mparntwe Declaration?

Here are some of the questions researchers might ask:

1. Are the goals of the Declaration likely to be achieved – will the Declaration 'work'?
2. Is the Declaration comprehensive, or are there notable omissions?

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3. What kind of power dynamics are suggested by what is included, and what is excluded, from the Declaration?
4. Whose viewpoint does the Declaration represent?
5. What are the views of the stakeholders the Declaration aims to impact – and those it doesn't?
6. What is the history of the Declaration, both nationally and internationally, and how did it come about?
7. How does the language used in the Declaration shape the people and problems it describes?
8. How is the Declaration presented using text and visuals, and how do these features shape our understanding of it?
9. How have the core issues related to the Declaration been taken up by the media?

Each of these questions is different. Each of these questions is interesting and important. And each lends itself to different kinds of analytical approaches.

When conducting policy analysis, it's important to think first about the kind of question one wishes to ask. Then, an approach that is appropriate to answer this question can be considered. This book is designed to do two things. First is to introduce a range of questions that can be asked of education policy, including those that may not seem immediately obvious or appealing. As we have argued already, there are lots of ways in which policy can be thought about. Identifying and asking interesting and generative questions are key. Second, this book will help its readers to identify the kinds of approaches that are likely to answer the questions they are interested in asking and to provide some examples of research which has asked similar questions, using similar approaches, in the field of education.

This book presents an overview of how critical education researchers have sought to analyse education policy in recent years. Each chapter explores a distinct approach. This book is divided into two parts. Part 1 looks at theory and method for text and document analysis – analysing policy as a written document or via text available in the media or online. Part 2 looks at policy analysis via the views of human participants – those who create, enact or otherwise experience policy.

In this chapter, we offer an overview of education policy – how it can be understood and defined, how it can be and has been analysed, and current trends and points of focus in current research. In this way, this chapter provides what we hope is a useful conceptual mapping and 'pulse check' of critical education policy studies today. Finally, we provide a road map for the rest of this book, which can be read cover to cover or by diving into particular chapters according to the reader's interests. Either way, our aim for this book is to provide guidance to those looking to expand their understanding of

policy analysis in education, and the rich range of contributions that different approaches to education policy analysis can make.

What is education policy?

Policy as a term has been taken to mean many different things. As Colebatch (2009, p. 7) writes, it could signify anything from 'a broad orientation' to 'an indication of normal practice', to 'a specific commitment' or even a 'statement of values'. Another definition of policy comes from Dye (1992), who describes policy as whatever governments choose to do or not do. While policy is not only made by governments, there is much that is helpful in Dye's (1992) definition. This includes that policy is, importantly, not only about what gets done but also about what is not done and what is not addressed. Policy does not only exist in the form of 'official' policy documents, either – it can also include, for example, agenda setting and funding arrangements, implementation, evaluation and effects that are both intended and unintended. In addition, policies can be 'all but ignored' (Jones, 2013, p. 4) and have little or no effect in practice. As such, the question of 'implementation' or enactment is also important, as policy may only really take shape (or not) 'on the ground'.

One definition of policy that has been influential is that from Easton (1953), of policy as the 'authoritative allocation of values'. The key point here is that policy is not neutral – there are always particular, not necessarily coherent, values, aims and goals which underpin policy and which are important to try and understand. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 5) put it, policy 'desires or imagines change', which implies that there must be something about the existing state of affairs that is undesirable. However, interests and values are rarely singular, and policy can in fact consist of and reflect multiple, sometimes, competing interests and values.

Building further on such considerations, we would emphasise that policy is not only about what is and is not said, but also about what is able to be said (or written), and the ways in which language in policy can both reflect and construct ways of thinking about particular issues. Helpful here is the well-known distinction made by policy scholar Stephen Ball, between policy as 'text' and policy as 'discourse'. Policy as 'text' is about 'representations which are encoded in complex ways (via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations) and decoded in complex ways (via actors' interpretations and meanings in relation to their history, experiences, skills, resources and context)' (Ball, 1993, p. 12). The idea of policy as 'discourse' shows us that focusing on the 'text' element potentially 'misses and fails to attend to what [policy makers] do not think about. Thus we need to appreciate the way in which policy ensembles, collections of related policies, exercise power through a production of "truth" and "knowledge", as

discourses' (Ball, 1993, p. 14). This idea of policy as discourse leads us to the notion of 'problematisation'. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 6) write:

> Policies are also often assembled as responses to perceived problems in a field such as education. Here, however, we again have to be aware of the discursive work that policies do in constructing problems in certain ways, perhaps differently from what the best research-based empirical and theoretical analyses might suggest.

Attention to the ways in which policy can construct particular 'problems' has been a core focus of the work of policy scholar Carol Bacchi. As Bacchi (2009, p. 1) writes, 'if you look at a specific policy, you can see that it understands the "problem" to be a particular sort of "problem". Policies, therefore, constitute (or give shape to) "problems" '. Bacchi uses this conceptual grounding to develop a particular method of policy analysis called 'What is the problem represented to be?', which is explored in Chapter 5 of this book.

It thus becomes apparent that what policy 'is' depends to some degree on 'the specific thinking technologies brought to bear' (Gulson et al., 2015, p. 5). As Gulson et al. ask, '[I]s it a text, a narrative, a technique of subjectification, a defensive strategy of disavowal, a fold, a spatial and spatialising orchestration?' (Gulson et al., 2015, p. 5). In this book, we adopt a broad definition of policy, understanding it as including, but not limited to, 'official' documents produced by governments and other educational institutions, which position educational issues in ways that reflect particular values and which can have a range of 'effects'. Now that a working definition of policy has been developed, we are well placed to consider different approaches to policy analysis, which is what we focus on in the next section of this chapter.

What is education policy analysis?

Approaches to policy analysis in education vary considerably. This is not only because different approaches provide different kinds of information but also because different approaches tend to be more or less appropriate for answering different kinds of questions. More than this, different questions are underpinned by different kinds of assumptions and associated conceptual orientations. Understanding which question/s to ask and the information needed to answer them are important first steps in conducting a policy analysis, and that is where this book can help.

For many readers, it's possible that out of all the potential questions listed at the start of this chapter, Question 1 was the most appealing. Finding out whether or not something 'works', especially if it has received public funding and taken up people's valuable time in its development or 'roll-out', might, at first glance, appear to be the most important issue when it comes to policy

analysis. And indeed, much of the history of public policy analysis has been devoted to finding out whether or not a policy 'works'. Broadly speaking, this work has taken a 'rationalist' approach, seeking to evaluate what Stephen Ball (1993) might term the 'first-order' effects of policy (what it is intended to do and whether or not it achieves this) rather than 'second order' and potentially unanticipated ramifications – or indeed questioning the underlying logic and rationale of such shifts. In the words of Sanderson (2002, p. 1), it is this kind of rationalist approach which underpins 'evidence-based' approaches, which 'attempt to ground policy making in more reliable knowledge of "what works" '. This approach, Sanderson summarises, asks, 'what works for whom under what circumstances, and why?' (p. 19)

According to Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 3), rationalist approaches to policy analysis began to lose popularity from the 1980s, for five reasons:

> First, it was believed that the approach did not produce the reliable, generalizable and predictable policy knowledge it had promised. Secondly, the positivist view of (social) science upon which the rationalist approach was based was increasingly discredited or at least challenged within the social sciences. Thirdly, a range of new theoretical developments such as critical theory, feminism, post-structuralism and post-colonialism undermined rationalist approaches and claims to knowledge, and their alleged value neutrality. Fourthly, the Keynesian economic theories upon which many policy interventions were based lost popular support, especially following the ideological assault on them by the Thatcher and Reagan governments. Market ideologies framed by neoliberalism became ascendant around the world. And finally, and perhaps most significantly, the emerging processes of globalization transformed the political and economic contexts in which public policies were developed (Kennett, 2008).

Yet although positivist approaches to education policy may have been challenged within critical, feminist, poststructural and postcolonial paradigms, there has arguably been a 'resurgence of interest in evidence-based policy making' (Sanderson, 2002, p. 19), particularly in government, in the last 30 odd years. Indeed, one key theme of critical policy research in recent times has been how 'evidence' in education policy is understood and operationalised. Today, rationalist, evidence-based approaches to policy analysis – or more accurately perhaps, 'evaluation' – are arguably most effectively taken up by international bodies, such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). A 2020 OECD report, for instance, summarises policy evaluation practices across OECD member and non-member nations, arguing for the importance of evaluation as 'a critical element of good public governance', ensuring public sector 'quality, responsiveness and efficiency' through 'an understanding of what works, why, for whom, and under what circumstances'

(OECD, 2020a, p. 4) – a definition echoing that of Sanderson's (2002) almost word for word. An example of the OECD's own evaluative contributions might be its work on the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on education – for instance, their evaluation report of school responses co-produced with the Harvard Graduate School of Education (Reimers & Schleicher, 2020).

Such a work is important and useful. However, with an aim to distil large-scale 'lessons' and 'how to' guidelines, its approach to knowledge is fundamentally different from those of the chapter authors in this book, where the intention is more to question, critique and open-up, rather than provide definitive 'answers' to educational issues. In this project, we join Gulson et al. (2015, p. 5) in asserting that 'what might at first glance look like procedural or practical questions, such as how best to implement a particular policy, how to identify best practices or how to design evaluations, are always already epistemic and political questions'. As such, 'good, responsible and interesting scholarship makes a concerted effort to scrutinise these assumptions and their implications' (Gulson et al., 2015, p. 1). Critical research thereby differs epistemologically from rationalist approaches to policy analysis, finding value in multiple perspectives and a range of lived experiences rather than seeking to identify singular truths. We would argue that this orientation to education policy analysis reflects a growing trend in education policy studies, with critical policy research increasing in its range and scope over the past 20–30 years.

Policy analysis in critical education studies today

Today, critical policy research in education is a rich and diverse field, often attracting scholars interested in understanding the operation of power in education and how education policy can differently serve the interests of different groups. In this section of this chapter, rather than looking at theory and method in education policy studies (which is the focus of the rest of this book), we provide some grounding regarding the kinds of topics which have attracted scholarly attention in recent years. The themes we work through in this section reflect recent socio-political shifts in education, often related to neoliberalised policy settlements in different educational jurisdictions. Neoliberalism tends to emphasise personal responsibility and a 'small state', aiming to achieve global economic success through the formation of human capital (Connell, 2013). Individuals are thereby responsible for their own academic success, with this success viewed as the key to progressing the national economy. Given the seeming emphasis on minimal government intervention, such drives usually come in the form of centralised accountability structures to ensure that these individual responsibilities are being met.

One articulation of the form that recent education policy has tended to take is that of the 'Global Education Reform Movement' (GERM), as discussed by Sahlberg (2016). Sahlberg (2016) summarises this pattern of reform

as centred around 'competition and choice'; 'corporate models of change'; 'test-based accountability'; 'standardisation of teaching and learning'; and 'increased emphasis on reading literacy, mathematics and science'. According to Verger et al. (2019, p. 6), only a few nations have remained immune to such trends, including 'East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea, and European countries such as France, Germany, Denmark, Norway, Belgium and, of course, Finland' – although Proctor et al. (2020) have argued that neoliberal tendencies can also be identified in some of these.

Meanwhile, work out of the United States (Ravitch, 2014), and England and Australia (Lupton & Hayes, 2021), has identified similar themes, with policy moves emphasising individual choice and responsibility rather than public provision, and centralised and standardised measures of accountability for schools, students and teachers. From our perspective, Sahlberg, Ravitch, Lupton and Hayes are highlighting key themes in education reform which, perhaps unsurprisingly, have filtered through to become key themes in education research, which we summarise as centred around the following: centralisation and standardisation; testing, data and evidence; teachers; marketisation, privatisation and commercialisation; and a focus on the examination of how policy 'moves' in a globalised world. In the following paragraphs, we discuss some of the recent research on these themes. Throughout, we maintain a general focus on work within the Australian context from which we write.

The first theme, of centralisation and standardisation, is perhaps somewhat counterintuitive given the global emphasis on personal responsibility which has dominated much education reform. However, within neoliberalised contexts in which much responsibility and purported 'control' are devolved to the local level, the introduction of centralised mechanisms functions to ensure accountability for such new responsibilities. In Australia, standardisation has been a dominant focus of reform (Reid, 2019). Savage's (2021) research has focused, for example, on the federalist system and how the federal government has increasingly involved itself in school education – otherwise largely a state responsibility. This echoes federal interventions noted in other countries, such as 'No Child Left Behind' and 'Race to the Top' in the United States. Two Australian manifestations of this shift have been a new national curriculum and national standards for teachers and principals. Both of these developments have seen their share of critical research, with the curriculum critiqued for what it includes and excludes (e.g. Maxwell et al., 2018; Yates, 2018), and utility of the standards debated in relation to their necessarily reductive function (Connell, 2009), their use for 'regulation' (Mockler, 2013) and accreditation (McGrath-Champ et al., 2020), and the benefit they may provide in establishing a 'common language' for teachers (Loughland & Ellis, 2016). While curriculum and teaching standards are two particularly tangible examples of centralised reform in Australia, we also note other large-scale trends. These include, seemingly paradoxical, pushes towards devolved school governance

(Keddie et al., 2020) and associated increases in teacher workload including 'paperwork' and 'administration' (Fitzgerald et al., 2019), a concern not only in Australia but also internationally (OECD, 2020b).

Indeed, when considering the role of 'paperwork', we should also include some discussion of the seemingly increasing emphasis on 'data' in education. As part of a broader move towards 'evidence-based' learning (Ladwig, 2018), this shift has seen a privilege of statistical evidence in education, which some have argued has sidelined other forms of evidence such as teacher observation (Mockler & Stacey, 2021). Additionally, this focus can at times be inappropriate, with teachers encouraged to make claims about student learning based on specious connections to particular forms of data (Ladwig, 2018). This is facilitated by the move towards large-scale standardised testing in Australia, discussed earlier. Such an emphasis on data – where 'measures become targets' (Strathern, 1997) – has also been argued to have perverse effects at the level of school funding policy where this is tied to test results (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Such dynamics are evident not only at national level but also internationally, with the best example being the OECD's PISA tests, which have been the target of much critical policy research since their establishment in 2000 and subsequent influence on schooling policy, including its function in causing 'PISA-shock' for countries who performed less well than expected and consequently sought to reform their education systems (e.g. Waldow, 2009).

An emphasis on tracking student performance also has implications for teachers, as noted earlier, particularly in terms of their roles as data 'collectors' and interpreters for their classrooms. Teachers themselves have been a further point of focus for critical education policy researchers, including how they may come to understand their roles in relation to data (Hardy & Lewis, 2017). This may be one articulation of what has been described as a re-emergence of 'teacher centrality' in Australasia, Europe, Great Britain and North America (Larsen, 2010). In Australia, this has been particularly evident in relation to debates around teacher 'quality' (e.g. Mockler, 2018), also at play in teacher education (e.g. Stacey et al., 2020). The most important critique of this focus on teachers is that it can sideline other concerns – most notably the factors outside of the school gates which can influence student learning, particularly in relation to student advantage and disadvantage (Skourdoumbis, 2017).

Issues around student advantage and disadvantage, and concentrations of such within particular schools, have also been a particular point of concern in Australia. As a country with a relatively high proportion of students attending private schools (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021), researchers in this space have examined discrepancies in funding across and within the sectors (e.g. Rowe & Perry, 2019b) as well as patterns of student enrolment according to identity markers such as social class and ethnicity (e.g. Ho, 2020; Rowe & Lubienski, 2017) and effects on patterns of achievement (Thomson, 2021). An emerging area of research, related to but distinct from examinations of

school choice and privatisation, is commercialisation within schooling. By 'commercialisation', researchers are usually referring to the 'creation, marketing and sale of education goods and services to schools by for-profit providers' (Hogan et al., 2018, p. 141), often multinational companies operating around the globe. One example of selling schooling itself is for-profit private schooling operating in developing countries (e.g. Riep, 2017). Often, this area of research intersects with explorations of data use in schools, through companies providing data-tracking technologies (e.g. for an examination of the 'Class Dojo' programme, see Manolev et al., 2019).

As we noted, the preceding paragraphs have a particular focus on research from the national context of Australia. This is in part because it is the context from which we write and that we know best. However, Australia also constitutes something of a case of recent reform which, while contextually distinct, also reflects globalised flows of policy: how policy 'moves' and is taken up in different parts of the world with both similarity and difference, both in the nature of the policy itself and in its effects. Indeed, this is the final theme of critical education policy research which we explore in this section: what Steiner-Khamsi (2004) calls policy 'borrowing' and 'lending', and research which is described as focused on policy 'mobilities' (e.g. Lewis, 2022). Lingard (2010) writes of the need for policy 'learning' as well as borrowing, such that policy can meet the needs of local context rather than simply being transplanted across the globe. Other researchers have explored how it is not (or not only) governments which are engaging in such cross-national shifts, but rather this is a feature of 'new policy assemblages' including 'multilateral agencies, national governments, NGOs, think tanks and advocacy groups, consultants, social entrepreneurs and international business' (Ball, 2012, p. 10). The work of Hogan (Hogan et al., 2016; Hogan, 2018) has been key in this space, looking for instance at how companies like Pearson work across international borders to influence education policy.

This book

Each of the chapters in this book considers a different kind of approach to education policy analysis – different in both methodology and the theoretical principles which underpin them. Written by authors who have themselves used these approaches in their own research, each chapter provides a general introduction to the approach in question and some examples of how it has been and can be used. Chapters have been separated into two overall parts: the first focuses on the analysis of documents and other text-based sources; and the second focuses on analysis of the views of particular participants on their experiences of and with policy. In our view, most critical policy research falls into at least one of these two categories, and sometimes both. While we have separated the chapters in this volume into these categories for the purposes of this

book, it is important to note that we do not view such categories as discrete. Just what constitutes a 'participant', for instance, is not universally agreed. For an exploration of how researchers have sought to engage with the role of non-human participants in education policy, see for example the chapters on actor-network theory (Chapter 11) and policy and materiality (Chapter 14).

Additionally, while this book aims to provide a wide-ranging introduction to core approaches in critical education policy analysis, we by no means claim that it is comprehensive. For a text which seeks to make explicit connections between theory and methodology in relation to education policy research, we recommend Gulson et al. (2015). For a detailed exploration of the 'messiness' and ethics of critical education policy research, we recommend Addey and Piattoeva (2022). Finally, we note that this book is not attempting to, and indeed cannot, 'cover' all approaches to education policy analysis being used today. Thus, while we hope to introduce you to some common approaches, there are of course omissions. One substantial one which the reader may quickly identify is a lack of discussion of quantitative approaches to education policy analysis. This omission is intentional. As discussed earlier, there is a wide range of ways in which education policy can be thought about, some of which are quite distinct from the approaches covered in this book (such as evaluation). Evaluation research tends to take a more quantitative and positivist orientation towards its object of study (Sanderson, 2002). That is not to say that quantitative research on education policy cannot also be critical (see the following for some examples: Perry & McConney, 2010; Perry & Southwell, 2014; Rowe & Perry, 2019a). Critical policy research can also employ mixed-methods, as the chapters in this volume on media analysis (Chapter 6), social media and network analysis (Chapter 8) and network ethnography (Chapter 10) demonstrate. However, on the whole, we focus our attention on dominant research approaches in current university contexts, which tend to take a critical, qualitative form.

Document and text analysis

In Part 1 of this book, authors focus on approaches to policy research which use documents or other text-based sources as the target of their analysis. After a section introduction, the next chapter (Chapter 3) explores critical discourse analysis, an approach which considers the relationship between language and society through the work of Norman Fairclough. The following chapter, Chapter 4, moves to consider the influential work of Michel Foucault, and the possibilities and limitations of thinking with Foucault in conducting policy analysis work. Chapter 5 explores Indigenist Policy Analysis, drawing on the 'What is the problem represented to be?' approach, discussed through the authors' work on First Nations education policy in Australia. Chapter 6

presents approaches to media analysis including studies that focus on large corpora of media texts, and those that employ close analysis of single or small groups of texts, using a range of conceptual and theoretical tools. In Chapter 7, the focus moves to promotional texts – websites, school prospectuses and experiential marketing – and discusses how visual, discourse analytic and ethnographic methods can be used to assess the nature and role of such texts. Chapter 8 considers recent innovations in the use of social media, internet archives and other online record-keeping.

Participant analysis

In Part 2 of this book, authors consider approaches to understanding the roles and experiences of particular actors in education policy – usually, but not always, human. Chapter 10 explores network ethnography, in which a researcher follows persons, things, money and more, through methods including text-based sources as well as participant research methods such as interviews and field notes. This chapter, along with Chapters 11 and 12, highlights the role of both human and non-human participants in education policy, with Chapter 11 focusing on the utility and controversies surrounding actor-network theory and Chapter 12 exploring the role of materiality in education policy research. Similar to network ethnography, institutional ethnography – explored in Chapter 13 – seeks to track and trace chains of activity, understanding policy texts not as static documents but as texts which elicit particular responses from those who engage with them, considering 'text–action–text' sequences. Chapter 14 looks at the decolonisation of research in curriculum development through participatory methods. In Chapters 15 and 16, authors explore what it can mean to work with two important categories of human participants in education policy: the young people most affected by it (Chapter 15) and those who have primary responsibility for making it (Chapter 16).

Conclusion

As researchers in the field of education policy, we have a deep and vested interest in helping this field take shape into the future. This is especially so because the future, it seems to us, is one in which there will be ever more need for vigilant criticality of the positioning of education in the public domain. As education continues in its assigned role as a central pillar of the economy for nations around the globe, it will be important to continue asking questions about whether this positioning is desirable and what it does to and for the students, teachers, parents and other stakeholders involved. We hope that this book will help in continuing this project, providing an accessible and cohesive 'way in' to the critical analysis of education policy.

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PART 1

Document and text analysis

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2

DOCUMENT AND TEXT ANALYSIS IN CRITICAL EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES

Nicole Mockler and Meghan Stacey

Introduction

Starting to think about identifying documents and texts for analysis in critical education policy studies raises a couple of important questions, namely 'what is policy?' and relatedly, 'what counts as a "policy text"?' While, as we noted in Chapter 1, in some ways, there is contestation regarding what does and does not count as policy, a classic definition that many critical policy sociologists in education tend to rely on comes from the work of political scientist David Easton. Easton defined policy as the 'authoritative allocation of values' (1953, p. 129). This is a very broad definition of policy – on this basis, almost any organisation can be responsible for producing policy and any text produced under these conditions might be understood as a policy text. Bacchi (2009) makes an argument for a closer focus on texts that posit solutions or actions. In this book, we take a 'broad church' approach, but we also acknowledge that it is important to be able to articulate how the texts we might be drawn to constitute 'policy texts'. Like many other policy researchers in education, the policy texts we focus on in our own work tend to be those developed by governments and school systems that might be thought of as 'official' policy. However, more locally developed policy texts (such as the promotional materials that are the focus of Chapter 7), as well as text which reflects how policy is constructed (see, e.g. Chapter 8) also fall under the broad definition of policy text that we are adopting in this book.

What, then, constitutes document and text analysis within the frame of critical education policy studies? While there are some examples of quantitative and mixed-methods approaches – see, for example, Chapter 6, which touches on corpus-assisted methods, along with Spicksley's (2022) analysis of

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ministerial speeches; and Bokhove et al.'s (2023) analysis of 30,000 OfSTED reports – for the most part, the approaches used in this work are qualitative. Ball (1993, 2015) distinguishes between policy as text, policy as discourse, and policy effects. While we most usually draw on other sources, such as interviews with stakeholders (see Part 2) to understand policy effects, whether we approach policy as text, discourse or both will make a big difference to how we go about the task of analysis. As researchers, we both hold the view, along with the contributors to this book, that while policy documents are indeed texts, they are much, much more than *just* texts: indeed, much of our policy analysis work has been about highlighting the discursive and other effects of different education policies, reflecting the distinction made by Ball (1993) discussed in Chapter 1. The point here is that, as researchers, we need to be clear about how we understand the documents and texts we are working with and what the implications of this are for our analysis.

This also points to the issue of 'constructive alignment': ensuring that the methods we use are appropriate to the questions we are interested in answering through our research. As researchers, we should always seek alignment between what we want to understand, where we look for evidence and how we conduct our analysis. Research in critical education policy studies is no different. Our choice of texts and of the way we treat those texts will depend greatly on our research questions, the understandings we seek to develop, the knowledge we aim to generate and the scope and scale of our research. The chapters in Part 1 of this book highlight some of the ways that key researchers working on analysis of policy texts have sought to do this in their own work.

Approaches to working with document and text analysis in critical education policy studies

The chapters in Part 1 of this book provide examples of different approaches to working with documents and texts in critical policy analysis in education. They aim to provide an overview to each approach, to raise important issues and questions, to provide examples and to suggest ways forward for researchers wishing to tackle similar questions. They do not aim to provide a detailed or step-by-step description of how to undertake the analysis. Most approaches addressed in this section have been the subject of a great number of library shelves. The authors of the chapters in this book have sought to distil some of the key ideas from those many publications and to highlight some important works that researchers new to the approach might consult to develop their capacities in specific analytical techniques.

As we noted in Chapter 1, our focus in this book is on *qualitative* approaches to policy research in education, and regardless of the approach taken or the scope of your study, to be a successful policy researcher, it will be important

to develop a strong and systematic understanding of methods of qualitative analysis. Some of the chapters in Part 1 point to quite specific methods of analysis, such as Chapter 3, which focuses on a particular approach known as critical discourse analysis, developed by Fairclough (2012); or Chapter 8, which explores two different approaches to analysing online networks. Others present a set of insights into working with particular types of texts (such as Chapter 6, on working with media texts, and Chapter 7, on working with promotional texts). Others still present a framework for analysis (see Chapter 5 on Indigenist Policy Analysis) or a set of theoretical and conceptual tools for use in policy analysis (see Chapter 4, on thinking with and against Foucault).

None of the chapters, however, by design, focus on the more procedural elements of qualitative analysis. Critical policy researchers in education use a wide range of frameworks for condensing, categorising and drawing together findings, among them, for example, Bacchi's 'what's the problem represented to be?' approach (2009), which operationalises Foucauldian discourse analysis, and Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach (Fairclough, 2013), both of which feature in the chapters of this book. While it is important to ensure that our methods of analysis are consistent with our theoretical and conceptual framing and appropriate for the data we are working with, there are some more 'general' approaches to qualitative data analysis that it can be helpful to be familiar with (and these are also often relevant when working with participant-based data; see Part 2). These might help inform the answer to the very immediate questions around 'but what do I actually and physically DO to generate my analysis of the data?'

Again, there are diverse approaches that can be employed, but one that is often utilised in qualitative policy research is Miles and Huberman's 'qualitative data analysis' approach (Huberman & Miles, 1998; Miles & Huberman, 1994), posthumously updated by Johnny Saldana more recently (Miles et al., 2018). Their guidance provides an overview of issues related to the systematic preparation and organisation of data; to the generation and application of codes; to the development of patterns; and to the drawing together of coded data to develop and verify conclusions. While the process they advocate need not necessarily be deployed in a strictly linear fashion, it is underpinned by a sensibility that privileges 'old school' quantitative approaches to validity, reliability and generalisability, which have been widely contested by qualitative researchers over the past few decades (see, e.g. Merriam, 1998; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

A different and no less rigorous approach that is perhaps more comfortably aligned with critical and/or post-structural approaches to policy analysis is that of (reflexive) 'thematic analysis', developed and refined by Braun and Clarke since the mid-2000s (see, e.g. Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2018, 2019; Terry et al., 2017). Thematic analysis, when done well, involves subsequent rounds of developing, applying and refining codes before identifying

and constructing themes on the basis of the coding analysis. Braun and Clarke's approach recognises the central role of the researcher in the process of analysis: rather than advocating a clinical, objective stance, they challenge researchers to understand and 'read out' their stance and locatedness in relation to the data. For instance, on the construction of themes, sometimes said by researchers to have 'emerged from the data', they write:

> Because themes *do not emerge* fully-formed from the data, the process of constructing them is akin to processes of engineering or design. Prototypes (or *candidate themes*) are developed from the analytic work of the earlier phases, and 'tested out' in relation to the research question/dataset overall. Knowing that not all candidate themes will necessarily survive this early development process is vital to not getting too attached. Good themes are those that tell a coherent, insightful story about the data in relation to the research question.
>
> *(Braun et al., 2018, p. 12)*

Trustworthiness is generated in the research through transparency, through the use of techniques such as an 'audit trail', where the researcher lays out the many decisions taken throughout the research process, and the acknowledgement of our own biases and subjectivity as humans and researchers.

These are but two approaches to qualitative analysis, and both of these include different strands and variations. However you approach the process of analysis, it is important that it is systematic, well documented, and clearly described and explained to your reader. Elliott (2018) argues that the act of coding and making sense of data should be understood as a decision-making process, and we hold that the 'ins and outs' of this process should always be clearly communicated, as a basic requirement of high-quality and ethical qualitative research.

So, while there are always decisions to be made about the procedural and process dimensions of data analysis, regardless of what constitutes 'data' in our research, these need to be consistent with the research questions we are seeking to answer, the data we are using to address them and the theoretical/conceptual framework we are employing. The chapters in Part 1 provide examples of and frameworks for engaging with policy 'texts' of many different types, including online data, media texts, promotional texts, and government-generated policies.

Why do policy texts matter? The relationship between policy and practice

Policy texts matter because the 'authoritative allocation of values' impacts what becomes and remains possible and impossible within societies and

communities. While policy texts on their own do not and cannot provide us with the whole – or even a whole – story (to do this, we always need to get to the actors or stakeholders in some way because that's how we come to an understanding of the lived effects of policy), they do tell us something about the way that problematisations manifest, and the things that are prioritised within our society. However, the relationship between policy and practice is a very complex one, and often in education policy research, it is the role of policy in framing practice that we want to get to in our work.

There are many ways that this relationship has been understood and theorised over the decades, and it is not our intention in this chapter, or indeed in this book, to canvass these in any detail. Some different theoretical framings of the policy–practice relationship include Bourdieu's notion of 'logics of practice', linked to field theory (Bourdieu, 1990), and the theory of practice architectures (Kemmis & Grootenboer, 2008; Kemmis et al., 2014). Both of these framings offer an interesting way of understanding this relationship that sees it not as a causal or linear relationship but as a complex interweaving, speaking back to the kinds of rationalist conceptualisations of policy we critiqued in Chapter 1. Education policy, for better or worse, forms a fundamental and central piece of the cultural-discursive 'arrangements' (Kemmis et al., 2014) within which the work of teachers, students and other actors within educational systems and institutions practice. Policy enables and constrains this practice in both direct ways, such as when a new directive is issued to schools and teachers from the Department of Education, and in more 'round-about' ways, such as where policies have unintended or unanticipated consequences or 'perverse effects' (Lingard & Sellar, 2013) that impact educational environments negatively. Conversely, teachers, students, parents, school leaders and others are responsible for shaping the policy environment within which they practice.

Regardless of what our interests are that draw us to policy research or what kinds of policy texts we analyse – or indeed whether we undertake textual analysis alone or alongside methods that involve data generated by human participants – good policy research is always concerned with policy as 'more than' text.

Conclusion

The chapters that follow aim to open up different pathways for thinking about and analysing policy texts. They are diverse in their approach, in how they understand 'policy texts', and in how they conceptually and methodologically frame the research task of analysing policy texts. While none will provide 'everything you need to know' about this type of research, it is our hope that the chapters in this section will expand readers' understanding of what can and

might constitute a 'policy text' in critical policy research and inspire expansive thinking about working with policy texts.

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3

CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Language, ideology, and power

Izhak Berkovich and Pascale Benoliel

Introduction

Discourse consists of textual, verbal, or graphic communications used for understanding, observing, and appreciating the world (Berkovich & Benoliel, 2019; Sengul, 2019). Policies, narratives, written texts like letters or textbooks, discussions, speeches, meetings, school teachings, nonverbal communication, visual imagery, multimedia, and cinema are just a few of the various forms or genres that discourse may take (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). There are several approaches to discourse analysis. This chapter focuses on a particular form known as critical discourse analysis (CDA).

CDA centres on the dialectic relationship between discursive activity and social practice, which results in discourse both constituting social practice and being constituted by it (Fairclough, 2015). The approach focuses particularly on how social power is expressed through language (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA aims to identify and expose implicit or concealed power relations in speech (van Dijk, 1993). According to CDA scholars, discourse not only reflects power relations but is also constitutive of them – that is, it upholds and perpetuates the existing *status quo* (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Discourse can generate and sustain power imbalances, with ideological consequences (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Moreover, scholars suggest that dominance is exercised directly through language in certain settings and indirectly by influencing others' opinions (van Dijk, 1993).

In contrast to discourse analysis, which is an umbrella term that includes various approaches to investigating language in different settings without necessarily highlighting the dynamics of power and ideologies, CDA emphasizes the critical study of language to uncover social, political, and ideological aspects

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(Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Wetherell et al., 2001). CDA has become a common analytical approach in educational research, as evident from various reviews (Lester et al., 2016; Liasidou, 2008; Luke, 1995; Mullet, 2018; Rogers et al., 2005, 2016). In the last 50 years, a significant body of CDA works in education has been documented by researchers specializing in educational policy and education literacy, who explored middle schools, high schools, and various higher-education settings (Rogers et al., 2005, 2016; Rogers & Schaenen, 2014). CDA analysts in education focus on materials such as policy statements, textbooks, websites, and YouTube videos produced by individuals, educational institutions, and international educational agencies (e.g. Arce-Trigatti & Anderson, 2020; Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020a, 2020b; Sharma & Buxton, 2015; Wilson & Carlsen, 2016).

In recent decades, educational policy scholars have increasingly turned to CDA to investigate underlying issues of power, social injustice, the (re)production of dominance, and the formation of identities within policy "talk," legislative texts, or both (e.g. Barrett & Bound, 2015; Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020a, 2020b; Liasidou, 2008; Taylor, 2004; see also the introduction to a special issue on "Critical Discourse Analysis and Education Policy" by Lester et al., 2016). CDA in educational policy research can be used to explore both the macro level of policy (e.g. how policy actors promote and reproduce specific ideologies) and its micro level (e.g. what is the orientation of policy implementers and how they make sense of the policy within a given organizational context) (Lester et al., 2016).

Some scholars have suggested that CDA can provide a starting point for challenging widely held beliefs about how educational policy has come to exist and be understood by policy players, implementers, and society stakeholders (Lester et al., 2016). In doing so, it presents alternate viewpoints on these problems that can guide educational decision-making and advance the objectives of frequently marginalized groups (Lester et al., 2016). CDA can also detect underlying epistemic disparities that pertain to particular educational policies or reflect locally developed understandings of how policy should work (Lester et al., 2016).

Fairclough (2013a) argued that the main contribution of CDA is its ability to critique the "problem–solution" dynamics at the heart of policymaking. CDA can help us understand how policy problems are constructed, particularly how different social imaginaries are associated with different interpretations and narratives of crisis. Fairclough also suggested that CDA can promote a better understanding of the many levels and places at which issues are problematized, as well as the different social actor categories involved in the process (e.g. problematization by social actors in academia, politics, management, and governance who seek to study, regulate, govern, and change aspects of existing social life). CDA can also show how different problematizations favour certain

solutions and exclude others, and the sets of values and concerns behind the proposed solutions. He noted further that CDA can explain how policies are constructed by the image of the target population (deviant, powerful, etc.).

In this chapter, we seek to show how text and language create versions of human reality and thus serve the social dominance of strong actors and institutions. The understanding of the interaction of language and social power structures helps explain how language is used in educational research, practice, and policy. This chapter includes the following sections: (a) a description of the CDA approach, its objectives, and the types of topics it addresses; (b) practical procedures crucial for the CDA process, including a description of Fairclough's technique; (c) examples of the analytical method in action; and (d) reflections on the potential of CDA for future research on policy analysis in education, which serves as the conclusion of this chapter.

An overview of the CDA approach

Discourse analysis is defined as the exploration of talk and texts. Specifically, it focuses on studying the language in use in social settings, elucidating the meaning behind dialogues that are part of the social sphere, as well as the cultural importance of these dialogues and the representation associated with them (Wetherell et al., 2001). CDA is an approach to discourse analysis that originally emerged from the work of linguists in Europe in the 1980s (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). CDA has been "critical" of other types of discourse analysis that are technically accomplished but failed to address how structures and power create and influence discourse (Smith, 2007). Scholars have argued that social actors engaging in discourse do not simply employ their individual experiences and methods, they rely on common frames of perception and view discourse as the interface between society, mind, and discursive interaction (Sengul, 2019; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

For CDA, discourse is key to the operation of power in social processes (van Dijk, 2015; Fairclough, 2015). It examines the dynamics of power and how they use discourse in subtle but controlling manners (Fairclough, 2015). Discourse reproduces power in given social situations (van Dijk, 1993, 2015), and CDA "decodes" how discourse is used for this purpose. Thus, the mission of CDA is to reveal tactics that seem regular or neutral on the surface but may be ideological and seek to alter the portrayal of events and people for certain objectives (Mayr & Machin, 2012).

Scholars have suggested that language derives its power from the way it is used, depending on who uses it and in what context (Wodak, 2001). CDA focuses largely on how social power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimized, and resisted through text and speaking in a given social and political environment (van Dijk, 2015). Discourses mirror social practices and are essential for the constitution of power seeking to achieve certain goals

(Sengul, 2019). Therefore, language should not be analysed separate to the context of the social practices of which it is part (Fairclough, 2015). CDA considers the general context of the text together with the specific words.

Classic CDA addresses areas such as political and ideological discourse (e.g. Chaney & Wincott, 2014; Chiapello & Fairclough, 2013), racism (e.g. Trochmann et al., 2022) and immigration (e.g. Huot et al., 2016), economic topics (e.g. Smith-Carrier & Lawlor, 2017), globalization (e.g. Tamatea et al., 2008), marketization (e.g. Teo & Ren, 2019), gender (e.g. Yu & Sui, 2022), the institutional discourse of professions (e.g. Annandale & Hammarström, 2011), and education (e.g. Lim, 2014). In all these areas, CDA focuses on power asymmetries, exploitation, manipulation, and structural inequalities. The goal of CDA is to disseminate information that empowers individuals to free themselves from oppression by introspection and self-awareness (Mullet, 2018; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The idea of power, or the possibility that individuals in a social connection may carry out their own will in the face of resistance from others, is crucial to CDA (Mullet, 2018).

CDA is situated within critical social science. It has been strongly influenced by critical social theory (O'Regan, 2006). It relies on a range of critical social theorists, including Foucault, Bourdieu, and Gramsci, especially in the way they conceptualize power (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). These authors have influenced the notion of discourse as a mechanism in the construction of social reality as well as the understanding of the role of discourse as both a product and a producer of social actions (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000; Smith, 2007). Thus, the critical discourse analyst assumes that language is performative, always engaging in action that has consequences (whether intended or not) (Lester et al., 2016).

The development of CDA was greatly advanced by the work of leading researchers such as Norman Fairclough, Ruth Wodak, and Teun van Dijk, who remain its most important proponents (e.g. Fairclough, 1992, 2010, 2013b, 2015; Wodak, 2001; Wodak & Meyer, 2009; van Dijk, 1999, 2015). In general, most CDA frameworks are characterized by problem-oriented approaches; the idea that discourse is situated in time and place; and the idea that language expressions are never neutral (van Dijk, 1993; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). CDA frameworks are informed by a diverse range of theories, from the micro level, which addresses functional linguistics and offers insights into the ideological characteristics of written texts (Kress, 1990), to the macro-level cognitive approaches that examine the underlying conceptual processes invoked by low-level lexico-grammatical structures in discourse (Hart et al., 2005).

Various methodologies play a role in contributing to CDA, including linguistics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, cognitive psychology, and conversation analysis (Hart & Cap, 2014). CDA works at both theoretical and methodological levels, challenging research approaches that emphasize exclusively

theory or method (Sengul, 2019). For example, van Dijk's socio-cognitive approach to CDA combines theories and methods by using text and cognitive linguistics to explore how mental models and social cognition affect the manner in which people comprehend and use language in certain social circumstances (van Dijk, 2017).

Although CDA usually adopts an inductive analysis approach (i.e. identifying patterns in the data to develop a general theory or explanation), it can also proceed through abductive inference (i.e. logical reasoning that is used to explain observations or phenomena) or transductive inference (i.e. making predictions based on the patterns learned from the data) (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Moreover, the analysis alternates between focusing on structure and emphasizing action (Fairclough, 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). The analysis techniques used in CDA are often hermeneutic or interpretative, and they strive to provide meaning (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

The CDA literature offers a limited discussion of standards that characterize qualitative rigor. Most CDA methods agree on two standards of quality: completeness (the addition of further data does not lead to new discoveries) and accessibility (the work is readable by the social groups under investigation) (Mullet, 2018; Wodak & Meyer, 2009). Some scholars (e.g. Smith, 2007) have also suggested that qualitative trustworthiness strategies are relevant to CDA: for example, subjectivity, which reflects both the bias of the researcher and the transparent acknowledgement of it, or the adequacy of interpretation, which derives from repeated immersion in and engagement with texts (Morrow, 2005).

CDA has been criticized on the grounds that researchers' biases and motivations influence the reading and interpretation of the texts analysed (Smith, 2007). This criticism has been levelled at other critical social scientists as well. According to CDA scholars, the multiple interpretations of a text are not a problem, but rather one of the key insights gained through the CDA approach (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Smith, 2007). These scholars have argued that texts can be understood and interpreted in different ways, depending on the characteristics of the text itself and of the person interpreting it. These characteristics may include the social positioning, expertise, values, and other factors of the interpreter (Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999). In other words, CDA suggests that the way a text is understood is determined exclusively not only by the text itself but also by the context in which it is being interpreted and the characteristics of the person interpreting it. Moreover, CDA involves researchers committing to the emancipatory goals of critical research, rejecting value-free objectivity, and advocating for marginalized groups. It also involves ethical standards, such as transparency of research interests, values, and positions, without apology (Bergvall & Remlinger, 1996; Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

Practical steps in the CDA process

Mullet (2018) provides an overview of the stages that guide CDA studies. First, select a topic that addresses injustice or inequality in society. Second, find and prepare the data sources for analysis. Third, analyse the social and historical settings of each text as well as its authors. Fourth, identify underlying ideas and code the text. Fifth, examine the external relationships (interdiscursivity) of the text, the social relationships that shape its creation, and how they affect social practices and structures. Sixth, examine the internal workings (e.g. representations, speaker's positionality, goals) of the text. Seventh, describe the themes and interpret their meanings.

In this chapter, we focus on Norman Fairclough's (1992, 2003, 2010) three-dimensional framework for CDA, which is not only widely popular but also highly structured, providing an excellent applicative architecture for those wishing to develop CDA sensitivity and capabilities. Fairclough's (1992, 2003, 2010) CDA framework can be applied in a wide range of critical educational studies and education policy research. The framework consists of three interconnected analytical processes associated with three dimensions of discourse (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010): (a) discourse as text – the object of analysis (including oral texts, graphic text, or both); (b) discourse as discursive practice – how the object is shaped (written, talked about, or created) and accepted by people (read, attended, or watched); and (c) the socio-historical circumstances that direct these processes. Each element requires a different type of analysis: (a) textual (description); (b) processing (interpretation); and (c) socio-cultural (elucidation). Each dimension is treated separately.

Level one: textual analysis

The textual analysis focuses on *discourse-as-text*, which refers to the linguistic aspects and the organization of concrete text (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010). Text is considered as the inscribed or verbal language formed in a discursive event. This level addresses the subtleties of the text: how it is shaped, and what vocabulary and style are used to create meaning (see Halliday, 1985; Janks, 1997). CDA analyses methodically the choice and patterns of vocabulary (e.g. word choice, poetical and rhetorical figures of speech), grammar (e.g. the expression of possibility and necessity, in other words, modality), cohesion (e.g. cohesive devices, that is, words that connect ideas between different parts of the text, connectors such as "so" or "because"), consistency (e.g. conjunction, reader's linguistic background knowledge, i.e., schemata), and text structure (e.g. episode formation, turn-taking system). It also examines systematically: (a) lexicalization (adding words to the lexicon), (b) transitivity patterns (verbs that connect actors and objects), (c) use of passive and active voice, (d) use of nominalization (nouns that are created from adjectives that

describe nouns or action verbs, for example, "authorization," which emerged from the verb "authorize"), (e) choice of mood, (f) choice of polarity (the distinction between positive and negative forms, using words such as "some" or "unfortunately"), (g) thematic structure, and (h) information focus. There are several ways that an early career researcher may develop the abilities needed for textual analysis, such as attending workshops on CDA or linguistics, reading the relevant literature (e.g. Halliday's (1985) book *An Introduction to Functional Grammar*), and working through examples in papers or textbooks.

Level two: processing analysis

The processing analysis focuses on *discourse-as-discursive-practice*. Fairclough (1992, 2003, 2010) defined discourse practice analysis as the examination of the production, circulation, and consumption of a text in a given society. "Discourse practice" describes the way texts are produced, the rules that govern the use of language, how texts are disseminated, how they are read, and by whom (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse practice level analysis studies the history and practices related to the medium by which the text is presented. The situational and intertextual context is key to interpretation (Fairclough, 1992). Situational context depends on time and place. Relevant questions are as follows (Janks, 1997): could this text have been written before a given year? Could this text have been produced in a different socio-political period or another country? What factors affected its production and interpretation? Novice researchers may follow different paths to develop the skills needed to study the history and situated practices related to a given text and the medium in which it is presented. These include attending courses in media and cultural studies and seeking additional sources of information, such as literature or interviews with individuals who have knowledge about the historical and situated contexts of the text.

Level three: socio-cultural analysis

The socio-cultural analysis focuses on *discourse-as-social-practice* that examines the ideological effects and hegemonic processes in which discourse plays a role (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010). The sociocultural level of analysis examines the social context in which the text is produced, to assess the text in its original setting. It links the language of the text to the manifestations of power and ideology more broadly (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010). The context consists of a web of practices that emerge from a historical, political, organizational, economic, and social environment (Fairclough, 1992, 2003, 2010). The sociocultural level affects how the text is produced and received, and what it contains. The analysis examines the hegemonic powers and

ideologies that dominate the sociocultural context, which affects the depiction of the identities and institutions discussed in the text. How discourse is represented, re-spoken, or re-written sheds light on the emergence of new orders of discourse and scuffles over what counts as social normal and good efforts to govern and resistance to regimes of power (Blommaert & Bulcaen, 2000). Classic hegemonic sociocultural processes identified by Fairclough's CDA approach include democratization, commodification, and technologization. To develop sensitivity to the manner in which power and ideology manifest in society, there are several things an emerging researcher can do: educate oneself about these topics by attending courses and reading the literature, paying attention to the ways in which the topics manifest in the world (e.g. in the media, social interactions, institutions), and reflecting on one's experiences and how power and ideology have affected one's life and the lives of those around them.

Examples of CDA in practice

The following examples show a range of CDA techniques and linguistic or rhetorical elements taken from one of our papers (Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020a) analysing the discourse of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Our CDA sheds light on how OECD leaders seek to mould common beliefs in the discourse on teacher quality. International organizations play a leading role in the global education policy discourse that is shaped, among others, by their standardized cross-country evaluation of national education policies and outcomes. Among these international organizations, the OECD is clearly the most important agency in the developed world. Participation in the worldwide testing and assessment programmes of the OECD, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), has become prevalent. The OECD has also established indicators of ideal teaching practices and created the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) framework for assessing them, with a focus on teacher beliefs, attitudes, and practices. We used CDA to examine the forewords of TALIS documents authored by OECD leaders, which we argue contain meanings related to the discourse of the Global Education Reform Movement (GERM) (Sahlberg, 2006). The main characteristics of GERM include increased standardization of schooling, curriculum focused on core knowledge and subjects, increase in high-stake accountability, and the application of business management practices in education. The analysis below is based on the three levels of Fairclough's CDA approach. The following examples aim to serve as a guide for researchers wanting to apply CDA to policy material. The analysis of OECD texts serves emancipatory purposes by revealing the ideological social construction of ideal 21st-century education and the manner in which it serves

to promote global homogeneity of schooling policies and structures (Benoliel & Berkovich, 2021; Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020b). These educational goals are consistent with the culture of Anglo countries and ignore the links to local culture and history at the periphery of the global power structure (e.g. Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020a; Lingard & Lewis, 2016).

Example of Fairclough's CDA at the textual level

We explored the argumentative subsections that predominate in the forewords of OECD documents and found a problem–solution structure pertaining to the policy issue of (low) teacher quality. The prototypical outline at the basis of such a structure includes multiple aspects such as goal, problem, solution, and assessment of solution (Fairclough, 2015). But the forewords focus exclusively on the first three aspects: goal, problem, and solution, omitting the evaluation of the solution. This means that the texts do not offer any way to gauge the solution offered by OECD policy to (low) teacher quality. Analysis shows that the argumentative subsections of the documents contain long compound sentences. The sentences are written in a declarative tone and use modal verbs that imply necessity, such as "may need" and "will demand." The present continuous tense is frequently used in the texts to emphasize current processes (e.g. "facing," "increasing," "chancing," "looking," "growing," and "struggling"). One text on traditional school systems stated that schools "aren't keeping up" with the fast-paced transformation. This linkage relates conventional schooling systems to antiquated procedures. The "goings-on" form is regarded as a potent transitive form. It conjures an image of ongoing processes and asserts the reality of their occurrence. Consequently, the texts portray a sense of disarray, bordering on loss of control.

Analysis indicated another crucial semantic element, the binary framing of teachers versus the OECD. In the examined texts, teachers are framed as obstacles to reform, and their opposition is characterized as unimportant and irrational. The description of the teachers not only shapes their image but also serves to frame indirectly the OECD as their negative. The texts state that teachers can serve as reformers and become "new professionals" if they embrace the OECD perspective on teacher quality. This framing further serves the OECD goal to legitimize its policies. One text states that because the teaching profession lacks well-defined expectations of what teachers must know and be able to do, teacher professionalism must be strengthened. This suggests that teachers are a group of unskilled individuals who are staking a false claim to the title of a profession. Another document specifically questions whether teachers' pedagogical knowledge base is still in touch with societal requirements. The texts subtly support a derogatory view of teacher expertise. They use the term "high quality" to refer only to the absence of competent teachers or instructional growth. Several cautions criticize the abilities and

conduct of teachers. The need to create policies to make the teaching profession more attractive and more effective is illustrated by the fact that teachers themselves are frequently not developing the techniques and abilities necessary to address the different demands of present-day learners. The qualifiers "often" and "more" appear to restrict the generalizations but actually serve to support the criticism.

In the texts, the OECD TALIS framework is presented as examining the key characteristics of teachers, focusing on the pedagogical core of the teaching profession and thus exploring the nature of teacher professionalism. In this way, TALIS ostensibly does the professional thinking that teachers cannot do. In one of the texts, TALIS assessment was indirectly compared to a metaphorical camera (e.g. "true picture," "see more clearly") that records education quality in high resolution. This metaphorical language highlights the capacity of OECD to describe instruction and provide fresh insight into it. The goal of all the instances described earlier is to establish a hierarchy of expertise between the OECD and teachers. The texts aim to communicate that the OECD has unique professional capital that defines ideal teaching in the 21st century.

Example of Fairclough's CDA analysis at the discursive level

Typical texts containing GERM discourse usually refer to the self-improving schooling system model, which has gained traction globally and has joined the GERM global bundle of policy technologies in education. In the OECD texts, we located words linked to self-development techniques, such as "responding" and "improving," used to express what schooling systems need to do. These words co-occur in ways that indicate that such systems need to be changed. An impassioned plea for change is coupled with apprehension about the unknowable future. For example, according to the texts, countries seek development as a result of uncertainty brought by "challenges that intensify," "demand that continues to grow substantially," and needed skill sets that continually change. An example of over-lexicalization used to construct a certain depiction of events is the wordy vocabulary surrounding the concept of change and the numerous repeats. Change is portrayed as urgently needed but falling behind the fast-moving dynamics of events (e.g. "need to keep up," "demand in this rapidly changing world") and in short supply.

The materials also reflect the rhetoric of "empowerment" that is expressly aimed at teachers. Reverse presentations are used in OECD documents on TALIS, as the texts switch the roles of systems (and particularly policymakers) and teachers. According to one source, "educational systems and teachers" are both equally important to the forthcoming changes. The conjunction "and" implies a resemblance in the unit of analysis, with both being presented as supra-organizational authorities that can manage and supervise several organizations

and are in charge of what happens within them. When systems and teachers are mentioned together in other TALIS documents, it becomes clear that the analogy does not fit into a collaborative model of work but rather a differentiated one. Whereas systems typically offer "effective support" or "enable teachers," teachers and principals "have the authority to act." Because GERM rhetoric holds that authority is either "here or there" (for instance, centralized in the government or dispersed among various actors), it is possible to criticize the teachers' empowerment discourse in the TALIS texts. Critical scholars, such as Foucault, argued that power is typically concentrated within institutions and closely tied to prevailing power structures and hegemonic systems. Therefore, we argue that the OECD's focus on the individual as the site of empowerment (i.e. teacher) deflects attention from oppressive systems like the state and global capitalism that have cardinal responsibility for the functioning and quality of public education.

Example of Fairclough's CDA analysis at the sociocultural level

The economic discourse is dominant in the OECD documents analysed. A term used in economics to describe output capacity is "effectiveness." Effectiveness is a crucial value in the TALIS texts, which creates a logical sequence of actions that teachers take in education systems. Effective policy responses, particularly in the area of "effective teacher policies" that help "teachers enhance their performance and effectiveness", are advocated for the sake of "effective learning." Moreover, "effective support systems" for teachers "improve the effectiveness of the teaching profession," enabling teachers to create more "effective learning opportunities." This series of activities is related to the principle of human capital, and in it, teachers are seen as a key mechanism. The texts declare that countries must prepare students to work successfully in modern economies by equipping students with high-level skills. There is a noticeable indirect construction of contemporary social requirements as primarily economical. As a result, the OECD recasts teachers in a significant way as "servants of the global economy." It portrays teachers as the key component of the OECD solution, which enables nations to successfully compete economically on the world stage.

The importance of the knowledge economy in the TALIS documents is linked to both social and institutional facets of the degraded status of public education. Initially, in the mid-20th century, the "knowledge economy" discourse was connected with science-based/technology-based sectors and management approaches that prioritized ongoing learning and innovation. The word "knowledge" has various connotations in OECD texts. It is used to describe data or inventions produced by systems. It represents more than just economic output; it also represents regulation or a lack thereof. The OECD connects wealth with knowledge in the phrase "in modern knowledge-based

economies." At the same time, it encourages the formulation of "knowledge-rich" data-driven schooling systems and emphasizes the connection between economic growth and the monitoring of education. Thus, when used in relation to education, the term "knowledge" takes on the sense of "regulation," which is required to realize the promise of economic output. Therefore, the effectiveness of teacher competence and behaviour is closely regulated and monitored, which many people believe promotes increased technical and professional knowledge. TALIS, a technology made for knowledge-based regulation, can be used to implement this form of control. In summary, social and structural analysis reveals that in OECD texts, the language used to discuss teacher quality reinforces negative stereotypes about public education and that discourse related to knowledge based on assessments of "ideal" teachers and teaching are used to criticize and devalue the work of practising public school teachers. The link is founded on the development of the knowledge economy and is made necessary by the significance and efficacy of the economic agenda in education.

Concluding remarks

This chapter has aimed to provide an overview of the CDA methodology, its goals, and the types of subjects it handles. It has also described the method of Norman Fairclough, one of the best-known CDA scholars, and provided examples of the analytical method in action. In this final section, we outline some potential future avenues for the application of CDA in the study of educational policy. First, with the rise of the hyper-partisan policy environment in many Western democracies, CDA can be a powerful method in separating anti-factual rhetoric from policy issues (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017). Second, in light of the dominance of accountability (and public crisis) discourses in 21st-century education policy, CDA can be instrumental in illuminating anti-public efforts (Lochmiller & Lester, 2017) and the role of policy actors in education, specifically international agencies in cultivating accountability and crisis ideas (Berkovich & Benoliel, 2020a, 2020b). Third, CDA can help better understand contemporary digital media communication policies in education and shed light on how ideologies are reflected and served in the way actors use a vast array of multimodal resources made available by digital technologies to communicate policies or implement them (Bou-Franch & Blitvich, 2019). Fourth, CDA can help explain how language and discourse are used by educational policy actors to describe, hide, and aid in the resolution of environmental issues (Fill & Penz, 2017). Using CDA, researchers studying educational policy can look at both the macro and micro levels of policy. CDA can be used to challenge widely held notions about policy problems, offer alternate perspectives, and pinpoint underlying inequities in policy knowledge and implementation (Fairclough, 2013a; Lester et al., 2016).

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4

THINKING WITH FOUCAULT TO UNDERSTAND EDUCATION POLICY

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Introduction

In this chapter, we discuss how Foucault can be used to think about education policy, and we draw upon our own work to demonstrate how this might be done. Importantly, Foucault himself was adamant that his analytical approach was not to be used like a recipe. Rather, he encouraged scholars to treat his work as a conceptual toolbox, where different concepts could be picked up, tried out and used when appropriate. Therefore, in the spirit of Foucault's appeal, this chapter is presented in the form of a toolbox – offering a variety of conceptual tools that may be useful as readers follow different lines of inquiry throughout their education policy analysis pursuits.

The three of us, individually and collectively, have dabbled in this toolbox ourselves and have found that Foucault's concepts are most powerful when we are not only willing to try the tools but also willing to put them down if we realise that they are not fit for purpose. In this chapter, we begin by laying the ontological and epistemological foundation that underpins Foucault's work. We define some of the key assumptions about reality, truth and knowledge that are critical not only for understanding but also for operationalising the concepts described in the second half of this chapter. In the second half, we focus on a collection of Foucauldian concepts that have been most useful to us and are often regarded as his most significant contributions to sociology. Throughout this chapter, we weave through illustrative vignettes of how we have put Foucault's concepts to work in our own policy research or how one might think about using Foucault within education policy more generally. Drawing across these cases, we show how the concepts have been useful for different purposes, but we also include moments when the research took us

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in unexpected directions that prompted us to consider complementary theoretical tools. Even though this chapter is about doing policy analysis using Foucault, we find just as much value in showing how and when such concepts were no longer suitable. We like to think that Foucault would endorse this approach and appreciate our reluctance to be dogmatic about his work.

Poststructuralism: shaping Foucault's theoretical concepts

To understand how Foucault's work might be useful to education policy analysis, it is critical to first understand the onto-epistemic field within which Foucault situated his thought. While we will continually emphasise that his work should not be followed rigidly, we simultaneously assert that, to make use of his work, one must be consistent with his philosophical views about truth, knowledge and reality. Too often, scholars of education policy analysis will refer to Foucault's concepts to frame their study but then, when actually doing the analysis, will inadvertently apply the concepts inconsistently with his epistemological assumptions about knowledge and what can be 'known' (Anderson & Holloway, 2020). Thus, before we get to the Foucauldian concepts specifically, we will take a step back to discuss poststructuralism as the broad theoretical paradigm that informs his (and our) work.

Poststructuralism as a theoretical paradigm comprises a heterogeneous group of theorists and methodologists (Peters, 1996). It emerged when a group of theorists began to reject the idea that our understanding of society could be reduced or explained by grand narratives or that power was (only) concentrated in hegemonic structures. Like structuralists, *post*-structuralists are interested in concepts like power, but they tend to focus less on the binary nature of an oppressed-dominant relationship and seek, rather, to understand how discourses work to shape reality and the knowable. They often 'view meaning as fluid, blurred, and multiple' (Anderson & Holloway, 2020, p. 193).

In large part, post-structuralists break from views that assume that:

(1) power is a tangible thing that is held and used by discrete and determinable hegemonic groups (e.g. the financial and political elite);
(2) power relationships exist on a binary – the dominant versus the oppressed;
(3) language reflects a true reality that can be investigated to reveal intentions, power and oppression; and
(4) the researcher can sit in an ontologically privileged position to understand what is 'really going on'.

Rather, post-structuralists view power as something that operates in a much more complex, ubiquitous and diffused way (cf. Foucault, 1980). When it comes to policies, these scholars are focused on understanding how a policy

came to be. They tend to think of policy *problems* (not just *solutions*) as being constructed, rather than things that exist naturally. The post-structuralist, Carol Bacchi (2000), who draws significantly on Foucault's work (see Chapter 5), developed the policy-as-discourse framework to argue 'the emphasis in policy-as-discourse analyses is upon the ways in which language, and more broadly discourse, sets limits upon what can be said' (p. 48), thought, and done. In this sense, policy works to define and constitute both solutions and problems. Put differently, policy does not merely solve problems that already exist in reality. Rather, policy works to constitute problems and solutions because, by specifying a solution, the 'what' that the solution is trying to solve is already defined (Rabinow & Rose, 2003).

An example from education policy is accountability. When thinking about accountability using a post-structuralist lens, we might think about how techniques of measurement and evaluation are framed as a solution to a 'problem'. We could also ask: how does this 'solution' presume and constitute particular types of problems? For example, student achievement testing is presumed to solve the problem of low teacher or school quality (either to improve low quality or to identify and punish low-performing schools/teachers). In doing so, teacher 'quality' is problematised (or defined) in terms of student achievement scores on standardised tests. This not only defines teachers as a problem, but it also confines the 'problem' of teacher quality in terms of the identified solution, namely more student testing. For this type of analysis, one might use national and local policy documents and artefacts related to student testing and teacher accountability to analyse how teachers are framed within a problem–solution relationship (see Holloway, 2019).

This way of thinking about policy-as-discourse breaks from traditional policy approaches (e.g. the school effectiveness literature) in that policy is not thought of as something that policymakers do; rather, 'policy-as-discourse approaches, by contrast, encourage deeper reflection on the contours of a particular policy discussion, the shape assigned a particular "problem"' (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48).

While the next section will delve into greater detail on power and discourse, for now, it is important to understand that the types of research questions that post-structuralists generally ask are 'how' and 'what' questions, rather than 'why' questions – for example, *how* have these policies come to be? *What* conditions have to exist for these processes and practices to be made possible? *How* is discourse structuring what is possible and imaginable at this particular time and in this particular place? In doing so, they purposefully avoid trying to locate power or 'truth' in any specific object or group. Rather, they seek to understand the historical, social, political and geographical factors that have led to particular events, subjectivities and rationalities occurring in a particular moment and place. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) describe how this manner of thinking fundamentally influences the investigation at hand, as 'the task

becomes investigating *how* it was possible to *do* those things (or to *say* those things)' (p. 32, emphasis in original) (see also Chapter 5).

A question that some post-structuralist scholars of education policy have asked is: how do policies and policy conditions fundamentally change not only what school actors (e.g. teachers, students) do but also who they are (cf. Ball, 2003; see also Holloway & Brass, 2018)? These types of questions can be particularly useful when thinking about the logics that underpin policies, rather than the specific outcomes or effects of policies. This can have transnational implications for thinking about how policy discourses move and flow between and across different contexts. For these questions, the scholar is less interested in how well a particular policy is working as intended, or if it needs to be modified or scrapped altogether. Instead, their concerns are more focused on how particular logics and rationalities, over time, become accepted as 'normal' and, in turn, shape what is considered a necessary solution (in the form of a policy). Data for these analyses might include, for example, archival and contemporary policy documents, as well as interview and observational data (with an emphasis on logics and rationalities within these text- and speech-based materials).

While post-structuralists, generally, share a broad set of onto-epistemic assumptions, Foucault (as with most scholars) has a particular view of such concepts. In the following section, we present what we see as a starter toolbox of concepts that have informed our own work and that have been influential within the field of education. Please note that this list is far from exhaustive, and different scholars would no doubt highlight different concepts. We also want to emphasise that these concepts are not discrete ideas, as this list might suggest. Rather, they should be understood as deeply intertwined and impossible to understand or operationalise in isolation of one another. This will become apparent as concepts are referenced throughout the explanation of the other concepts.

Ultimately, we hope this list serves as a starting point that only prompts readers to explore Foucault's writings in more depth, as well as the writings of those who have extended and challenged his work.

A Foucauldian toolbox

> *'I would like my books to be a kind of tool-box which others can rummage through to find a tool which they can use however they wish in their own area . . . I write for users, not readers'.*
>
> —Michel Foucault (1974, pp. 523–524)

Discourse

To understand Foucault's view on discourse, it might help to start with how his theorisation differs from other discourse analysts. Broadly speaking,

'discourse' has been defined and operationalised in many ways across disciplines, philosophies and methodological approaches (Bacchi, 2000). For example, theorists who take on a structuralist perspective, such as critical discourse analysts, often seek to understand how power is shaped by discourse, and how discourse reproduces power (Fairclough, 1989; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 1993) (see also Chapter 3). In this vein, power can manifest in beliefs, policies, norms, behaviours, etc., and it is often associated with hegemonic groups (Gramsci, 1971). Racism, classism and sexism are all common forms of discrimination that are resultant of power dynamics. Here, also, *language* is assumed to be a structured symbolic representation of reality. Thus, the role of the discourse analyst is to understand how language (and sometimes non-verbal cues and actions) fits into a larger social context, or narrative, allowing them to locate power and the process by which power is reproduced. Foucault, like other post-structuralist discourse theorists, moves away from the assumption that language represents reality and towards an assumption that language *shapes* reality by influencing possibilities and the knowable.

While texts often serve as the unit of analysis for CDA theorists, texts serve a different analytical purpose in Foucauldian discourse analyses. For Foucauldian scholars, language is historically and socially constructed, and thus, language does not name things that exist in reality, but rather, the act of naming actually makes certain things possible, knowable, doable and thinkable. Thus, to use text-based materials (e.g. interview transcripts, policy documents) to do a Foucauldian discourse analysis, one might question how certain phrases have become utterable – that is, what conditions must be in place for someone to even be able to express the idea in a particular way?

To use an example from education policy, think about a teacher who is described as 'adding value' to student learning, or a teacher who is considered effective because of how their students scored on a standardised achievement test. This designation of 'effective' (or 'ineffective') might seem rather innocuous to someone today. That is only because, over time, the act of classifying a teacher as good or bad based on test scores has become a normal practice throughout most schooling systems around the world. However, it was not all that long ago when this would have been unimaginable (in most countries). The idea of teachers being assessed in this way was unthinkable before quality was (re)constituted by the idea to measure teaching based on student achievement scores. As some have argued, the normalisation of this practice has made it almost impossible to think of teacher effectiveness or quality in any other way (see Holloway, 2020). Holloway has drawn on policy documents and artefacts, such as US federal policies (e.g. No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top documents) and local policies (e.g. school-site improvement plans, teacher-level assessment reports), as well as interviews with teachers and principals to investigate these types of questions.

Importantly, Foucault works from the assumption that discourses make and define possibilities, and through this process, certain ways of thinking and doing are made available. More simply put, discourse can be thought of as the knowable and the imaginable, and in order to make sense of discourses, one must seek to historicise the ways in which the 'knowable' has come to be (and has come to be accepted and normalised).

Returning to the example of student test scores in teacher evaluations once again, we can ascertain that the test scores are meant to solve the problem of low teacher quality through either raising the quality overall or even identifying teachers of low quality for punishment. In doing so, teacher 'quality' is problematised (or defined) in terms of student achievement scores on standardised tests. This not only defines teachers as a problem, but it also confines the 'problem' of teacher quality in terms of the identified solution – student test scores.

Power

Power was central to Foucault's work, yet, as mentioned previously, he theorised power differently to structuralist thinkers who sought to locate power and power relations by analysing 'true meaning' hidden within (or underneath) texts. Foucault viewed power not as a tangible thing that someone (or a group of people) can possess and use against an oppressed group. Rather, he thought of power in a diffused way that is directly linked to knowledge production and infused within discourse. When referring to power, Foucault often used the term power/knowledge to emphasise that power operates through what has been accepted as knowledge or that which can and should be known. That is, Foucauldian theorists see knowledge(s) as being assembled and constituted through and by privileged disciplinary apparatuses of a particular time and place.

Foucauldian scholars of education policy have shown that, throughout different eras, different forms of knowledge have been used to frame, shape and act upon education. For example, measurement and economics have long maintained privileged positions of authority in constituting the value, purpose and techniques of education. Teachers, for instance, have been made objects of knowledge through techniques of measurement, evaluation and surveillance, all of which are logics that stem from these knowledge domains. Within this discourse, to 'know' a teacher, or to 'know' a teacher's quality, worth or degree of effectiveness, economic tools like value-added models (VAMs), or other forms of statistical calculations, are required. Thinking from this perspective provides a means to see the 'good' teacher as constructed through a particular power/knowledge discourse of a specific time and place. This relates back to previous questions posed at the beginning of this chapter: what conditions have to exist for these processes and practices to be made possible? How

is discourse structuring what is possible and imaginable at this particular time and in this particular place? Historical political speeches and media artefacts can be helpful in mapping how logics and rationalities regarding teachers and teaching have evolved over time.

Regime of truth

Closely related to power and discourse was Foucault's theorisation of truth:

> Each society has its regime of truth, its 'general politics' of truth: that is, the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true and false statements, the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as 'true'.
>
> *(Foucault, 2000, p. 131)*

Given that Foucault saw power as being that which enables some things to be knowable, while restricting other imaginaries, he

> enabled us to see different kinds of relations between truth and power, in which power was a matter of the production of truth, and truth was itself a thing of this world, intrinsically bound to apparatuses like the prison, the hospital, the school and the clinic for its production and circulation.
>
> *(Rabinow & Rose, 2003, p. 3)*

This is particularly important to understand how ideas are constituted as truth, or what Foucault (1980) referred to as 'regimes of truth' (p. 131) rather than truth itself (McWilliam & Jones, 2005). That is, what we think of as true (e.g. measures of teacher quality), although discursively constructed, is often accepted as truth based on the rationality at play. In the current moment, Foucauldian scholars have argued that discourses of the market, neoliberalism and datafication are presently shaping what is considered 'truth' about schools, teachers and teaching (especially in terms of their quality and performance). From this theoretical perspective, 'discourse' can be defined as the conditions, knowledges and logics that have shaped what we 'know' (and can know) about teachers and teaching. Accordingly, the role of the discourse analyst, from a post-structuralist perspective, is to understand how language (i.e. written and spoken), over time, has worked to shape some reality and constitute particular ways of knowing, doing and being.

As Holloway (2019) has argued, 'risk management' is one such regime of truth that has become legitimised in education. Risk management entails

creating a system in which teachers 'question their own conduct, to watch over and give shape to it, and to shape themselves as ethical subjects' (Foucault, 1985, p. 13). Teachers' risk is first assessed through processes of numericisation and then subjected to constant surveillance and examination, turning teachers into objects of knowledge that are disciplined not only to behave in desired ways but also, importantly, to discipline themselves. Fenwick (2003) suggests that 'practices that render individuals "knowable" through examination, observation, classification and measurement, control people by making them objects of knowledge' (p. 345). From this perspective, teacher evaluation systems, as well as policy initiatives that inform them, operate as a 'regime of truth', in which risk management is the governing rationality, and numericisation, surveillance and examination are the technologies of governance that help mitigate such risk. Holloway (2019) has used various policy documents and texts, such as official press releases, political speeches (e.g. US State of the Union addresses), and text-based materials related to teacher evaluation (e.g. evaluator training materials; evaluation handbooks) to analyse risk as a 'regime of truth' in US teacher accountability.

Furthermore, the production of truth is also tied up in the way in which populations are governed, or the strategies by which populations can be turned into objects of knowledge and acted upon. These strategies of governance, or 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1991), create the conditions upon which populations can be managed.

Governmentality

To define governmentality, perhaps the best place to start is by defining what it is not. It is not a study of governments in the way we might conventionally think of them (e.g. bureaucracy, official governing bodies), though aspects of government might serve as sites of interest. Instead, it can be thought of as a combination of two words – 'govern' and 'mentality'. 'Govern' here refers to the way populations are controlled and produced or, put differently, to 'structure the possible field of action of others' (Foucault, 1982, p. 790). Rose et al. (2006) argued that 'governmentality is far from a theory of power, authority, or even of governance. Rather, it asks particular questions of the phenomena that it seeks to understand, questions amenable to precise answers through empirical inquiry' (p. 85).

'Mentality' refers to the rationalities, strategies and/or techniques that produce governable and self-governed persons. Similarly, self-governance is the process by which subjects discipline themselves through various techniques (e.g. self-discipline, self-reflection, self-assessment) of good, civil, ethical behaviour (Dean, 1999). As we will explain more in the next concept, the 'subject' is not a passive individual, but one who actively participates in creating an

obedient society. Thus, the questioning of subjects' 'conduct of conduct' is a key operating feature of modern societies. To use a governmentality approach in an analysis, Rose et al. (2006, p. 85) argued:

> Instead of seeing any single body – such as the state – as responsible for managing the conduct of citizens, this perspective recognizes that a whole variety of authorities govern in different sites, in relation to different objectives. Hence, a set of questions emerges:
>
> 1. Who governs what?
> 2. According to what logics?
> 3. With what techniques?
> 4. Toward what ends?

For these reasons, to understand governmentality as the 'conduct of conduct', one must first seek to understand the governing strategies, or rationalities, that make such conditions possible (Dean, 1999). We must point out, though, that 'rationality' is not the same thing as legitimisation in the sense that it acts to affirm an action has already taken place; nor is it defined in the same way that it might be used in psychology or economics. Rationality is, instead, built on some foundation of constructed 'truth' so as to 'establish a kind of ethical basis for its actions' (Rose, 1999, p. 27). The question then becomes: who has the authority to make true statements, and how are these statements constructed?

These rationalities also structure the conditions that make certain policies possible. Foucault's (1970) book metaphor provides a useful sketch for thinking about how policies emerge in reference to the conditions that have made them possible:

> The outlines of a book are never clearly and stringently defined: no book can exist by its own powers; it always exists due to its conditioning and conditional relations to other books; it is a point in a network; it carries a system of references – explicitly or not – to other books, other texts, or other sentences; and the structure of reference, and thereby the entire system of anatomy and heteronomy, depends on whether we are dealing with a dissertation on physics, a collection of political speeches, or a science fiction novel. It is true that the book presents itself as a tangible object; it clings to the tiny parallelepiped surrounding it: but its unity is variable and relative, does not let itself be constructed or stated and therefore cannot be described outside a discursive field.
>
> *(Foucault, cited in Anderson, 2003, p. 152)*

Like Foucault's book, policies are historically, politically and socially constructed, and thus they do not provide solutions to problems that exist in

reality, but rather, through the act of naming the solution, the 'problem' is created (Bacchi, 2000). We have also found this approach useful in analysing what types of teacher subjects have been produced in accordance with specific policy rationalities and techniques.

Subject and subjectivity

From a Foucauldian perspective, people are not simply discourse *users* (i.e. individuals who use discourse), but rather are subjects who are constituted through, or made up by, discourses (Bacchi, 2000; Hacking, 1986). Discourse is everything. It is everyone, and it is everywhere, all the time – we are the discourse, and the discourse is us. As such, Foucault was as much interested in the everyday, the mundane ways that discourse shapes us as subjects.

Applying this to the education sector, Foucault's care of the self provides a method of focusing on subjectivity and transgression without having to make large-scale changes but can be done by 'refusing the mundane' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013). Instead, teachers can practice liberty within their local context through 'resistance and processes of self-definition' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 94). One possibility of recognising power is to gather in solidarity with those experiencing similar struggles or discomfort. Common experiences are 'not established from a priori political positions but through work on and over and against practices and on what it means to be a teacher, what it means to be educated, and what it means to be revocable' (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 94). For this type of analysis, interview transcripts are a possible source of data.

Foucault (2000) was interested in the relationship between discourses and the formation of subjects as determined (and re-determined over time), by particular types of knowledge available (and privileged) at a particular time. He wrote that 'what we should do is show the historical construction of a subject through a discourse understood as consisting of a set of strategies which are part of social practices' (Foucault, 2000, p. 4, as cited in Davies & Bansel, 2010, pp. 5–6). Important to note here is that the subject is not a passive individual who has discourses 'done to' them. Subjects are *of the discourse* and part of the construction of themselves as subjects in relation to the discourse (which links back to Foucault's theorisation of power being diffused and everywhere, all the time). An example we often think about is how, even though we are critical scholars of metrics, measurement and datafication, we – as subjects of these discourses – still often look to metrics to qualify our own worth as academics. We look at our citation counts on Google Scholar; we keep updated profiles on ResearchGate for tracking our impact and engagement metrics. While we can say 'these metrics don't define us', we also accept that our subjectivity, in this particular moment of time, is nonetheless shaped by these numbers.

A burgeoning field in education policy is that of datafication or the processes of translating 'things' into numbers (Sellar, 2015). Datafication is largely built on the premise that technology and the numbers they produce are neutral and thereby free of power and potential unfairness (Hartong, 2019). The datafication of education sees every aspect of schooling 'rendered as data to be collected, analysed, surveilled, and controlled' (Holloway, 2020, p. 4). These processes do not simply change the work that is done and how it is completed but also serve to fundamentally change '*who people are*, or who they are expected to be' (Bradbury & Roberts-Holmes, 2017; cited in Bradbury, 2019, p. 8, emphasis in original). The current conditions around school leadership privilege the use of numericised metrics to 'know' school performance. In examining artefacts, such as policies and platforms, we can demonstrably see how the inclusion of particular metrics serves to alter the discursive practices of school leaders as well as influencing their own subjectivities; the moral imperatives of school performance become intrinsically tied to one's identity as leader. For her master's thesis, Langman (2021) analysed content from a digital platform that is used for school performance and accountability to explore the relationship between datafication and school leadership. She also used school-level strategic plan documents.

Combining Foucault's tools with another's

While Foucauldian analyses occupy a well-established place in the education policy literature (see, e.g. Ball, 2003; Heffernan, 2018; Holloway, 2020; Niesche, 2016), drawing on other theorists to complement and extend upon his work is both possible and, at times, necessary. In fact, Foucault himself was adamant about the need to disrupt contemporary ways of thinking by detaching from entrenched knowledge to ask new questions and make new correlations (Pringle, 2005) all while comprehending the necessity of doing so. One such way to achieve this end is to develop combined theoretical frameworks that draw on Foucault and other thinkers, with the only specification being that the theories utilised remain ontologically and epistemologically compatible.

For example, many scholars have brought together the works of Deleuze and Foucault. In his seminal piece *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, Deleuze (1992) contests that societies are largely shifting away from Foucauldian disciplinary institutions, characterised by discrete, enclosed environments (e.g. the school, the factory, the prison) tasked with producing docile bodies (Foucault, 1977) and are instead being replaced by control. However, the notion of control 'replacing' discipline offers a very limited binary understanding of such concepts (Hong, 2020). Rather, modulation, a form of power that continually changes and adapts, might be understood to follow disciplinarity (Thompson & Cook, 2012), and drawing on a combined framework of Foucauldian and Deleuzian thought can offer progressive insights into the datafication of

schooling. Such a framework enables us to consider, for example, the impacts of platforms in educational leadership settings. A Foucauldian analysis allows us to see the platform as a form of disciplinary gaze over leaders, teachers and students. However, Deleuzian analysis can complement such thinking by helping us view the site of surveillance as changing from the embodied subject, to a datafied construct. In Langman's thesis (2021), she used the school-performance platform school-level strategic plan documents to bring together Foucault and Deleuze. Similarly, Holloway and Lewis (2022) used web-based content, including training videos, platform content and other documents (e.g. evaluation training handbooks) to show how Foucault and Deleuze can be used together for understanding contemporary teacher evaluation systems.

While we advocate for the relevance of Foucault when conducting policy analysis, there are also times when his toolbox needs to be proverbially packed up and put away. This can be a somewhat-difficult lesson in letting go. But, as we noted at the beginning of this chapter, there are times when his tools simply are not suitable for the task at hand, and it becomes a necessary conclusion to put his thinking aside (at least for the time being).

Conclusion

Ultimately, Foucauldian scholars assume that 'no one stands [or can stand] outside discourse' (Bacchi, 2000, p. 45). Foucault, specifically, was interested in how discourses worked to produce particular types of people as subjects (Foucault, 1984). He did not use conflict between the dominant and oppressed groups as his focal point, but rather he

> [took] a series of oppositions – dividing practices involving men over women, of parents over children, of medicine over the population at large, of psychiatry over the mentally ill – as a starting point and attempt[ed] to define precisely what they have in common.
>
> *(Peters, 1996, p. 82)*

As such, he sought to understand the relationship between power and the subject by focusing on the conditions that create certain problems and solutions. Policy analysis, then, becomes less about trying to evaluate whether the policy addresses some problem, and more about how policies create or give shape to problems in 'the very proposals that are offered as responses' (Bacchi, 2000, p. 48).

In thinking about the relevance of Foucault's work in education policy, we keep coming back to how his theoretical tools provide different entry points for thinking about policy and how it shapes education spaces, ideas and practices. In education, more traditional (and positivist) approaches to policy tend to focus on outcomes and assessing the degree to which a policy has achieved

its stated purpose. When we only think about analysis and critique in these binary terms (e.g. did the policy work or not), we miss an opportunity to think about power as operating in more diffuse ways. We get tangled within a view that assumes that, with better tools, we will have fairer (or better) outcomes. What we miss is that we ourselves are products of the performative and datafied discourses that have made the tools possible in the first place (see Lupton, 2018). It constrains us from thinking about the power/knowledge (Foucault, 1980) that shapes our own way of imagining what schools and teachers are (or can be), and how this knowledge has evolved to become 'real' and 'natural' (Miller & Rose, 2008). It also limits our focus of critique to the governments and policymakers who we expect to make change, rather than thinking about how our own practices, values and subjectivities are also implicated (and sometimes complicit).

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5

INDIGENIST POLICY ANALYSIS

The Uluru Statement from the Heart as a road map towards recognising Indigenous sovereignty in Indigenous education

Kevin Lowe, David Coombs and Susan Goodwin

Introduction

Over the many decades since colonisation, Indigenous education policies designed by Australian governments at the state/territory and federal level have consistently framed First Nations students, families and communities as deficient, incapable, underdeveloped and deviant (Burgess & Lowe, 2022; Patrick & Moodie, 2016; Burgess et al., 2021). In formal policy documents, official statements and public discussions of Indigenous education, a range of powerful policy actors have mobilised 'deficit discourse' (Fogarty et al., 2018) to consistently blame Indigenous peoples and cultures for their sub-optimal formal educational outcomes. In turn, Australia's dominant systems of education provision and approaches to schooling have escaped major scrutiny as policymakers consistently represent these institutions and processes as the 'solutions' to the 'problem' of Indigenous educational disadvantage (Burgess & Lowe, 2022; Stacey, 2022). In contrast, the Uluru Statement from the Heart (henceforth the Uluru Statement) delivered to the Australian people by a large national gathering of Indigenous leaders – the National Constitutional Convention – in May 2017 directs critical attention to the unequal power relations that stem from the violent and colonial foundations of Australia. The Uluru Statement presents colonisation and the resultant 'powerlessness' of First Nations people as the fundamental cause of Indigenous peoples' frequent alienation from the social, economic and political institutions of mainstream Australia. One of the most crucial of these institutions is schooling.

In this chapter, we[1] demonstrate a form of policy analysis that can assist in the task of making the politics of Indigenous education policy visible. In our approach, we compare the 'problematisations' in the Uluru Statement and

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those within contemporary federal, state and territory Indigenous education policies. We argue that by 're-problematising' (Bacchi, 2009, p. 19) the relationship between First Nations peoples and the Australian state, the Uluru Statement offers a deep, historically grounded explanation of Indigenous experiences of social, economic, political and educational marginalisation. In addition, the Uluru Statement can also be read as a generous and constructive policy framework for achieving authentic reconciliation through the recognition of First Nations *sovereignty* and a proposal for a treaty-making process – *Makarrata* – reflective of this sovereignty (Brown, 2019). In this framework, the starting point is to question the legitimacy of the Australian state to act upon Indigenous people, a legitimacy that often goes unquestioned in the 'settler colonial policy system' (Strakosch, 2019, pp. 124–125) and, indeed, in mainstream policy analysis.

This chapter engages post-structural policy analysis (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), informed by a critical Indigenous standpoint (Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Nakata, 1998; Yunkaporta & Shillingsworth, 2020). First, we use Carol Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR) method to interrogate the problem framings, ontological foundations, proposed solutions and likely effects of the Uluru Statement from the Heart. We prioritise the Uluru Statement in our analysis because it is arguably the policy statement that is most representative of First Nations aspirations for political reform and policy change at this time; it was drafted by Indigenous peoples in consultation with many Indigenous communities across Australia (Referendum Council, 2017b). We prioritise this document out of respect for the principles of Indigenist research: giving voice to the voiceless and challenging the dominance of Western discourse (Rigney, 2006) and as a 'contestation of the ongoing production of racialized knowledges about Indigenous peoples' (Watego et al., 2021, p. 2). Thus, we take the results of the analysis of the Uluru Statement as constituting a legitimate Indigenous articulation of the causes of and remedies to the ongoing 'problems' for First Nations people. From this basis, we undertake an analysis of the most current set of state, territory and federal Indigenous education policy documents: the second round of WPR analysis is informed by the critical Indigenous insights generated by the first round. Specifically, the Uluru Statement's representation of the problem of Indigenous powerlessness is juxtaposed against government representations of Indigenous educational disadvantage.

Such an analysis of Indigenous education policy deepens our understanding of how Indigenous students, their families and teachers are 'governed' (Bacchi, 2009, p. vii). But this analysis is not done purely out of academic curiosity – we seek to produce practice-relevant knowledge and policy change. We contend that policy stagnation is characteristic of many areas of Indigenous policy, not just education, and that the problem frames that underlie Indigenous-settler relations have been remarkably 'sticky' (Baumgartner, 2007, p. 485) or

consistent since colonisation. It is our view that a reframing of the policy problem and a pragmatic resetting of the political relationship between Indigenous peoples and other Australians could create the conditions for policy success in many Indigenous policy areas, not just education. As the Uluru Statement proposes, this resetting could be a crucial part of 'a movement of the Australian people for a better future' (Referendum Council, 2017a).

In this chapter, we also start to make a case for Indigenist Policy Analysis. In doing so, we follow in the footsteps of what Professor Lester Rigney (2006) describes as 'a distinct yet diverse Indigenist Research epistemological and ontological agenda', one that disrupts the 'power' and 'truth' of racist and racialised research and policy practices. Similarly, we draw inspiration from the story told in *Black to the Future: Making the Case for Indigenist Health Humanities* (Watego, et al., 2021) about the possibilities of 'understanding health and humanities via the foregrounding of Indigenous sovereignty' (Watego et al., 2021, p. 2). In both Indigenist Research and Indigenist Health Humanities, the assumed 'neutrality' of academic disciplines and their concomitant methodologies and methods are challenged. In turn, it is the deleterious effects of the assumed 'neutrality' of policy that propels us toward knowledge-seeking methods that privilege Indigenous voices and experiences in the realm of policy studies.[2]

Analytic approach: comparing problematisations and the WPR approach

The establishment of problematisations that represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as homogenous (Rowse, 2009) and deficient 'has been a highly successful vehicle for exerting government control over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (Maxwell et al., 2018, p. 164). But what are problematisations? As Coombs (2019, p. 81) explains '(p)roblematisation refers, in part, to the process through which social phenomena are transformed into public policy "problems" '. Constructivist policy scholars, for example, maintain that policymakers' understandings of the root causes of pressing policy problems, such as unemployment, pollution, or obesity, will be heavily influenced by their world view. In addition, it has been suggested that 'problem definitions' largely determine the eventual content of policy solutions (Kingdon, 2003, pp. 109–111). Other policy analysts have focused on how policymakers construct policy problems through rhetorical acts or the telling of 'causal stories' (Stone, 1989, 2002), arguing that causal stories are an important political tool that policymakers use to persuade the public of the validity of their proposed policy solution. In contrast, for poststructural policy analysts, the concern is not so much with what *people* do or say, but on the discursive conditions that make these stories *sayable* or make sense and appear to be logical. This focus stems from an ontological and epistemological position

that questions the possibility of policymaking 'subjects' being able to access 'true meaning'. Instead, 'poststructural analysis considers how governmental problematizations produce particular kinds of provisional "subjects"' (Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 40). The analytic focus is therefore on the policy texts – the words and concepts deployed – rather than the intentionality of the policy authors.

The 'What's the Problem Represented to be?' (WPR) approach to policy analysis (Bacchi, 2009; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016) works with Foucault-influenced poststructuralism. Following Foucault, the interest in how issues are problematised – or *constituted* as 'problems' – contributes to how societies are managed and how people are regulated and regulate themselves. From this kind of perspective, policy is understood as a technique of *governing through problematisations*.

The approach involves a very specific way of thinking about policy. In contrast to conventional understandings, policy is not understood as a *reaction* to 'problems' that sit outside the process waiting to be 'addressed' or 'solved'. Rather, policies produce or *constitute* 'problems' as particular types of problems. The task for the policy analyst therefore becomes interrogating how specific policy initiatives or proposals produce 'problems', with particular meanings and with particular effects, and how these 'problems' and 'solutions' come to be seen as natural or inevitable – or at least 'logical'.

Such a focus directs attention to commonly accepted presuppositions that underpin understandings of issues within policies and what follows from these understandings. This form of critical analysis has actually already been deployed productively to examine Indigenous policies in Australia and elsewhere (e.g. Burgess & Lowe, 2022; Patrick & Moodie, 2016; Guenther et al., 2020; Street et al., 2020; Briggs, 2022). For example, Maxwell et al. (2018, p. 163) explain the utility of the WPR approach for their analysis of Australian Curriculum in the following way:

> Above all, this approach facilitates recognition of the 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education problem' as an analytic one; that is, it does not exist as a problem independent of education policy, but rather is represented as problematic by policy authors who simultaneously present an intersection of policies purporting to offer solutions to priority problems.

The *WPR approach* consists of six interrelated questions and an undertaking to apply those questions to one's own proposals in a practice of self-problematisation. Policy analysis involves applying the following questions of policy texts (from Bacchi, 2009, p. 2; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016, p. 20):

Question 1: What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?

Question 2: What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions (conceptual logics) underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
Question 3: How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualised differently?
Question 5: What effects (discursive, subjectification, lived) are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
Question 6: How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or how can it be disrupted and replaced?
Step 7: Apply this list of questions to your own problem representations.

The analysis provided below shows our comparison of the problematisations lodged in the documents we analysed using the WPR approach. The first analysis is of the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, with supplementary detail drawn from the accompanying Final Report of the Referendum Council (2017b). The second analysis highlights the problematisations – and silences – within contemporary Indigenous education policies.

Analysis 1: What does the Uluru Statement problematise?

Fundamentally, the Uluru Statement inverts the dominant settler-colonial policy narrative of Indigenous deficit. Instead of casting Indigenous peoples as the victims of their own oppression, as many policy documents do in both subtle and overt ways, the Uluru Statement tells a story in which the policy silence surrounding Indigenous sovereignty is centred as the root cause of Indigenous disempowerment and disadvantage. Simply put, the central policy problem articulated in the Uluru Statement is *the ongoing policy denial of First Nations sovereignty*. This denial is manifested in Australian governments' unwillingness to give unique political powers and rights to Indigenous peoples. The Uluru Statement emphasises 'the structural nature of our problem' and '*the torment of our powerlessness*' (Referendum Council, 2017a, emphasis in original).

The Uluru Statement is built on the premise of ongoing Indigenous sovereignty, which 'has never been ceded or extinguished, and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown' (Referendum Council, 2017a). The Uluru Statement affirms the existence of First Nations peoples' sovereignty, even though settler-colonial governments and institutions have suppressed it, ideologically and materially, since 1788. They ask: 'How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?' This assertion of Indigenous sovereignty is powerful in that it centrally constitutes the ethical and moral (or axiological) dilemma of the assertions of Australia's legitimacy as a

sovereign state. Ongoing Indigenous ties to Country are the ontological basis of the Uluru Statement. This underscores the fact that, despite the high hopes that followed the 1992 Mabo decision of the High Court, overturning the legal fiction of *Terra Nullius*, governments in Australia have never given effect to Indigenous peoples' sovereign rights as nations with the capacity and desire to self-govern and self-determine.

In the document, the following specific 'problems' are represented:

- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, manifested through ancient, spiritual and ancestral ties between people and Country, is not fully recognised or realised under Australian law. The Statement asserts: 'we seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country'.
- That the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and governments and the Australian people is unfair and untruthful: the Uluru Statement seeks 'a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia . . . . We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history'.
- That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been disempowered, made powerless and need to be heard. 'These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness . . . We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution'.
- That the future is endangered:

  [W]hen we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country . . . We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future.

The problematisations within the Uluru Statement can be traced through the long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resistance, activism and political protest in Australia. Indigenous peoples have asserted their sovereignty and have maintained their links to Country, culture and kin since colonisation began (Behrendt, 2003). In the frontier wars, First Nations peoples fought for survival, to preserve their cultures and forms of social and political self-governance, and to maintain their spiritual connections to Country. Since at least the 1930s, Indigenous resistance has been publicly articulated in relation to an ontological connection to Country and in critiques of the state's denial of this connection. For example, Yorta Yorta elder William Cooper's landmark petition to King George VI, signed by over 1,800 Aboriginal people

and presented to the Australian Government in 1937, asserts Aboriginal land ownership and calls for Aboriginal representation in the Australian parliament (Cooper & Department of Interior, 1934). Similarly, the 1988 Barunga Statement, designed and created by Aboriginal groups in the Northern Territory, calls for the Australian Government to recognise Aboriginal rights to land and self-determination (AIATSIS, 2022). We argue that the Uluru Statement is part of a longer Indigenous resistance movement exemplified by the Indigenous land rights movement, which culminated dramatically on January 26, 1972, in the Tent Embassy protests on the lawns of Parliament House. The movements for cultural maintenance (e.g. Banbuy et al., 1991) and culturally controlled organisations, such as schools, legal services and medical services, are also part of this discourse of Indigenous sovereignty and uniqueness (see, e.g. Coombs, 2019; Herring & Spangaro, 2019). Seen in the light of this long history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resistance, everyday practices such as welcoming/acknowledging Country can be understood as everyday assertions of sovereignty and cultural survival to prevent the extinguishment of Indigenous life-worlds. Thus, the problem representations within the Uluru Statement came about within the context of a long-term Indigenous protest movement seeking the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' rights to land, culture, political power and autonomy.

The problematisation of the failure to recognise Indigenous sovereignty by Australians in the Uluru Statement produces two main effects: (1) it *delegitimises* Australian governments' past Indigenous policy decisions and actions and (2) it proposes *a new governance framework* for policymaking that is based on First Nations peoples' rights to self-determine. In other words, one of the implications is that the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia is understood to be foundationally flawed. Fundamentally, the effect of the Uluru Statement is to delegitimise all policies created in Australia since 1788. In the document, the proposal for a *resetting of the relationship* between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and governments and for the establishment of new processes of policy decision-making is logically linked with the injustice of non-recognition. Moreover, for policy analysts, it opens up the possibility that policy 'problems' such as educational underperformance are unfixable or unsolvable simply by incremental changes to legislation, policy or resourcing.

It is fair to assume that the Uluru proposals can be applied to Indigenous education. If Indigenous *sovereignty were to become a central construct* guiding schooling, teaching and curriculum design, it might prompt questions such as: in which language is schooling conducted? Which pedagogies are prioritised? Whose ontologies take primacy? What are the overarching goals of formal education? Who should run the schools? In a post-treaty future, when an enshrined First Nations Voice is established, schools may have to

grapple with these practical questions, responding to the priorities and views of their Indigenous treaty partners. As such, it is useful to interrogate the ways in which the settler colonial education policy system constructs Indigenous education in the present.

Analysis 2: what do the Indigenous education policies of Australian governments problematise?

In the following section, we present our WPR-informed Indigenist Policy Analysis of the government policy documents that currently structure Indigenous education in Australia. To do this, we examined what we judged to be the most relevant and influential government-endorsed strategies, policies, plans, agreements, frameworks and guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education. We analysed at least one policy document from each state and territory government and the Commonwealth. A full list of the documents is available in the appendix. In this second round of policy analysis, again following Bacchi (2009; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016), we analysed how the problem of Indigenous education has been represented in each jurisdiction and interrogated the presuppositions and assumptions that underpin these problem representations. We were also attentive to the silences or auspicious omissions in the explanations of Indigenous educational disadvantage provided in the different documents. But in addition to the WPR questions, we applied an additional set of questions that emerged out of our scrutiny of the Uluru Statement. We found that in order to foreground Indigenous standpoint, sovereignty and aspirations, deep-seated colonial assumptions need to be much more explicitly problematised in policy analysis. The Indigenist analytic method presented in this chapter developed iteratively after we found a 'silence' in many applications of the WPR method, which do not problematise settler colonial policy or the state itself, a critical stance that, we argue, is central to Indigenous resistance. The following set of *five critical questions* form the basis of our new framework for Indigenist Policy Analysis in education.

Question 1: Is the sovereignty of First Nations people recognised in the policy?
Question 2: Does the policy say anything meaningful about enshrining fair and truthful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples?
Question 3: Does the policy give Indigenous families the rights to self-determination, to be heard, and to contribute to decisions about what takes place in schools, how teaching happens, what gets taught?
Question 4: Does the policy seek to recalibrate power dynamics and empower Indigenous peoples?
Question 5: Are there any openings for an Uluru-style education policy process within this policy document?

To demonstrate this form of Indigenist Policy Analysis, some of our key findings are set out below. The following is not an exhaustive analysis of all problematisations present in the policy documents. For example, while we found much evidence of governments problematising Indigenous educational under-achievement, blaming Indigenous students and their families for underperformance against mainstream benchmarks, we did not dedicate significant attention to this 'deficit discourse', since its existence and impact have been thoroughly critiqued elsewhere (see Fogarty et al., 2018; Brown, 2019; Burgess & Lowe, 2022; Altman, 2018). To demonstrate the utility of our new method of policy analysis, we draw attention to the way Indigenous education policies problematise 'relationships' between government actors and Indigenous peoples, also highlighting the silences around Indigenous sovereignty and the ongoing impacts of colonialism.

Problematising 'relationships': the magical work of 'partnerships'

Throughout many of the policy documents, *relationships* between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the schools and teachers that operate in Aboriginal communities are problematised. For example, the NSW Department of Education has 'committed to developing, growing and strengthening *partnerships* at all levels' (NSW DET, 2020, p. 2), implying that these partnerships with Aboriginal communities and families are currently somewhat underdeveloped, stunted and weak. In a similar way, the South Australian (SA) Department of Education promises to 'develop the confidence and capability of our workforce to build high-expectation *relationships* with Aboriginal students, families and communities' (2018, p. 17, emphasis added). The Tasmanian Department of Education also places great faith in the power of 'partnerships with Aboriginal students and their families' (Department of Education Tasmania, n.d., p. 1). In its one-page Aboriginal Education Framework, the Tasmanian Department states simply that its intention is to 'Develop meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal people in the development and delivery of learning programs and curriculum resources'. It provided no further detail about the nature of these partnerships, how they will be achieved or the impact they might deliver.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015), endorsed by all education ministers in Australia at the state/territory and commonwealth level, asserts:

> [Q]uality partnerships . . . between education sectors and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other stakeholders . . . are characterised by listening and responding, strong accountability and active engagement, collaborative information sharing and informed decision making.
>
> *(p. 5)*

It is claimed that such partnerships will assist in the achievement of 'School and child readiness; Literacy and numeracy; Attendance; Transition points including pathways to postschool options' (Education Council, 2015, p. 4). This document, however, makes no mention of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be invited to 'partner' in their children's education. Nor does it mention the drastic power imbalances (Burgess & Lowe, 2022, p. 9) that would shape and influence the outcome of any partnerships between First Nations communities and government institutions (e.g. school systems and education departments). Alongside the discussion of 'relationships' and 'partnerships', some of the policy documents do make mention of First Nations 'self-determination' and 'empowerment'. While there is inconsistent usage of these terms across the policy documents, overall, the impression conveyed is that most governments in Australia still view 'empowerment' and 'self-determination' as synonymous with 'engagement' or 'consultation'.

Again, viewing these documents through the lens of Indigenist Policy Analysis, questioning the way in which relationships between the governments and First Nations people are problematised, it is very clear that the 'problem of relationship' in the Uluru statement is of a different hue. For example, the Uluru Statement proposes a 'fair and truthful' relationship with the Australian people. In the education policies analysed, the problems of injustice and falsehood in relationships remain silenced.

Silences on Indigenous sovereignty and colonial history

At no point are Indigenous political rights, autonomy or independence acknowledged or recognised in this set of documents. Instead, strategic consultation with Aboriginal peak bodies or advisory groups, or nebulously defined Aboriginal 'community' members is proposed. For example, the South Australian Government promised: 'we will implement governance structures that include and empower local Aboriginal families and communities in decision-making and service delivery' (SA DET, 2018, p. 17). However, that is the most substantive reference to Aboriginal empowerment in the SA education system. No additional details about how or when these structural reforms might occur or the mechanisms for Aboriginal empowerment are provided. This policy does not challenge the disproportionate power of the SA government to make policy for Aboriginal peoples.

In the policy documents we analysed, the government of the ACT offered one of the most fulsome statements of support for Aboriginal self-determination. The overarching *ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019–2028* recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' 'right to self-determination which is an ongoing process of choice to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are able to meet their

social, cultural and economic needs' (ACT Government & ACT ATSIEB, 2019, p. 1). No details are provided, however, explaining how this 'process of choice' is to be realised or resourced; the most substantive change to ACT governance and accountability structures appears to be the establishment of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body (ACT Government & ACT ATSIEB, 2019, p. 1). While the establishment of this representative Aboriginal political body might offer some opportunities for Aboriginal people to engage in government processes, it is still a far cry from the kind of self-determination envisaged in the Uluru Statement, based on an ontological recognition of First Nations sovereignty.

One of the more substantive examples of First Nations 'voice' in Indigenous education policy design is found in the Victorian Government's Marrung Aboriginal Education Plan (2016). In Marrung, Geraldine Atkinson, the president of the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association, affirms that the Victorian Government has 'worked with the Victorian Koorie community' to develop this policy (Victorian DET, 2016, p. 4). Atkinson also states that this policy is 'underpinned' by the principles of self-determination, since 'local communities are to have a recognised voice and "place at the table" to provide advice to local service providers of what the community wants' (Victorian DET, 2016, p. 4). In this version of self-determination, sovereign Aboriginal nations are reduced to the status of policy advisors, competing to be heard around the already crowded decision-making table. Similarly, in the NSW Government's Aboriginal Education Policy, the state-level Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group, is recognised 'as the peak Community advisory body' in all planning and decision-making related to Aboriginal education. Without policy recognition of 'First Nations sovereignty', First Nations self-determination is reduced from *the power to make binding decisions for yourself* to *the opportunity to make suggestions and pleas to an external authority that will ultimately decide what to do with you, for you or to you*.

There are, however, three jurisdictions in Australia where the concept of Treaty is being engaged in the development of new policy frameworks. In 2018, Victoria enacted Australia's first ever Treaty law, the Advancing the Treaty Process with Aboriginal Victorians Act, and in 2022, the Queensland Path to Treaty Commitment was signed. Additionally, The Northern Territory Government established a Treaty Commission, which 'consulted with Aboriginal people across the Northern Territory and conducted research to inform development of a framework for future treaty negotiations'. The commission's final report was tabled in parliament in July 2022. All three of these processes involve governmental commitments to self-determination and to establishing new Indigenous governance mechanisms. With these government commitments to Treaty, there is some chance that Indigenous sovereignty might become a guiding principle of Indigenous policy. However, we found

no evidence of this in the policy documents. The implications of these significant developments for agreement-making on education and for First Nations peoples' educational experiences are, therefore, still unknown.

The *extant* Commonwealth, State and Territory policies related to Indigenous education in Australia do not yet make room for an enshrined independent Indigenous decision-making in education. In each case, the state reserves the power of inclusion and exclusion, of curriculum, teaching quality and standards and the promulgation of the myriad policies that structure and maintain its authority over children and their education. Wherever 'independence' is offered, it is shaped through negotiation within a 'partnership' arrangement with government and its agencies. This policy framework forecloses the possibilities of radical change, and/or Indigenous agency, which is urgently needed if the parlous state of Indigenous educational experience is to be remedied. None of the policy documents analysed consider the possibility that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, communities and nations might hope for a different model of education for their children, compared to what is currently on offer in Australian schools. These policies, strategies and plans do not acknowledge that, for some First Nations students, learning local Aboriginal language, continuing cultural traditions and gaining the skills to live on and with Country may be important educational ends *in and of themselves*. In the policy documents, we have examined, culture, language and connection to Country are conceptualised as necessary ingredients for Aboriginal educational (read economic) 'success'; they are presented as mere stepping-stones along the road to more important things, such as graduating from high school, gaining a place in university, learning a trade or getting a job. In pursuing the latter, without acknowledging Indigenous understandings of education, we argue that schools are continuing the assimilation project.

There is one further Indigenous education policy 'silence' that merits attention here: the silence surrounding the history of the colonisation of Australia. The Uluru Statement's proposals for legal and political reform have been distilled into three ideas: voice, treaty and truth. The implications of first two of these we have discussed in depth, above. In relation to the third idea, the authors of the Uluru Statement have called for a process of 'truth telling about our history' (Referendum Council, 2017a). The Referendum Council progressing this call has proposed that it cover invasion, resistance, mourning, activism, the struggle for land rights and the desire for treaty (Referendum Council, 2017b, pp. 17–21) and also that this 'truth' be taught in schools. Specifically in relation to the history of schooling, the Referendum Council also calls for the truth to be told about the exclusion, discrimination against, abuse and neglect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children by 'educators' and state-sanctioned education institutions. Participants at the

regional dialogues spoke of the need to teach all Australians about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including children, being 'herded to missions and reserves on the fringes of white society' (Referendum Council, 2017b, pp. 18–19), where education was not provided, limited or explicitly assimilatory in its intent. While many of the policy documents speak of the need to 'educate' non-Indigenous Australians about First Nations peoples and cultures, none of them speak specifically about invasion, frontier violence, Indigenous resistance or policy supported exclusion, linguicide. Nor do they say anything about the ongoing mistrust between schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities stemming from physical and psychological abuse in schools, and the central role played by schools in assimilatory removal of First Nations children from their families, and the prohibition on the speaking of Indigenous languages and the practicing of Indigenous cultures. Only one policy document mentions 'colonisation', but it is presented as a remnant of another era. The SA Department for Education recognises 'that Aboriginal people and their nations have endured *past* injustices and dispossession as a result of colonisation' but makes no subsequent commitment to respond to these injustices, reverse dispossession or address their impacts, even though they 'continue to be intergenerational' (SA Government, 2018, p. 10, our emphasis). We argue that these intergenerational impacts will continue to be felt in Indigenous education while government policies continue to ignore Indigenous peoples' calls for voice, treaty and truth.

Conclusion

Across Australia, there is a significant 'gap' between the kind of Indigenous empowerment countenanced in policy and the kind of Indigenous empowerment proposed by Indigenous peoples in their political statements, daily activisms and routine forms of resistance. By developing and applying a new framework of Indigenist Policy Analysis, we have demonstrated how key policy documents in settler colonial Australia do not discuss the possibility of transformational change to the structures of education, transformations that might come about from the substantial empowerment of Indigenous peoples. Writing in a different settler-colonial context, Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang urge settlers to consider the power recalibrations that decolonisation and Indigenous empowerment may bring about. They ask: if Native Americans re-gained control of their lands, 'Would the settler leave or just vanish? Would he ask to stay, and if he did, who would say yes?' (2012, p. 17). While the Uluru Statement does not call for such a radical territorial decolonisation as this, the Indigenous empowerment that it proposes may lead to some hard conversations about what is taught to Indigenous children, how, for what purpose and by whom. Taking inspiration from Tuck and Yang's provocative

decolonial question, we may ask: if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples re-gained control of their education, *would the settler education system vanish? Would settler educators and education administrators ask to stay involved? Who would say yes?*

We have found little evidence of these questions being asked in Australian education policies. Without addressing Indigenous sovereignty, Australian state policies remain incapable of proposing a different education system that might better serve the needs and aspirations of First Nations children, families and communities. We have, therefore, concluded that Australian governments and education departments are not yet taking seriously the prospect and possible outcomes of decolonisation and Indigenous empowerment. Policymakers may, however, be forced to confront this possibility before too long if a First Nations Voice to Parliament is enshrined in the Australian constitution. The decolonial conversations that would ensue may go some way towards bridging the gap between symbolic and substantive First Nations self-determination in education.

The form of policy analysis presented in this chapter can be understood as both an *analytic strategy* – a way to deconstruct and scrutinise existing policies and policy statements – and a *proposal* to education policy analysts to undertake policy analysis differently. The Indigenist Policy Analysis approach proposed is distinctive in the following ways. It foregrounds First Nation statements and renders questions of how settler policies operate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples central to the analysis. Moreover, the approach problematises the authority of the settler colonial state through the recognition of First Nations sovereignty.

Notes

1 Kevin Lowe is a Gubbi Gubbi man from southeast Queensland. David Coombs is a settler Australian born and raised in Sydney. Susan Goodwin is also a settler Australian, born on the lands of the Gundungurra people in south-eastern NSW and lives and works in Sydney.

2 Watego et al. (2021, p. 3) describe Indigenist Health Humanities in the following way:

> Indigenist Health Humanities makes explicit the criticality of critical Indigenous studies and, particularly, Rigney's Indigenist research principles of resistance, political integrity, and privileging of Indigenous voices [14]. Indigenist Health Humanities insists upon a foregrounding of Indigenous intellectual sovereignty to resist and remedy the prevailing racist research paradigms found across both health and humanities. Similarly, Indigenist Health Humanities is not a field whose parameters are defined by the Indigeneity of researchers or research subjects; rather, it is a field that regards Indigenous knowledges as foundational for knowing not just an ancient past, but a possible future. In being Indigenist, rather than Indigenous, neither the knowers nor known must be Indigenous; however, the principles of Indigenist research, as expressed by Rigney, provide the parameters by which knowledge is produced.

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Appendix: list of policy documents that were analysed

Commonwealth

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National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy. (2015). *Education Council*. www.education.gov.au/indigenous-education/resources/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education-strategy-2015

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: version 5.0. (2020). *Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA]*. www.acara.edu.au/docs/default-source/curriculum/the_shape_of_the_australian_curriculum_version5_for-website.pdf

Victoria

Marrung: Aboriginal Education Plan 2016–2026. (2016). *Department of Education and Training*. www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/about/programs/aboriginal/Marrung_Aboriginal_Education_Plan_2016-2026.pdf

South Australia

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New South Wales

10 Year Plan – Footprints to the Future. (2020). *NSW Government | Department of Education*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/aec/policy-strategy-and-business-systems#104

NSW Aboriginal Education Policy. (2008). *NSW Government | Department of Education*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/policy-library/policies/pd-2008-0385

Turning Policy into Action. (2008). *NSW Government | Department of Education*. https://education.nsw.gov.au/content/dam/main-education/policy-library/associated-documents/aetp_turning.pdf

Tasmania

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Tasmania's Aboriginal Education Framework. (n.d.). Department of Education Tasmania. www.decyp.tas.gov.au/students/school-colleges/aboriginal-education-services/

Northern Territory

Education NT Strategy 2021–2025. (2021). *Northern Territory Government | Department of Education*. https://education.nt.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1061386/education-NT-strategy-2021-2025.pdf

Northern Territory Education Engagement Strategy 2022–2031. (2021). *Northern Territory Government | Department of Education*. https://education.nt.gov.au/statistics-research-and-strategies/education-engagement-strategy

Queensland

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Perspectives Statement 2017–2022. (n.d.). *Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority | Queensland Government*. www.qcaa.qld.edu.au/about/k-12-policies/aboriginal-torres-strait-islander-perspectives/policies/perspectives-statement

Advancing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education: An Action Plan for Queensland – Consultation Report. (2019). *Queensland Government | Department of Education*. https://indigenousportal.education.qld.gov.au/strategies-and-plans/education-action-plan-for-queensland

Engaging Communities: Empowering Futures. (n.d.). *Queensland Government | Department of Education*. https://indigenousportal.education.qld.gov.au/strategies-and-plans/engaging-communities-empowering-futures

Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Succeeding: Strategy. (2021). *Queensland Government | Department of Education*. https://education.qld.gov.au/initiatives-and-strategies/strategies-and-programs/every-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-student-succeeding

Australian Capital Territory

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Programs. (n.d.). *ACT Government*. www.education.act.gov.au/public-school-life/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Education-Programs

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Cultural Integrity in ACT Schools. (2018). *ACT Government*. www.actparents.org.au/index.php/news1/item/378-cultural-integrity-in-our-schools

Early Entry for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children. (2020). *ACT Government*. www.education.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1019808/Early-Entry-for-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Children-.pdf

Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Families | Fact Sheet. (n.d.). ACT Government. www.education.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/807432/150897-Engaging-with-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Families.pdf

Supporting Education Directorate Staff. (n.d.). *ACT Government*. www.education.act.gov.au/public-school-life/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-education/supporting-education-directorate-staff

Western Australia

Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework. (2015). *Department of Education WA*. www.education.wa.edu.au/dl/jjpzned

Aboriginal Education Plan for WA Public Schools 2011–2014. (2011). Department of Education WA. www.parliament.wa.gov.au/publications/tabledpapers.nsf/displaypaper/3813393a38b5ea66293dd49748257894003c9059/$file/3393.pdf

6

MEDIA ANALYSIS

From the wide angle to the zoom lens

Nicole Mockler

Different approaches to media analysis in educational research

There are many different approaches to media analysis undertaken by educational researchers (and indeed researchers working across the social sciences more broadly). In many ways, the approach taken depends on research questions asked (indeed, as it should!); on whether the media analysis is the sole focus of the research or intended to complement analysis of other data sources; and on the availability of media texts related to the research focus. Media analysis is particularly good for answering questions about representations of educational ideas and concepts; about how education policy is translated in the public space; about the discursive framing of education; about the construction of education policy problems in a particular place and time; and about changing constructions of education policy problems over time. A very common question from researchers starting out in media analysis is 'how many articles should I include?' Unfortunately, there is no one simple 'best' answer to this question: high-quality research has been based on everything from analysis of a single article to analysis of thousands of texts. The important thing is that the scope of the research is appropriate to the research questions and that the method of analysis is also aligned. In examining the key research employing media analysis in education over the past two decades, it is clear that there are a range of different 'lenses' in use, and here we take a closer look at four of these.

The 'zoom lens': close analysis of single texts or small groups of texts

At one end of the spectrum lies research that conducts very close analysis of a single media article or a very small group of texts, often employing some

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variation of Fairclough's critical discourse analysis approach (1995). An example of this is Cristian Cabalin's exploration of quality assurance debates in Chilean higher education (2015), in which he closely examined two editorials published in rival newspapers and three columns contributed by the rectors of prominent Chilean universities. The focus in his study is on the practical arguments articulated and the discursive construction of 'quality' in higher education as demonstrated in these five articles. An even closer example is Keogh and Garrick's (2011) analysis of a single article, published in *The Courier Mail* and focused on the question of teacher quality. Informed by institutional ethnography (Smith, 2005), they conduct 'an intimate reading' (p. 424) of the text before 'zooming out' (p. 429) to consider the broader political implications of the deficit views of teachers and schools revealed in their reading of the text.

Work such as this affords a close engagement with each article, and a capacity for the researcher to rely on substantial extracts of the texts, by way of substantiating their arguments and explaining their analysis to their readers. The close focus on one or a small number of articles usually means a focus on the role of language in the discursive construction of some aspects of education, and while this kind of research cannot be used to identify media representations 'writ large', they do afford the opportunity to provide in-depth examples of the relationship between language and discursive positioning, and to craft a 'black swan' (Flyvbjerg, 2006) argument that can illuminate, problematise and argue against counter claims.

Thematic analysis of a larger group of texts

Sometimes, the aim is to develop a picture of representations of a particular issue or event, by undertaking a thematic analysis of a group of texts selected because of their relationship to a particular issue. Examples of this work include Jennifer Cohen's (2010) analysis of 170 news articles published in *The Chicago Tribune* over a two-year period, identified via headline and keyword searches as contributing to education discourse. Her analysis was both content-focused, involving the identification of themes across the articles, and structural, involving the exploration of recurring grammatical features within the articles. More recently, Melissa Barnes (2022) explored of the issue of 'teacher quality' in the Australian print media, analysing 30 articles published in four Australian newspapers over a one-year period, identified using the search term 'teacher quality'. Her analysis utilised the conceptual tool of media framing, which will be discussed further below, to identify the key political messages embedded in the texts.

These, and other similar studies, share a strong focus around a particular concept or phenomenon, whether an open one, such as *education*, or a more narrow and specific one, such as *teacher quality*. The selection of articles

for inclusion, while broader than that of the studies noted earlier, is carefully limited, and here researchers need to make (and then communicate to their readers) a number of important decisions around publication, timeframe and article type. Most important is the rationale for these decisions, which needs to be clearly presented and justified. The knowledge claims, while potentially broader than studies that focus on a small number of articles, are still limited by and thus need to correspond with the breadth of the sources included. While it is still possible to focus on the linguistic dimensions of the texts in analysis of larger groups, more usually the focus is on the discursive implications of the texts as a group.

Charting change over time

A range of studies have explored policy changes over time using a selection of targeted print media texts. For example, Baroutsis and Lingard's (2017) study charting media coverage of OECD PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) results from 2000 to 2014, in which they analysed 173 articles published in ten Australian newspapers, charted the shifting media frames in use over the period of the study. Punakallio and Dervin's (2015) analysis of 81 front-page stories about teachers in the Finnish press published between 2000 and 2013 highlights shifting representations of teachers over this time and also changing depictions of teachers' power.

These studies, and others like them, share an interest in the interplay between education policy and the media, generally focused on how reportage of particular policies or orientations has changed over time, and how specific policies and policy frameworks become socialised and normalised by the media. They generally, although not always, draw from a somewhat larger data set, which allows patterns to be identified and drawn out over an established timeframe, or at contrasting points in time. What is important in this kind of research is coverage of an appropriate timeframe and a 'critical mass' of sources at each point of the timeframe: to make a claim about change over time, it is necessary to identify discursive shifts on the basis of more than a small selection of articles.

The 'wide angle': corpus-based approaches

A final group of recent studies has used corpus-based approaches to explore the discursive construction of different aspects of education. Corpora are (usually) large groups of texts which are often constructed specifically for a given research project. Larger corpora of different types of texts, such as the British National Corpus (BNC Consortium, 2007), a 100 million word corpus of spoken and written British English texts, and the Corpus of News on the Web

(NOW) (Davies, 2016), a 16.7 billion word corpus from web-based magazines and newspapers in 20 Anglophone countries, also exist and could potentially be utilised to answer questions about education-related issues and phenomena. Corpus-based approaches to media analysis generally seek to identify the 'aboutness' of a corpus of texts constructed according to established research questions and/or to identify the representations of particular concepts within the corpus under investigation.

While corpus-assisted approaches to media analysis are relatively new on the scene in education, Fenech and Wilkins' (2017, 2019) research focuses on media representations of early childhood education and the National Quality Framework for early childhood education in the Australian print media, based on a purpose-built media corpus of 801 articles. They use both their whole corpus and sub-sets of their corpus (known as 'sub-corpora') to explore the discursive construction of ECE generally (Fenech & Wilkins, 2017) and to compare and contrast the different representations offered in newspapers published by different owners (Fenech & Wilkins, 2019). Some of my own recent work (e.g. 2020a, 2020b, 2022) has used a similar approach, seeking to explore patterns of representation in the media over a significant period of time using either large (2022) or smaller (2020a, 2020b) purpose-built corpora.

Corpus-based approaches focus at some level on the discursive construction of phenomena through exploration of language patterns, and while they employ quantitative strategies, good corpus-assisted research also involves systematic and often, depending on the size of the corpus, painstaking qualitative work. An introduction to corpus-assisted discourse analysis is provided below, but a more comprehensive overview for beginners can be found elsewhere, particularly in the work of Paul Baker (see, e.g. Baker, 2006).

Theoretical and conceptual tools for media analysis

Alignment between research questions and the scope of your study is only one important consideration in shaping up a media analysis project. Another relates to the conceptual and theoretical tools available to researchers, and there is a wide variety of these available. Some of the work cited earlier uses frameworks and tools drawn from broader discourse/policy analysis such as Bacchi's (2009; Bacchi & Goodwin, 2016) 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' framework (which is a focus of Chapter 5 of this book), which can be adapted for media analysis (e.g. Mockler & Redpath, 2022). Others come from media and communication studies and relate specifically to media analysis. Here I explore three such tools that work well for research seeking to illuminate the construction of media discourses and in turn how they affect public understandings of social phenomena, including education.

Media logic

Developed by David Altheide and Robert Snow (1979), over four decades ago, *media logic* is about the role of the media in the shaping of people's experience. More recently, Altheide wrote that media logic:

> is defined as a form of communication, and the process through which media transmit and communicate information. A basic principle of media logic is that events, action, and actors' performances reflect information technologies, specific media, and formats that govern communication. A related principle is that communication guidelines become institutionalized and taken for granted, serve as an interpretive schema, and guide routine social interaction, and thereby become integral in creating, maintaining, and changing culture.
>
> *(Altheide, 2015, pp. 750–751)*

So, the concept of media logic is concerned with the way that media forms shape content and in turn, conceptualisations of reality, on the part of readers and audiences. Altheide wrote of the way that 'audiences-as-actors normalise these forms and use them as reality maintenance tools' (2013, p. 225), and as I have argued elsewhere (Mockler, 2019), in the case of education, these 'reality maintenance tools' reinforce readers' own narratives of schools and teachers, derived from their own schooling experiences. In this way, media logics contribute to the ongoing and ever-emergent 'cumulative cultural text' (Weber, 2006) of education.

The concept of media logic is a useful one for policy researchers wishing to explore the relationship between education policy and understandings of education in the public space. It does not suggest that this relationship is linear or neat, but does offer a tool for understanding its linguistic and discursive dimensions.

Media framing

Where media logic is about the relationship between media forms and institutions and audience effects *writ large*, media framing gives account of the practical mechanisms by which messages are communicated, and thus popular opinion shaped. Media framing as a conceptual framework dates to the work of Erving Goffman (1974) in the 1970s, and over time this has been developed by scholars such as Iyengar (Cacciatore et al., 2016; Iyengar, 1990, 1991; Scheufele & Iyengar, 2012) and Entman (Entman, 1993, 2003; Entman et al., 2009). Entman's classic summary of framing argues that media framing is about both selection and salience:

> To frame is to *select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular*

> *problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation* for the item described.
>
> *(Entman, 1993, p. 51, emphasis in original)*

The work of Gamson and Modigliani has been instrumental in the development of framing analysis. They conceptualised a media frame as:

> a central organizing idea or story line that provides meaning to an unfolding strip of events, weaving a connection among them. The frame suggests what the controversy is about, the essence of the issue. A frame generally implies a policy direction or implicit answer to what should be done about the issue. Sometimes more than one concrete policy position is consistent with a single frame.
>
> *(1987, p. 143)*

Frames are said to appeal to existing cognitive schemas (Scheufele & Tewksbury, 2007) and seek to make complex issues easily accessible to mass audiences. By way of offering tools for analysis of media framing, Gamson and Modigliani (1987, 1989) posit that frames relate to what they term *packages*, constituted by both the frame itself and a set of 'framing' and 'reasoning' devices that steer readers' perspectives on an issue and its corresponding solution. They note that 'a package offers a number of different condensing symbols that suggest the core frame and positions in shorthand, making it possible to display the package as a whole with a deft metaphor, catchphrase, or other symbolic device' (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989, p. 3). Within their model, examples of 'framing devices' include metaphors, exemplars, catchphrases, depictions and visual images, while the 'reasoning devices' are defined as roots (causal analysis), consequence (effects) and appeals to principle (moral claims). Gamson and Modigliani note that packages can be referenced through the use of symbolic devices that invoke their central characteristics, with packages exhibiting a *signature* – a particular confluence of elements that come to provide a shorthand for the central ideas of the package. Gamson and Modigliani thus offer a series of conceptual tools for analysing and understanding media frames, tools that can help researchers to get inside the way that media frames are constructed and sustained, including the discursive effects of language in the context of media texts.

News values

The concept of 'news values' is about newsworthiness – how events either present as intrinsically newsworthy or how they are made so by journalists and editors. News values 'are said to drive what makes the news' and can help us in

'answering the question [of] why events make it into the news media' (Potts et al., 2015, p. 150). Richardson argues:

> The precise manifestation of what these values *mean* to journalists sifting news from mere events is wholly dependent on the (imagined) preferences of the expected audience. Thus, the daily developments of the stock exchange are of significance to certain readers while daily developments in the lives of minor celebrities are thought significant to (perhaps) different readers.
>
> *(Richardson, 2007, p. 92)*

Many different lists and typologies of news values have been developed by scholars of journalism over the past 60 years, including those of Galtung and Ruge (1965), Bell (1991) and Harcup and O'Neill (2001, 2017). Bednarek and Caple (2012, 2017) have argued for a streamlined and more precise set of news values, including negativity, timeliness, proximity, prominence/eliteness, consonance, impact, novelty/unexpectedness, superlativeness and personalisation. Furthermore, they note what they see as an underutilisation of news values in critical discourse analysis of media texts, with Bednarek (2016) developing a highly practical inventory of linguistic devices useful for discourse analysis. These resources can help researchers operationalise news values in their analysis, linking the specific language utilised in media stories to the creation of newsworthiness for particular audiences.

Media logic, media framing and news values are three distinct but also somewhat related conceptual tools that enable researchers to connect the 'work' that media texts do collectively in terms of representation and discursive construction through to the processes of textual analysis required to substantiate knowledge claims.

Two examples

This final section includes two very different examples of media analysis from my own work, highlighting the affordances and limitations of each approach and some of the contrasts between them. I have chosen to highlight one example (Mockler, 2014) that uses media-framing analysis, specifically Gamson and Modigliani's (1989) 'signature matrix' approach mentioned earlier, and one example (Mockler, 2020b) that utilises corpus assisted discourse analysis.

Example 1: news framing analysis

In this study, I was interested in examining representations of the National Plan for School Improvement (NPSI), the Gillard Government's response

to the first 'Gonski report', itself the culmination of an extensive review into school funding in Australia (Gonski et al., 2011). Having observed a shift in the discourse around 'Gonski' from a focus on funding to a focus on quality, I undertook a systematic analysis of a number of texts, including media reports, along with press releases and transcripts of speeches and interviews by the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and the Minister for Education, Peter Garrett. I was particularly interested in whether the shift I had identified was perceived or actual, and in the case of identifying an actual shift, from where it had emanated.

Selection of texts

Because in this study I was most interested in a close analysis of and comparison between different texts, anchored by a particular 'policy moment', I elected to limit the texts in my sample temporally, taking a very narrow sweep of the media and other texts produced within a week of the policy announcement. I began with the Ministers' Media Centre,[1] an excellent source of transcripts of speeches/interviews and press releases, collecting all during the given time frame that included reference to the National Plan for School Improvement. Given that the Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, had taken a central role in the announcement and discussion of the NPSI in this first week, I also expanded my search to the Prime Minister's Media Centre. These searches yielded 14 texts: three media releases, two speeches and the transcripts of nine interviews on radio and television. I augmented these with print media articles from the 12 Australian national and capital city daily newspapers identified via a Factiva search using the search terms 'National Plan for School Improvement', which I also broadened, given the flavour of the reportage of the NPSI, to 'teacher quality' and 'teaching quality'. A manual check then ensured that only media articles directly referencing the NPSI/'Gonski announcement' were included. This yielded 28 articles.

This account highlights two important things about text selection in this kind of work. First, it needs to be theoretically driven and linked to the research questions guiding the study. I could easily have broadened the parameters and included a larger number of texts, but because I was concerned in this study with a very close framing analysis that required a focus at a linguistic level on phrases and sentences, it was important to ensure that I limited the scope to a manageable number of articles. It is important to be able to articulate and justify the parameters of article selection with reference to the focus of the study: the knowledge claims that can reasonably be made out of the analysis will be tempered by the scope of text selection, and so having alignment between the focus of the study and the articles selected is key to generating a significant contribution out of the research. Second, while computer-assisted searches are excellent for identifying a group of relevant

texts, manual searching is always important. This is the case regardless of whether the study focuses on 50 articles or 50,000. In the case of the latter, the manual checks might be quite different to those undertaken for a smaller study; however regardless of the scope, it is important to ensure that all texts included meet the criteria identified for inclusion, and this cannot be achieved by electronic searches alone.

Conceptual and analytical approach

For this study, I employed a media-framing analysis, using Gamson and Modigliani's (1987) 'signature matrix' approach. Working first with the media texts as a subgroup, I developed a 'signature matrix' where I identified the dominant frames in use through close attention to the framing devices (metaphors, exemplars, catch-phrases, depictions and visual images) and reasoning devices (roots, consequences and appeals to principle) at work in each of the 28 articles. From these, I was able to identify three core frames, each with a 'core position', and identify the way that these frames were neatly packaged by the media: namely around 'saving our nation's education system', 'school improvement' and 'teacher quality'. This process was one that involved close examination, re-examination and coding of each of the texts, which I conducted until I was satisfied that I had 'exhausted' the analysis. At that point, I went to the press releases, transcripts and speeches to explore how these frames resonated with or diverted from the original presentation of the ideas. Here, through a similar process, I was able to identify a strong resonance between the frames used by the politicians in their 'selling' of the NPSI and those employed by most journalists in their reporting.

Knowledge claims

This strong resonance and the close study of an 'entire' (remembering that I included all of the texts that met the search criteria in the study, not a selected sample of them) coverage, albeit one limited in terms of timeframe, allowed me to make some claims about the way that policymakers had influenced the media coverage of the NPSI announcement. This had happened via the strong and consistent framing in the Prime Minister's and Minister's discussions, which in turn had almost exclusively been put to work in the media framing of the coverage. While a reading of the media texts alone might have attributed the construction of the moral panic about teachers and the education system more broadly that strongly characterised these articles to the media, the analysis showed that moral panic was a strong part of the politicians' own framing of the issue. What I could not surmise, however, is whether this was an isolated incident or a more regular part of journalistic practice in reporting on education.

Example 2: corpus-assisted discourse analysis

In this study, I was interested in charting the patterns of media coverage of the Australian National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) standardised testing over the first ten years of the Program's life. My particular interest was in how far reporting had been consistent over the period, whether there had been a discursive shift at any point and if so what the nature of the shift had been.

Text selection

Because of my desire to trace patterns in the media coverage over this extended period of time, a larger group of texts was required for this study. To that end, I used the Nexis News database to identify all articles published in the 12 Australian national and capital city daily newspapers, from January 1, 2008, to December 31, 2018, (inclusive) that referenced NAPLAN. I used 'NAPLAN' as the search term and included all articles that referred to NAPLAN at least once. This method yielded 5,949 articles. I could have limited the text selection further – for example, to articles that referenced NAPLAN more than once, or three times or more, however, this would have yielded a selection that was more 'about' or focused on NAPLAN than I was necessarily interested in for this study. Recognising that often NAPLAN is referenced in stories about education more broadly and surmising that this referencing would also highlight something about the discursive construction of NAPLAN, I opted to include all articles with one mention or more.

Conceptual and analytical approach

I used corpus-assisted discourse analysis for this project, and in particular the two corpus analysis tools of keyword and concordance analysis. As noted earlier, there is a wealth of writing about the practicalities of corpus analysis (for good examples, see Baker, 2006; Brezina, 2018); however, for the purposes of this discussion, a very brief overview of these tools will be provided.

Keyword analysis provides insight into the 'aboutness' (Scott, 2002) of a corpus by identifying words used more (or less) frequently in the corpus under analysis (the 'study corpus') than in a second corpus (the 'reference corpus'). Keywords are identified using corpus analysis software such as AntConc (Anthony, 2022) or Wordsmith Tools (Scott, 2020), which use a researcher-stipulated measure of statistical significance and effect-size measure. There are many decisions to be made by researchers in terms of the statistical measures to be employed in keyword analysis, and the most appropriate statistics for a study can depend on the size of the corpus under examination, and the difference between the study and reference corpora (Gabrielatos, 2018). In the case

of this particular analysis, keywords were generated for the NAPLAN Corpus as a whole through comparing it to the Australian portion of the NOW Corpus (Davies, 2016) as the reference corpus. Keywords were also identified for each year of the NAPLAN Corpus by comparing the texts published in each calendar (i.e. school) year with the texts published in the other ten years covered by the Corpus. The Bayesian Information Criteria (BIC) statistic was employed as a representation of significance, and Hardie's Log Ratio as the effect size statistic.

Once the keywords were identified, concordance analysis, which involves examining each instance of each keyword in its original context, was undertaken. This is a painstaking but critical part of corpus assisted discourse analysis which ensures that the meaning attributed to the patterns identified in the quantitative analysis is justifiable and correct. Corpus analysis software packages such as those noted earlier are able to quickly and easily generate concordances for any selected word, which can be presented with either a small (e.g. 10) or larger (e.g. 50) number of words either side and ordered in a myriad of different ways to support the exploration. The software can also generate a random selection of concordance lines, which is helpful for providing examples to readers.

This analysis yielded a number of findings related to both consistency and discursive shifts. First, it highlighted the consistency with which NAPLAN tests are connected in the print media to the myschool.edu.au website, where test results are displayed and comparisons between schools are enabled. Second, it highlighted the sustained strength of effectiveness and improvement discourses in Australian education policy over the decade under examination, and the role played by NAPLAN in this. Third, it highlighted an increasing association of standardised test performance and school funding in the public discussion of education policy in Australia, of which there was little evidence in the years pre-dating national testing. Finally, it highlighted the shifting nature of critique of the national testing regime, initially the province of teachers' unions and a small group of academics, but later a more mainstream concern.

Knowledge claims

Given the 'census' nature of this dataset, in that it included all articles published over an extended period that reported on NAPLAN, it was possible with this study to draw some large-scale conclusions about discourses of NAPLAN as reflected in the Australian print media. Observations about discourses of educational effectiveness and improvement, for example, could not be extrapolated from this analysis (in which they are intrinsically connected to discussions of NAPLAN) to more general contexts; however, this analysis could provide a starting point for comparisons in subsequent research. While expansive claims can be made from this research with reference to the 'aboutness' of coverage

of NAPLAN over this time frame, which in turn might raise questions more broadly about public representations of education policy, these knowledge claims are limited necessarily to the focus and scope of the study itself.

A word on ethics and quality in media analysis

While ethical research practice in this kind of text-based research is different to research with human participants, it is nevertheless important to think about ethical practice as a key aspect of good-quality media-based research. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discuss at length the relationship between issues of trustworthiness and ethics in good-quality research, arguing that research lacking in trustworthiness cannot be regarded as ethical, or indeed, 'quality' work. They note the importance of transparency, for example, through the provision of an 'audit trail', where the researcher's decision-making and reasoning are made clear to their reader. The purpose of this kind of transparency is not to make the research replicable, but to provide a very clear indication to the reader of the parameters employed and how the conclusions were reached. As with all qualitative research, the findings are a product of the data, the conceptual tools used and the researcher themselves. It is incumbent upon us, even when the data sources we use are publicly available, to act ethically and transparently at each step in the selection and analysis of our sources. Ethical practice in media research relates to not 'cherry-picking' sources, for example, but rather establishing parameters for data collection based on the research questions established and then ensuring that all eligible sources (or a genuinely random selection of those sources) are included. Making sure that the knowledge claims we make out of our research correspond with and do not transcend the boundaries of the study is another strategy to ensure trustworthy and ethical research. Giving account of our decisions and our analysis to a co-researcher or critical friend is another strategy that can be used to maximise trustworthiness in research.

Conclusion

Given the complex relationship between education policy and the mainstream media, media analysis can be a powerful tool for education policy researchers. This chapter has attempted to give a sense of the many diverse approaches to media analysis and some of the affordances and challenges of different approaches. While the discussion within this chapter has been largely confined to the mainstream print media, many of the approaches could be and have been applied to texts generated via social media, and/or transcripts of audio-visual media. While it has surveyed in-depth only a small selection of these approaches, hopefully it has provided some insights into the power and utility of media analysis for educational policy researchers, some encouragement to learn more, and some potential pathways for further reading.

Note

1 The Minister's Media Centre is connected to the Commonwealth Department of Education website and thus the URL changes depending on the nomenclature of the Department. At the time of writing, it is https://ministers.education.gov.au

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7

SITES OF PROMOTION

Analysing prospectuses, websites and experiential marketing

Sue Saltmarsh

Introduction: promotional texts and education markets

Promotional texts used by educational organisations take a wide variety of forms and have a range of purposes, functions and audiences. This chapter is concerned with three types of promotional texts – prospectuses, websites and experiential marketing, examples of which may be found across educational sectors and levels. In what Nikolas Rose refers to as 'the public habitat of images' (1999, p. 86), there are numerous examples of advertisements and notices on shopfronts, school gates and billboards, in brochures and magazines, and in the glossy prospectuses circulated to the parents of prospective students. In addition to print-based promotions, websites are an increasingly prominent form of promotional text, typically used by educational institutions as a means of communication with students, parents and stakeholders. Many schools and universities also use websites to promote their organisation's brand, networks, achievements and facilities, reiterate nationalist and colonialist narratives and 'produce uniformly positive expectations' (Stein, 2018, p. 461) among prospective students. Websites may also provide information about educational, sporting and other opportunities available to current and/or prospective students and their families (Drew, 2013; Thornton & Shannon, 2013). In addition, experiential marketing in the form of 'open days', campus tours, and themed events may be used to create emotionally satisfying brand experiences and to cultivate a sense of loyalty and connection with prospective students and families.

In preparation for analysing such texts, it is worth considering their emergence in recent decades as an object of study and ways that such a contextualisation might inform contemporary and future approaches to such analyses.

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Following on from this, it may also be helpful to draw some initial distinctions, the first of which concerns ways that specific disciplinary fields, their substantive concerns and philosophical orientations might shape research approaches to the topic of promotional texts. A second set of distinctions pertains to the types and functions of promotional texts, and the significance of these to methodological and analytic approaches that inform scholarship in this area of study. The first section of this chapter attends to these questions, before moving on in subsequent sections to discuss practical steps for undertaking research on educational promotions, and provide examples of approaches taken in my own and others' research in this area of study.

Promotional texts as an object of study

While a detailed genealogy is beyond the scope of this chapter, it is worth noting that the promotion of educational institutions has a long history, most often associated with the elite schools in the UK and Europe. A number of these were established in the Middle Ages, with centuries-old traditions of recruitment reliant on school reputation, enhanced and promoted by systems of patronage, family connections, social status and political influence. By the 18th and 19th centuries, scholarships and competitive examinations became additional tools for recruitment of students, in light of increasing demand from newly prosperous and aspirational classes eager for their sons to gain social and economic advancement through access to elite schools and their social networks (Leinster-Mackay, 2021). In addition, complex iconographic webs of what Synott and Symes (1995) refer to as the 'symbolic architecture' of schooling have evolved in such institutions. This symbolic architecture, consisting of uniforms, mottoes, badges, logos, pledges, slogans and other signifying texts and practices, functions as a means of inculcating students with the school's ethos, elite status and prestige and promoting the school abroad as offering 'a revered array of social, cultural and symbolic capital that can potentially be invested in any nation state and in relation to certain fractions of any state nobility' (Kenway & Koh, 2013, p. 287). Particularly in the case of schools cloned from or modelled on the British Public Schools that emerged in other parts of the world, recruitment of new students has increasingly relied on promotion of the schools' histories, traditions and ethos, typically represented as cultivating a particular type of masculine subject modelled on the English ruling class. This has often included 'an intense focus on competitive team sports, the self-conscious promotion of school heritage traditions, and the enlistment of older students in the discipline and pastoral care of younger students' (Proctor, 2011, p. 844).

Such practices furnish the backdrop to scholarly concerns in more recent times about the ways that the promotion of schools and universities function to privilege notions of elitism, choice and meritocracy in a highly competitive

and commodified educational landscape. By the latter decades of the 20th century, education had also become increasingly subject to global and national market forces, in which elite private sector schools maintain a high degree of desirability (Kenway et al., 2017; Kenway & McCarthy, 2016). Scholars concerned with neoliberal policy reforms that have intensified privatisation, corporatisation and commodification of educational institutions in recent decades have perhaps unsurprisingly seen promotional and advertising texts as indicative of the evolution of education from a transformational process to commercial product. It is this relationship that makes the study of promotional texts a project of interest for critical education policy scholars. These moves toward the marketisation of education have been seen as 'implicated in the promotion of elitism and exclusivity' (Drew, 2013, p. 175), with the promotional activities of elite institutions in particular being understood as a means of 'selling' the choice of school or university in order to secure social advancement and academically and financially successful futures (see, e.g. Kenway et al., 1993; Kenway & Fitzclarence, 1998; Symes, 1996, 1998; Symes & Hopkins, 1994; Drew, 2013; Pini et al., 2016). Coming from fields such as policy studies and sociology of education, these scholars have raised concerns about the ways that schools and universities are complicit in reconfiguring education in economic terms, in the process constructing the purposes and value of education as largely concerned with individual advantage rather than collective good.

However, scholarship in this field is not restricted to critiques of the promotional texts and practices of elite institutions. Indeed, the policy reforms described earlier have also catalysed forms of 'edu-capitalism' (Blackmore, 2014) across a variety of schools and universities keen to promote themselves in ways that are distinct from their competitors in the education market. This requires more than 'promoting perceived qualities of the educational goods and services on offer' (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017, p. 770) but also constructing institutional identities and reputations in ways that resonate with the perceived values and desires of their preferred consumers. Expensive looking, glossy school prospectuses can be seen, in other words, 'as strategic texts that idealise and commodify gendered subjectivities that are likely to appeal to the perceived clientele of a particular school' (Wardman et al., 2013, p. 284). Prospectuses can be distributed in a variety of ways, and are typically provided to parents who make inquiries about enrolments, or displayed and distributed at school marketing events, and these documents have become a tangible tool not only for enticing new enrolments but also for building brand recognition among particular types of desired clientele. As research on the marketing practices of charter schools in the United States shows, 'these schools are not necessarily competing against all other schools to attract potential students. Instead, these charter schools are competing against smaller *subsets* of schools for *particular* students' (Wilson & Carlsen, 2016). In doing so, their

promotions not only respond to competition and market demand but also play a part in shaping consumer preferences and ideas about the purposes and value of education.

Studies of issues such as those described earlier are largely concerned with the critical analysis of promotional texts, as distinct from research conducted within disciplines such as marketing, educational economics, management and consumer psychology. The latter fields tend to have greater interest in exploring the ways that promotional texts can be used to advantage by educational institutions. Introducing new products, services, facilities, activities or programmes, communicating effectively with current or prospective consumers (typically students and/or parents), impression management, maintaining loyalty within their historical, contemporary and anticipated consumer base, and building brand identity and recognition in the broader community are all examples of the ways that promotional texts may be put to use. In the case of online promotional texts, disciplinary fields interested in website evaluation – that is, assessing a site's functionality, usability, 'interactivity, hypertextuality and multimediality' (Brügger, 2010, p. 5) – may also be particularly concerned with indicators of marketing effectiveness, such as website traffic, online queries generated via the site, user engagement with the site and any other cross-platform affiliated sites and other types of data (see, e.g. Brügger, 2010; Madlenák et al., 2015; Negoita et al., 2019; Peruta & Shields, 2018).

Findings in these disciplines may be used to inform educational organisations about how to develop and improve their promotional approaches for maximum advantage and benefit to the organisation (Peruta & Shields, 2018) or to inform fields concerned with technological advances, online trends and marketing strategies more broadly. Similarly, some education and educational technology scholars are also interested in ways that school or university websites might be used for promotional as well as other educational and relational purposes:

> The school website can provide a platform for engaging with all stakeholders and for promoting and showcasing the school. The website can facilitate communication, the exchange of information and ideas, and the sharing and creation of knowledge. More importantly, the school website can facilitate collaborative practices, and enhance learning and teaching experiences and outcomes.
>
> *(Taddeo & Barnes, 2016, p. 433)*

The variety of uses to which school or university websites might be put is indicative of the increasingly ubiquitous accessing of organisational representatives, products and services online, as well as of research concerned with facilitating these activities. This necessarily means that school and

university websites have multiple functions beyond advertising and promotion, a point which is acknowledged here. Importantly, however, websites remain nonetheless an important part of prospective students' search processes (Saichaie & Morphew, 2014) and that of parents navigating school choice options on behalf of their children. Our interest in this chapter, though, pertains mainly to critical examination of these kinds of texts and their discursive functions, rather than to the ways in which they might be enhanced or utilised.

The third type of promotion considered here is that of experiential marketing, which also emerged as an object of scholarly interest in the latter decades of the 20th century (see Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982; Schmidtt, 1999). Distinct from print or online forms of texts, experiential marketing or 'interactive brand experiences' (Smilansky, 2017) rely less on didactic forms of messaging than on providing opportunities for prospective clients or customers to voluntarily, purposefully and selectively engage and interact firsthand with the organisation and its people, facilities and the products and services on offer. Proponents of experiential marketing of schools and universities (for a prominent Australian example, see Vining, 2006) contend that sensory experiences provided by events, such as campus open days, career exhibitions and school marketing expos, not only afford prospective clients the opportunity to explore and see for themselves what a campus, the opportunities it offers and the people who study and work there are like but also function to build emotional connections that can powerfully influence consumer decisions. Indeed, 'emotional brand building' through customers' interactive experiences is not particularly new, and some scholars provide early examples such as 19th-century fairs and shows that can also be seen as early forms of experiential marketing (Madhvapaty & Rajesh, 2019). However, in contemporary times, parents and students are more accustomed to anonymously browsing online, often from a considerable distance. For these prospective clientele or education 'consumers', the interactive embodied experiences offered by experiential marketing differ markedly from the experience of online browsing. Some marketing experts refer to these types of experiential education marketing in terms of multi-sensory brand experiences, in which brand image is

> based on how customers perceive and experience service and the process in reality. The customer's feelings and thoughts about the service, including both goods- and service components, as well as other elements, contribute to an image in the customer's mind that is synonymous with the brand.
>
> *(Hultén, 2011, p. 256)*

These promotions can be highly persuasive, particularly those in which consumers encounter organisational cultures and service experiences that resonate

with their own values and aspirations. Through sensory experience, prospective clientele are able to engage with the relational, material and informational dimensions of the educational organisation and brand under consideration.

In the following section, this chapter turns to a consideration of analysing the three types of promotional texts introduced here – prospectuses, websites and experiential marketing, from the vantage point of sociologically oriented research concerned with critically appraising and understanding the discursive functions of these. Rather than directing readers toward specific methodological or theoretical approaches per se, the view taken here is that researchers may find it necessary to draw from a range of perspectives and disciplinary approaches in their analysis of promotional texts – a constellation of approaches, in other words, through which observations, queries and critiques might be helpfully illuminated.

Research approaches to analysing promotional texts: social semiotic, discourse analytic and ethnographic dialogues

As noted earlier, researchers interested in analysing these types of promotional texts and practices come from a variety of disciplinary backgrounds, and this in turn influences both their approaches to analysis and the topics that are typically of interest to them. In preparing to critically analyse any of the three types of promotions considered here, irrespective of modality, it is helpful for researchers to consider some key questions. For example:

- To whom is the promotion directed, and what are the tacit and normative assumptions about its target audiences, their perceived values and preferences?
- What are the promotion's explicit and implicit purposes, and how are these constructed and communicated?
- What are the design features of the promotion, and how do these potentially shape the ways that prospective consumers navigate the text and/or experience its use?
- What are the promotion's key claims, and what visual, intertextual and interdiscursive, rhetorical and/or embodied multi-sensory techniques does it use to construct and lend credibility to them?
- How does the promotion construct impressions about the organisation's history, reputation, aspirations, culture, students, staff and community?
- Are there problematic aspects of the promotions claims and messaging, and how do these function to construct, include/exclude and position different groups?
- Are there coherences or disjunctions between the visual, written or other elements of the text, and if so what are the functions of these?

Asking questions such as these directs attention away from taking promotions and their claims at face value, evaluating their efficacy or relying on them uncritically as sources of information. Instead, the emphasis is on asking how promotional texts function within a broader set of visual, symbolic, discursive and social practices and on querying assumptions, claims and power relations of which these may be part.

Critical analyses of this sort can be undertaken using a variety of methodological approaches and techniques. Social semiotics, discourse analysis and ethnography – each with their own epistemological genealogies and methods – are approaches used in studies concerned with educational promotions. Importantly, scholars increasingly utilise these research approaches in dialogue, recognising the value of interdisciplinarity and the need to expand conceptual and methodological repertoires, 'given the many changes related to space, time, mobility, and the multiplicity associated with contemporary times and theory' (Kenway, 2015, p. 37). In the case of social semiotics, which grew out of the field of linguistics and its interest in the communicative and symbolic functions of language and written texts, there is also interest in how ideas from linguistics can be used in relation to 'non-linguistic modes of communication' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 6). These may include visual, multimodal, spatial, performative or other types of representational and communicative texts. Social semiotics often pays particular attention to the conventions of visual representation, or 'the grammar of visual design' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), considering how the content and frequency of elements such as colour, light, composition, camera angle, modality and gaze 'work together to position the subject and viewer in particular ways' (Wardman et al., 2013, p. 285). For example, research on elite school prospectuses has shown how visual elements such as the depiction of student activities and interactions, school grounds and architectural features can be used to 'construct idealised images of masculine subjectivity through the juxtaposition of action and passivity; constructed and natural environments; and hyper-masculine adolescence and feminised childhoods' (Gottschall et al., 2010, p. 19).

Importantly though, social semiotics also 'relates symbolic processes to social conditions, economic realities and the politics of power play' (Symes, 1998, p. 135). Hence, this approach to analysis can be understood as 'an attempt to describe and understand how people produce and communicate meaning in specific social settings, be they settings such as the family or settings in which sign-making is well institutionalized and hemmed in by habits, conventions and rules' (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 266). Thus the content, representational and interactive elements of these texts have a social function as 'material rhetorics [that] serve to reinforce a school's ideology' (Symes, 1998, p. 45), narratives that emphasise aspects of organisational ethos, values and culture perceived as appealing to prospective clientele. My own work on

school promotions (Saltmarsh, 2008; Gottschall et al., 2010; Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017; Wardman et al., 2010) has drawn on these ideas to show how idealised versions of 'excellence, leadership and disciplinary environments are important educational "commodities" – promoted by schools as part of the "products" on offer, and important factors in school choice amongst parents' (Saltmarsh, 2008, p. 118). These rhetorical claims operate through written narratives, images and other visual elements. Together, they construct discourses of gender, privilege and power (to name but a few) in ways designed to both appeal to target audiences and reiterate organisational cultures and power relations for existing clientele.

Social semiotics is not restricted to use in analysing print-based promotional materials, however, and has also been used to understand other kinds of representational practices that feature in the marketing and impression management of educational institutions. As institutions have increasingly shifted toward branded promotions online, the social semiotics of multimodal texts (Cranny-Francis, 2005; Kress, 2010; Wong, 2019) have been used to explore the social and cultural dimensions of online promotions of schools and universities (Drew, 2013; Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017). Social semiotic analyses have shown, for example, how key features of online promotions, including 'action, movement, image, sound, and spoken and written text' (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017, p. 8), operate in conjunction with conventions of visual media production. For example, elements such as camera angle, and mode of address used when speakers talk and gesture directly to camera, function together in constructing idealised impressions of life on campus. They may simultaneously offer tacit and implied invitations to viewers/visitors of websites to imagine themselves enjoying the experiences presumably on offer. Through these kinds of texts, ubiquitous in website promotions schools and universities, 'discourses of educational consumption and participation are mapped onto student subjectivities via online . . . branding and promotions' (Gottschall & Saltmarsh, 2017, p. 2).

Approaches to discourse analysis, including multimodal discourse analysis (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; van Leeuwen, 2005), have also been used, sometimes in conjunction with social semiotics, to analyse promotional texts. While social semiotics takes a particular interest in representational texts and practices, discourse analysis is particularly useful for bringing these analyses of representational texts and their construction of subjective and ideological positionings into more extended dialogue with broader historical, sociocultural and political discourses. Discourse analysis has been used to show how, for example, images and visual rhetorics in the promotional texts of elite private schooling in Australia are embedded in long-standing discourses of educational consumption. In some cases, these discourses – derived from and reiterating religious iconography and narratives – may equate educational

consumption with divinity and divinely ordained entitlement of the ruling class, as well as notions of whiteness and its associated privilege and worth in colonialist society (Saltmarsh, 2005, 2007, 2008). With any of these methodological approaches, it is useful to bear in mind that contemporary advertising and promotional texts often occur across multiple sites, and operate in dialogue with other types of texts circulating in different forms. While, to some extent, specific types of texts may be closely linked to their intended function and use by audiences and consumers; in another sense, they can also be understood as part of what Colin Symes once referred to as a 'web of promotional textuality' (1996, p. 134). Thus, for example, online social media typically provides an interactive interface between education institutions, their past, current and prospective clientele and may cross-reference and augment information contained in other forms of promotional texts (Lund, 2019). Thus school or university websites that typically contain a range of information targeting current and prospective students, may also be supplemented by regular updates, announcements or discussions on dedicated group pages on other popular social media sites already in common use by the target group/s, and may reiterate or value add to information on institutional websites.

Similarly, organisational promotions may be encountered *in situ* across multiple sites, whether observed through signage and advertising around the perimeters of educational institutions (Symes, 2021), in public spaces such as train stations and shopping centres (Simpson, 2018) or through attendance and participation in the kinds of events, activities that comprise experiential marketing. Understanding the significance of on-campus events such as open days, which can form a crucial part of prospective students' and parents' decision-making process (Moogan et al., 2001), can be greatly enhanced through the use of ethnographic approaches that typically involve techniques such as observation, written or recorded field notes, and interviews. Increasingly, researchers have also engaged with concepts such as sensory or 'emplaced ethnography that attends to the question of experience by accounting for the relationships between bodies, minds and the materiality and sensoriality of the environment' (Pink, 2015, p. 28). These approaches can be a valuable means by which researchers can engage more directly with the embodied and multi-sensory aspects of research sites (Pink, 2011) such as experiential school and university promotions. These may include a variety of experiences ranging from the mundane such as market stalls and jumping castles, to the exotic such as reptile handling and camel rides, and that encourage 'the use of bodily feelings as a source of information' (Krishna & Schwarz, 2014, p. 159). Much research concerned explicitly with experiential marketing focuses on how to make such promotions more effective. However, some studies (Saltmarsh, 2016; Simpson, 2018) have used ethnographic methods to show how promotions of various kinds can continue to build organisational branding, engender

consumer loyalty or construct student and staff subjectivities well after the period of recruitment and enrolment.

For example, ethnographic research – using techniques such as attending sites and events, observing activities and practices in situ, making written and other forms of recorded field notes, and interviewing attendees, participants and stakeholders – can be used to capture voices and perspectives beyond the confines of promotional texts. For example, ethnographies have shown how the festive atmospheres created by playful, carnivalesque activities typically used in campus-based mental-health promotions play a part in conscripting mental health discourse 'into the consumerist agenda of the enterprise university . . . with commercial imperatives to offer consumers a positive student experience' (Saltmarsh, 2016, p. 176; see also Marginson & Considine, 2000). By observing public displays and market stalls, attending workshops and keeping records of their own interactions during such events, researchers are able to provide observational accounts of how such promotions are experienced. Other ethnographic research has shown how promotions such as student discounts and loyalty programmes offered by retailers and local service providers 'assist in the creation of studenthood' (Simpson, 2018, p. 25) that is itself an aspect of educational consumption. However, interdiscursivity remains a critical factor in the analysis of these kinds of promotional events. Far from being solely about the institution itself, such promotions not only constitute what Hultén refers to as a 'multi-sensory brand experience' (2011) but also function to 'provide a discursive articulation of their policy and economic contexts' (Symes, 2021, p. 61). For researchers interested in analysing these forms of organisational promotions, then, it is not enough to document and describe their own observations or the experiences of participants. What is needed instead are ways of bringing these embodied and emplaced experiences into dialogue with both their signifying practices and their discursive functions and broader contexts.

In my own work, I have been interested in exploring these kinds of discursive articulations, particularly in climates where education has been commodified, and subsequently constructed and perceived as a means of securing intergenerational 'positional advantage' (Hirsch, 1976). For example, by examining visual rhetorics and written narratives in elite school prospectuses, together with school histories and the histories of elite education in colonialist contexts, I have shown how contemporary promotional practices are an extension of much broader, long-standing discursive assumptions and practices. This typically involves selecting for theoretical analysis a range of texts of relevance to an organisation's history, traditions and cultural practices. These may include books tracing the organisation's beginnings, influential leaders and changes over time; archival documents such as school records and correspondence between parties; policy documents pertaining to matters such as

discipline and behaviour management; marketing and promotional materials such as brochures, prospectuses, signage, banners and advertisements (Symes, 2021); and examples of everyday communication with parents, communities and stakeholders such as newsletters, signage and websites.

By bringing social semiotic analysis of these kinds of texts into dialogue with policy and educational discourse – drawing on sources such as organisational and government policy documents, political commentary, media releases and public debates that appear in sites such as news reports, public statements by key stakeholders and in social media – it is possible to identify the complex co-implication of text and discursive practice. My work on educational promotions has made use of these dialogues to show how interdiscursive dialogue between notions of choice, competitive advantage and education policy drivers makes its way into the rhetorical claims and visual representations of promotional materials, which in turn play a part in constructing social expectations, practices and norms. In the case of educational promotions, often these interdiscursive dialogues have been shown to privilege particular social groups already favourably positioned with education markets, and to reiterate masculinist and patriarchal discourses of elitism, power and privilege (Drew, 2013; Gottschall et al., 2010; Saltmarsh, 2008). In other words, the semiotic and discursive functions of educational promotional texts operate in conjunction with everyday educational values, beliefs and practices. Importantly, representational practices and the educational discourses are not restricted to local or national contexts. Scholars interested in the globalisation of elite education (Kenway et al., 1993, 2017; Kenway & Fahey, 2014; Kenway & McCarthy, 2016), for instance, have unpacked in detail the ways that discourses of nationalism and colonial power circulate as a kind of currency in the promotion and provision of elite education in countries around the world. These discourses in turn have implications for the promotional practices and representational strategies that schools and universities employ, in terms of messaging, modalities and the construction of institutional identities considered to place them most advantageously for attracting new clients and maintaining brand recognition in the competitive global education market.

Conclusion

This chapter is informed by a range of approaches to analysing promotional texts of schools and universities, and makes distinctions between fields that are interested in the ways that promotional texts can be used to advantage by organisations, and fields that are interested in how promotional texts construct and position consumers and their educational decision-making. This chapter highlights approaches from social semiotics, discourse analysis and ethnography, suggesting that these can be effectively brought into dialogue in order to capture the nuanced intersections of promotional texts, discursive practices

and broader social contexts. The research literature in this field continues to evolve alongside new marketing modalities and changing forms of consumer interactions with marketing texts and experiences, as well as with changing policy cultures and the public expectations to which they give rise. This is a dynamic area of study, and one that challenges researchers to be agile in their conceptual and methodological approaches.

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8

ONLINE NETWORKS AND EDUCATION POLICY SOCIOLOGY

Naomi Barnes and Anna Hogan

Introduction

The word *network* has become increasingly used as a metaphor to explain how information and influence flow around the globe (Robinson, 2021). While networks of influence are as old as political power, network and networking metaphors have become central to interrogating influence on policy and political rhetoric. In this chapter, we describe a methodology of policy analysis that utilises digital networks in the way a historian, political scientist or sociologist might utilise an archive. We describe the types of digital data we have used and how we have made sense of it. Our techniques and datasets might be new, but our purpose is bounded by the field of policy analysis that defines policy as something that is both deliberated on and advocated for as well as implemented and enacted. Policy objects are simply the result of an ecosystem of power and influence over decision-making.

It has long been accepted that public policy is the 'result of an interaction process between many actors of whom only a few are government bodies' and that the study of policy networks is concerned with 'describing and analysing the setting in which policy develops and is implemented' (Klijn et al., 1995, p. 439). Political science has also long understood that the point of such a study is to understand that when a policymaker develops objects and systems of governance, they inevitably take elements of that network into the design (Klijn et al., 1995). Critical policy analysis (Ball, 2012) is interested in how the ideologies of these network actors affect how the policies and processes develop due to the influence of the policymaker's ecosystem. How policy rhetorics are mobilised (Lewis, 2020) by the influence of global institutions, like the OECD, and more recently within a globalised digital ecosystem (Williamson, 2021),

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has been the focus of educational policy researchers interested in transnational policy networks over the last decade. It is alongside this latter conceptualisation of the policy analysis field that our methodologies discursively sit.

The reason we have written a chapter together is because we want to illustrate how two different policy and politics of education scholars have used similar techniques and datasets but have interpreted them through two different sociological lenses. Naomi is a digital sociologist who is interested in how the internet as a social structure shapes educational practices, including the development of educational policy. In other words, Naomi is concerned with digital rhetoric. Anna, on the other hand, is a more 'traditional' policy sociologist who uses the internet as a tool of inquiry. For Anna, websites, blogs and social media function as sites for data collection and analysis. In other words, Anna is concerned with digital methods.

First, Naomi describes a digital rhetoric approach that uses digital tools to build and analyse policy networks by harnessing key textual features within online texts, including hashtags and URLs. Second, Anna describes a network ethnography approach that uses both online and more 'traditional' methods for data collection. Both approaches seek to understand education policy networks and how policy actors work within networks to reconfigure policy fields. Both approaches will include a brief overview of method and resulting research outcomes, as well as some practical steps to follow these methodological approaches. We end this chapter with a discussion that responds to some of the common critiques leveraged at digital methods to argue that online network analysis is a dynamic, robust and increasingly necessary way to understand the complexity of education policy.

Digital research and social theory

The techniques that are applied to digital data, some of which we explain below, are not new but being adapted to incorporate digital data. Likewise, the theoretical frameworks that explain the phenomena observed are also being adapted to account for how people interact in a world that uses the internet, what that means for sociology, and in our studies, what that means for policy sociology in education.

Because the internet is a communication tool and the data it contains are its grammar, theoretical frameworks that use rhetoric have proved most useful. For example, Anna has found Ball's policy toolbox or Bacchi's *What's the Problem Represented* (WPR) approaches consistently useful for incorporating digital data into policy research. However, often an internet researcher will also experiment with multiple theoretical frameworks until finding one that best frames the explanation of their social observations. For example, Naomi has used *discursive struggle*, a concept well established in Bourdieu's field theory, to explain how two traditions of literacy knowledge have struggled for field

dominance in early reading research and teaching. However, when finding a way to explain what she has observed in the viral phenomenon of CRT outlined below, Naomi has found that a combination of Foucauldian discursive analysis in his later works on neoliberalism and Hayek's *Road to Serfdom* is most valuable in framing explanations of global misinformation.

Naomi has previously written on the selection of theoretical frameworks in digital research (see Barnes, 2020), but in summary, digital researchers should have a disposition that considers the ethical ramifications of social media data representation, resists nodocentrism, works with already-available data and network representations, and subjects those representations of the social to iterative critical analyses, methodological explorations and theoretical pressures. In other words, in a data environment that is still a youngster, that is ever changing and exponentially powerful, the digital researcher must have an ethical disposition that embraces speculation, is knowledgeable of theory, experimental in methodology and curious about contextualising findings within a hybrid (online and offline) social environment.

Before describing the difference between Naomi and Anna's approaches, it is necessary to spend some time discussing the ethics of online research and describe the types of digital data we both use to develop our interpretations and theories of educational policy and politics.

Ethics of online research

A rarely discussed point to dissect when utilising digital research methods is the application of procedural ethics. Collecting and analysing large amounts of geographically disparate data generated by countless individuals brings challenges with regard to informed consent, ongoing support of participants, or even the jurisdictional relevance of ethical approval that may have been granted. As Rogers (2013, p. 203) observes, the internet 'continues to pose problems for the analysis of content in that it disappoints those in search of traditional markers of quality and an underlying interpretative apparatus' and that 'this state of affairs makes many researchers denounce the web as source'. However, the growing use of digital methods has created a groundswell of understanding that rich, meaningful data can be collected from the internet. Still, it is worth considering the sources of data, for example, public spaces where individuals and organisations interacting with these 'public' platforms would have little expectation of privacy, or have at least accepted user agreements to guarantee this. As Madge (2007) asserts, there is a consensus about a difference between the ethics of accessing private forums (e.g. closed chatrooms and email correspondence) and the ethics of accessing open-access forums (e.g. bulletin boards, blogs and Twitter), in that 'the greater the acknowledged publicity of the venue, the less obligation there may be to protect individual privacy and the right to informed consent' (p. 659). However, it is still necessary to consider how the use of

verbatim quotes (taken from the likes of blogs or Twitter) has the potential to be traced to the discussion forum archives from which they originated, and it is likely that they will be able to be linked to the individual's identity. In facing these ethical challenges, a researcher must engage their own reflexivity, where they work to establish critically the extent to which their new methods relate to traditional concerns (Whiteman, 2012). As Whiteman (2012) advocates, the ability to critically engage with the research process is a key characteristic of an ideal researcher. Indeed, Markham (2006, p. 39) suggests:

> Online or off, an ethical researcher is one who is prepared, reflexive, flexible, adaptive and honest. Methods are not simply applied out of habit, but derived through constant, critical reflection on the goals of research and the research questions; sensitively adapted to the specificities of the context.

As such, a researcher employing digital methods must take great care to apply and adapt procedural ethics for the online environment (see also Avelar et al., 2021, for a more extensive discussion of the ethical 'balancing act' required when employing digital methods like network ethnography). Different types of data will bring different ethical challenges along with it, so it is useful to categorise types of data to simplify discussions.

Types of data

Latzko-Toth et al. (2017) describe four different categories of digital data: big, small, thick and lively. While the categories are dynamic and constantly changing and morphing, these categories are a useful place to start a digital research journey.

Big data is about investigating clusters and large-scale trends that require machine coding. In other words, the dataset is so large that the use of machines is seen to be more practical than qualitative analysis and coding. It is common practice for big data researchers to use machines to pinpoint clusters for forensic qualitative analysis. Big data research usually requires a waiver of consent when applying for institutional ethics approval. This is because it is impracticable to ask for the consent from the authors of thousands to millions of social media posts. It is important, however, that a researcher intent on big data research does not assume that public broadcast means the data is ethically available without institutional clearance. Users are quite aware that third parties will purchase their data and use it for marketing purposes. They are less aware that their data might be collected for social and policy research purposes. Here is a typical waiver of consent statement Naomi uses in her ethics applications:

> While the API terms and conditions are clear about the use of social media data for research, Fiesler and Proferes (2018) found that while the Twitter

users they canvassed were not aware that their tweets could be used for research under the Twitter API, and expressed beliefs that researchers should not use their tweets without permission, these attitudes were contextually dependent on the identity of the researcher and the nature of the research.

Small data is investigations of small collections of data points that can be analysed via human coding. In other words, the data gathered is small enough for a practicable qualitative analysis of any tradition, whether critical discourse analysis, thematic analysis, or simple mixed method analysis. This method can also be conducted with a waiver of consent to begin research, with the possibility of consent gained at point of publication, as per the advice of the Association of Internet Researchers (Markham & Buchanan, 2012). Naomi has previously written on the ethical use of ancillary, hyperlinked social media data to aid analysis (Barnes et al., 2015), arguing that social media broadcasts should not be directly quoted in publications even with informed consent due to the possibility of breached anonymity via search engines. This is further complicated by the potential for harm an identified social media account poses to the network of users that are not part of the initial consent protocol. Therefore, it is impracticable and potentially still does not meet ethical benchmarks to gain full consent before canvassing tweets as one individual Twitter user cannot provide consent for their associated network.

Due to the complexities of consent in big and small data research, if consent is never gained, it is advisable that research findings should mainly be presented in aggregate, non-identifiable format (social network analysis, argumentation maps, location mapping, quantity charts) to protect the identity of the authors of social media posts and their communities.

Thick data comprises ethnographic, detailed and dense descriptions of the intersection between the digital and social. In other words, the data is collected from both online and offline sources that are all connected in some way. Data collection might include both small data and semi-structured interviews and focus groups. Ethical consideration of thick internet data is similar to that of small data, combined with traditional ethical protocols for qualitative research, like interviews.

Lively data is dynamic, constantly being reorganised, concerned with how influential digital environments and texts are on everyday behaviours, beliefs and decisions. This type of data is usually gathered ethnographically or autoethnographically in response to the situation under investigation. The purpose is to build an assemblage of objects and how they interact with and are shaped by digital objects. Objects can be material like tweets, stories and interviews, or made material through targeting and interpreting things like emotions, reactions and reasonings. For example, researchers have investigated fitness tracking platforms, where users share, follow and comment on physical activity (Lupton, 2018). In education, there is an emerging field of research that

considers biometrics in schooling, particularly through AI-assisted 'personalised learning' for students (Regan & Jesse, 2019) and online exam proctoring (Selwyn et al., 2021).

In the use of lively data, the protocols for small and big data are applicable. Furthermore, this type of data also requires a research collective, group or institution to consider the well-being of the researchers themselves. As the field develops within education, it is also important to consider the vulnerability of the researchers. It is very important for digital researchers to have a support system around them. Online research can lead to exposure to ideas that someone might not have been exposed to in a traditional research career. Indeed, some academics have chosen to not engage with social media research because their social identity exposes them to online violence. For example, Barlow and Awan (2016) reported on how the hate speech directed at academics from minority groups disseminating their research on social media has led to the silencing of difficult and contentious research topics. Furthermore, Pitcan et al. (2018) reported that aspirational researchers from minority groups, performing an awareness of the dangers of an online presentation of their work, may lead to viral media coverage their employers hope to avoid. As such, they present themselves online as 'vanilla' or inoffensive, in order not to offend their employers' moral sensibilities. Power in digital environments may be flattened in many ways, but the same issues of equality that affect society offline are well established online. When engaging with difficult education topics online, it is important to look after your well-being.

In what follows, we describe how we each use the different types of digital data to explain phenomena in educational policy and politics.

Naomi's digital rhetoric approach

Digital rhetoric acknowledges that traditional approaches to communication have been joined by online communication systems such as social media, educational technologies, ministerial websites, education media and other digital environments linked to, but separate from, structures of governance (Andersen & Pors, 2021). Each of these digital tools brings its own rhetorical devices. For example, the education system has vast chains of interweaving and interlocking actors, technologies and meanings which affect and shape each system in different ways. By adding in digital spaces, education must incorporate a communications system designed to efficiently move information around to as many interlocutors as possible from multiple, non-education, fields that do not use the same language systems as education. For example, the publicness of education communication means that readers interested in economics, politics, law, science, religion and education have an interpretive role in education policy. Furthermore, each person has a different background that might use a different language of communication (Luhmann, 1995): an economist

might interpret through money; a politician might use the language of power; a lawyer or someone interested in justice might comprehend through ideas associated with rights and responsibilities; science might interpret through a search for truth; the media might be interested in definitions associated with information; and for education, being transdisciplinary, multilevel and connected with parents and carers, this development of understanding becomes even more complex. This means that even though two interlocutors might be using the same words, those words most likely have different meanings within their context (see Barnes et al., 2022, for a more in-depth analysis). Education communication on the internet now needs to navigate potential misinterpretations of meaning, depending on which system is reading, lobbying for, developing or enacting a policy.

The tools these systems use to communicate with each other, and the public (parents, carers and community), also include algorithms. Unlocking their effect on educational policy development is the purpose of my digital sociology approach.

The use of digital rhetoric for analysing political discourse was deeply interrogated by Losh (2009), who considered how online platforms play a role in how information moves between interlocutors. Losh suggests that there are four types of digital rhetoric. The first relates to the genres of communication that have emerged in everyday discourse, or the communication techniques that are considered 'normal' for users of Facebook, Twitter or one of the other commonly used digital platforms. Each platform has a particular style and can produce certain norms of communication as simple as the use of hashtags or as complicated as debate about echo chambers. Second, digital rhetoric refers to the political messaging which online platforms and websites represent and record and how that messaging is distributed among networks. For example, the Australian MySchool website that was developed as a transparency tool to assist families use the school choice mechanism has been shown to produce and reproduce symbolic and concrete consequences of the policy rhetoric (Hardy & Boyle, 2011). Third, digital rhetoric refers to the scholarly discipline of analysing the computer-generated rhetoric and media. Fourth, digital rhetoric refers to the mathematical theories of communication that underlie any linguistic exchange on the 'public' facing platforms. This includes analysis of social networks and engagement using metadata but also considers the algorithmic affect of such exchanges (Bucher, 2017) and the role of data analytics in how these algorithms learn (Gulson & Sellar, 2019). Essentially digital rhetoric considers how the mechanisms of the internet work to limit how the information in a user's information ecosystem moves. When a policy actor wishes to influence, then knowledge of how algorithms deliver that information becomes a rhetorical tool of influence. As education is a political field, it is then important to consider the role of digital rhetoric in how policy is developed and enacted.

I bring digital rhetoric together with transnational rhetoric. These rhetorical fields work well together because the techniques of political influence using the internet are shared across transnational networks for adaptation by individual nations. Transnational rhetoric considers the movement of texts and ideas through how 'policy rhetorics are linked – how they are disseminated, received, rewritten and put into action – in unexpected ways' (Dingo, 2012, p. 7). In particular, transnational rhetorics consider how ideas become mainstreamed and in that mainstreaming how they change meaning as they encounter different local and global contexts, international agreements, '(neo) colonial power structures, changing local cultural practices, political unrest, and environmental degradation' (Dingo, 2012, p. 2). Transnational network rhetorics consider transnational commonplaces – or ideas which feature in policies around the world – and interrogate their meaning and effect on the place those policies are implemented and enacted. This is an enormous project to which my research is a small contribution.

A recent research question that I have been considering with research partners Keith Heggart, Steven Kolber, Cameron Malcher and Timothy Mahoney is: *How did public opinion about critical race theory in the United States of America come to influence the review of the Australian National Curriculum in 2021?* Using transnational rhetorical approaches, we have considered the dynamics of information movement between US education policies banning CRT in schools and the rejecting of CRT by the Australian Senate in June 2021. Here are some examples of digital data in this broader project.

Example of Naomi's analysis of digital rhetoric

To return to the above definitions of types of data, the types of digital data used for the transnational movement of CRT rhetoric are *big*, *small* and *lively*. For example, Figure 8.1 is a representation of a dataset of over two million pieces of data from Wikipedia, Open Alex (which is an academic publication database), and the social media sites Reddit, YouTube and Twitter. The types of data ranged from the edit of a tiny spelling mistake by an editing bot on Wikipedia to a 350-page book written by an academic researcher. Knowing how to start analysing such a huge amount of data requires temporal and topic modelling skills. I usually begin with a temporal analysis or a look at the data over a period of time, because reading through every piece of data to explore possible themes is not a practical approach. A temporal analysis will usually reveal an interesting slice in time to begin. Figure 8.1[1] shows the amount of publication and posting of online data between October 1, 2020, and October 31, 2021.

Due to the extreme rise in engagement with CRT in June 2021, we decided to extract the June data for each platform and conduct some social network analysis (SNA) and topic modelling to understand the dynamics and semantics

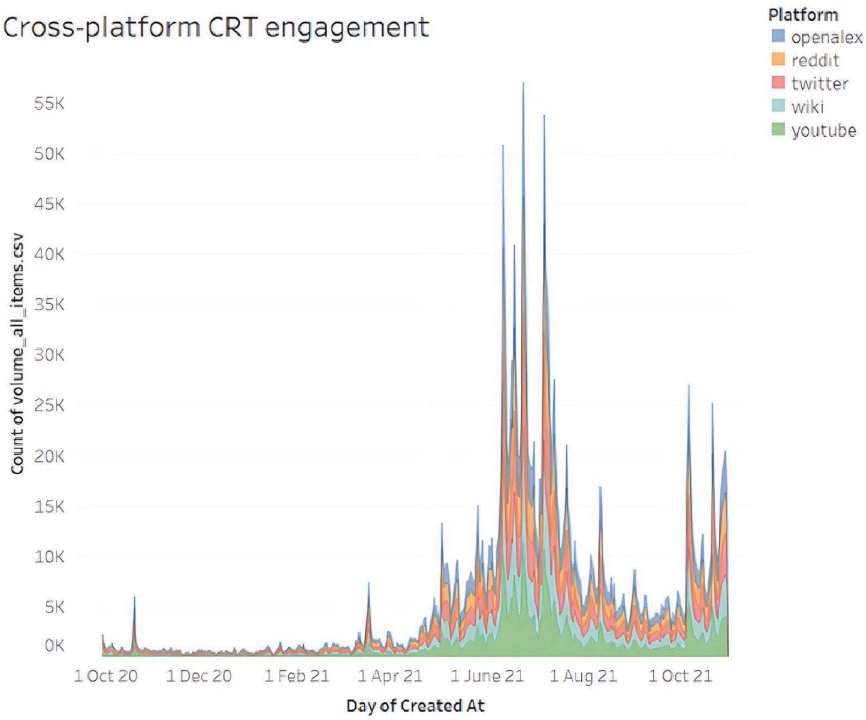

FIGURE 8.1 Critical race theory cross-platform posting

of the online conversations. Figure 8.2 shows an SNA of the Twitter data but to better understand the dynamics of the Twitter engagement, I needed to take a *small data* approach.

I conducted a forensic investigation into the nature of the most dynamic accounts in the SNA and grouped them into accounts which were supportive of the academic definition of CRT (blue) and accounts (nodes), which were engaged in anti-CRT campaigning (red). When analysing a social network, the lines (edges) indicate who the account is talking to (clockwise). If an account has a daisy shape around it, that account is both talking about CRT and to other accounts interested in CRT. If a line is coloured blue or red, it means that there is direct engagement between the connected nodes. The grey nodes have not been coded. What I gathered from the dynamics of this data is that the red accounts are mainly broadcasting or engaging with a small group. The blue accounts are broadcasting and engaging with each other. Therefore, I can hypothesise that Twitter users who are supportive of the academic definition of CRT are more likely to take on a responsive approach to their audience. They are discussing the term, drawing in other accounts who support their point of view, strengthening their rhetorical position. Anti-CRT accounts, on

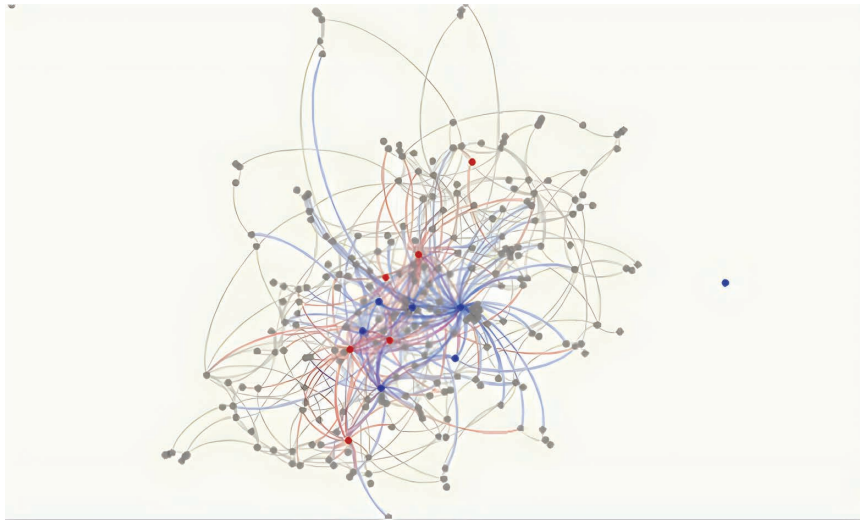

FIGURE 8.2 Critical race theory Twitter network

the other hand, are posting with an intention of disrupting their audience through writing something controversial to elicit a reaction. To test my small data hypothesis, I would need to strengthen the data set through discursive analysis of individual tweets and online materials they link to (images, gifs, memes, websites, etc.).

The way I use big and small data is intended to be abductive in its reasoning. These analytical techniques favour experimenting with visualisations and various ways of analysing the data to see what is going on in the data. I then form hypotheses as the basis of research questions for future inductive and deductive analysis framed by a relevant sociological theory. This approach to data is closely related to historical archive research. It begins with a sense that something is happening from long-term observation of a phenomenon, and a hypothesis is formed through systematically going through stacks of materials. It also feels like an autoethnography in that the phenomenon is more likely to be noted if the researcher is chronically online (like me). As the internet, and specifically social media, becomes more integral to people's lives, including emerging policy researchers, the insights gained into an online phenomenon will come increasingly from researchers who spend a lot of time 'in the field'. This latter point is why many digital researchers consider the liveliness of digital data.

The desire to have a multi-platform approach to the CRT analysis meant that I have also needed to engage with *lively data*. At the time of data collection, it was not possible to automatically extract data from TikTok, but as TikTok has become one of the most influential platforms of recent years,

I believed it was necessary to include this data. As I was unfamiliar with TikTok I hired a research assistant who was familiar with the platform to manually analyse TikToks that referred to both CRT and school in their keywords. Before developing their research protocol, I tested the requirements myself. I realised two things which would affect the overall research project. First, TikToks play continuously until a user moves to the next TikTok. The number of times someone views a TikTok trains the algorithm to send recommendations to a user's main viewing and discovery page (For You Page). I could not expect a research assistant to use their own account as they would need to watch a video several times to analyse it to the extent I required. Second, the first TikTok I trialled the questions with was racist. I had to ensure that there was adequate support for the research assistant when dealing with racist sentiments online. I informed them of the situation and gave them the option of not completing that task. In the end, we split the RA time between TikTok and reviewing the Wikipedia reference list for accuracy and representativeness.

This reflexive approach to the dynamics of social media websites that might not have been anticipated in project development needs to be accounted for, even if it is never reported on. Some researchers might create entire papers about their experiences with data collection, putting together methodological accounts of how their digital research changed them as researchers. I used this approach earlier in my career when analysing academic blogging (see Barnes, 2017) and now encourage early career researchers to do the same.

Anna's digital methods approach

Inspired by Ball and Junemann's (2012) methodological approach of 'network ethnography', I have been using digital methods for my entire research career (granted, it has not yet been a long one!). Often, these sit alongside more 'traditional' methods, such as document analysis, or semi-structured interviews, but even these tend to be carried out digitally. Documents are found online, downloaded, imported into NVivo and thematically analysed on my computer. Participants are emailed, sent digital consent forms and invited to a recorded video conference call. Rarely do I work with pen and paper. And rarely do I meet with interview participants face to face. The COVID-19 pandemic along with associated social distancing requirements and travel restrictions has made the virtual interview standard practice, but for far longer, researchers have discussed the potential benefits, for example, reducing one's carbon footprint (Versteijlen et al., 2017); alongside the relatively minor drawbacks, for example, the loss of some subtle body language cues (Farooq & De Villiers, 2017) of this approach. For me, a millennial, who completed a PhD in the mid-2010s, I have never considered my methodological approach 'cutting edge', but one of basic necessities. How else does one do research on a shoe-string budget that also seeks to trace contemporary policy processes that

stretch vertically and horizontally across the globe? Education stakeholders cannot be neatly summarised into a hierarchy stretching from a national state education department down to teachers and students in schools but are now considered to consist as a global 'heterarchy' or network of actors that bring together public, private and philanthropic interests (Ball & Junemann, 2012).

Much of my early research sought to investigate these new education policy networks, particularly the role of edu-businesses within them. Using the internet as my field site, I became a 'cyberflâneur' (Kenway & Bullen, 2003; Hogan, 2016b), wandering through the links of cyberspace, collecting information from websites, blogs and social media sites. My programme of research has included hashtag analysis on Twitter (Hogan, 2016b, 2018), case studies of edu-businesses using 'thick' data (Hogan, 2015, 2016a, 2016b; Hogan et al., 2016), examination of commercial testing programmes (Hogan, 2016a) and analysis of corporate blogs (Hogan, 2021). The particular digital method employed in each of these projects was on the basis of what would provide the best 'illuminative technique' (Ozga, 1987) to analyse the education policy or practice under investigation. Research questions have been very specific, for example, 'Who uses #OECDPISA on Twitter in the 48 hours after the release of PISA results?' And very broad, for example, 'How has Pearson become a globally influential edu-business?' The first question necessitated a short period of data collection: the setting up of Tweet capture using Twittonomy software, the plotting of networks using Gephi software, and the analysis of network clusters, through geolocation of Tweets and qualitative analysis of Tweets. The second question, on the other hand, shaped an entire PhD, and countless data points collected through various digital methods over a series of years. Thus, the most important step is ensuring that there is a suitable link between the research problem and the (digital) method utilised for investigation (see also Rizvi & Lingard, 2009, for a general discussion on this point).

Example of Anna's use of digital methods

To return to the definitions above about 'types' of data, my use of digital methods usually centres on the collection of 'small' or 'thick' data. For example, building on the research questions above, the data set collected to understand the initial uptake of PISA results was small. In the 48-hour period following the release of PISA results in 2015 and following #OECDPISA on Twitter, I collected 2,933 tweets. This set of tweets became a dataset for analysing who was interested in PISA, what organisations they represented and how they were utilising PISA data. Geolocation of these tweets provided a visual representation of the 'global education policy field' and network analysis indicated that various actors – including, the OECD, politicians, lobbyists and individual activists – were using PISA data to de/legitimate education reform agendas in their contexts. While this analysis is available elsewhere (see Hogan, 2016b), Figure 8.3 shows one of the networks generated through this

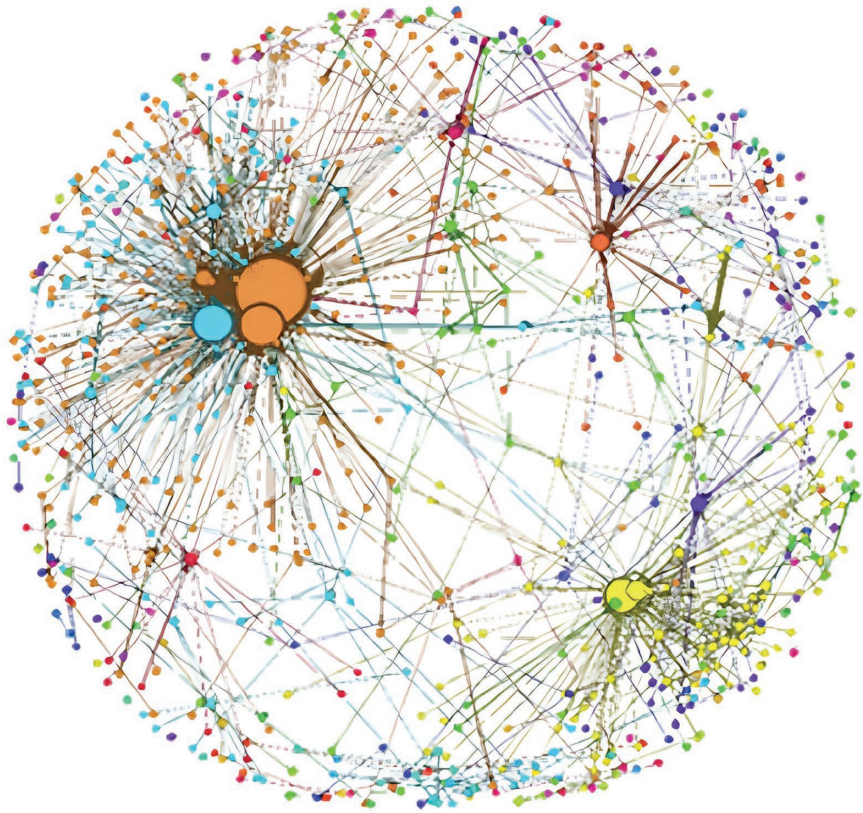

FIGURE 8.3 #OECDPISA network

Source: Hogan, A. (2016). Network ethnography and the cyberflâneur: Evolving policy sociology in education. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education 29(3), 381–398, reprinted by permission of Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group, www.tandfonline.com

analysis, and how clusters of actors and organisations form around particular ideas or understandings of the PISA data.

In other examples of my research, I tend to employ 'thick' data where I supplement digital data collection with semi-structured interviews (see, e.g. Hogan, 2015, 2016a; Hogan et al., 2016). This aligns with the methodological approach of 'network ethnography' (see Chapter 10) where an initial information audit using various internet sources, allows the construction of network diagrams, and then follow-up interviews with actors deemed central or interesting within the network (Ball & Junemann, 2012). Many researchers follow this approach (see, e.g. Allen & Bull, 2018; Avelar & Ball, 2019; Junemann et al., 2018; Player-Koro, 2019). As Ball and Junemann (2012, p. 6) observe 'this method constitutes a mapping of the form and content of policy relations', where the diagrams can be deployed as both 'an analytical technique for looking at the structure of policy communities and their social

relationships' and a conceptual device that can be 'used to represent a set of "real" changes in the forms of governance of education, both nationally and globally'.

In terms of applying a network ethnography approach, it is first necessary to select a policy issue or policy actor as a central node of analysis (e.g. 'Pearson'). From this starting point, a researcher can work to identify the various links, connections and associations that emanate from this central policy node. This allows a researcher to move through online communities, collecting information from websites, blogs and social media. For instance, data collected on Pearson over time has included annual reports, promotion materials, 'policy' documents, corporate think pieces, recommendations made to education systems about policy reform, reviews of Pearson developed materials, Pearson generated data sets, social media posts, and so on. Movement between these spaces (and documents) is seamless and provides a different way to trace the flows and mobilities of policy work today. Network ethnography is able to visually portray changing educational governance structures and enables recognition of the heterarchical nature of education policy processes that are produced through vertical and horizontal relations between public, private and philanthropic actors.

Discussion and conclusion

While digital methods are well established in sociological research, they are still immature in the grand scheme of educational policy research. What might appear a 'sexy' digital approach that impresses the reader with a colourful visualisation of a million data points is often just a different way of illustrating an issue that has long been noted by traditional qualitative researchers. Big data and their subsequent networks have historically been associated with qualitative research (Bancroft et al., 2014); however, the introduction of internet-mediated big data has meant that the methodologies have been taken over by quantitative, statistics-oriented, technology-enhanced methodologies (Sarkar, 2021). Qualitative sociologists need to insert themselves authoritatively into digital spaces to help write new questions for this data because as boyd (Jenkins et al., 2015) notes, the possibility of quantitative big data research to help solve the world's problems has resulted in just having a million more data points to prove what we already know. The direction of online policy research has moved further away from the sociological and humanities approaches that have traditionally dominated an understanding of social issues and interactions, towards technical approaches that required specialised computing skills (Mills, 2018). Qualitative policy researchers are faced with the challenge of re-centralising itself in this revolution of people interface with technology in policy contexts and 'what that interface enables or leads to in those contexts' (Cheek, 2021, p. 124).

As big-data analytical techniques become more sophisticated and more automated, the possibility of social research being given over to machines becomes an increasing possibility. As Anna noted in her section, this research is inexpensive. The main cost is in the time of the analyst to sort through the possibilities and formulate hypotheses. As machine learning becomes more advanced, algorithms will be able to do increasingly sophisticated topic modelling. Mixed-method partnerships between computer scientists and qualitative researchers will become increasingly important to ensure that the qualitative is still centralised in contemporary digital data methodologies.

Education policy sociology already has a well-established reputation for network analysis meaning that the field already has the theoretical depth to take leadership in how digital methods can be used in the social sciences. The already-established footprints of networks noted over time can be the starting point for considering the empirical and descriptive power asymmetries within policy networks. Engel and Burch (2021) raise some useful ways forward for education network sociology that we have found in the data we have analysed over the last decade. For example, networks are notoriously difficult to hold together so how are the policy networks noted by education policy researchers being held together and what are the fault lines? Less abstract, how do school communities, including parents and students, interpret the policy networks that they are affected by but may not notice? Are school communities transforming and resisting these formulations of the market and power? We have shown that social and other dynamic media can provide insight into these questions in ways traditional network methods may have been unable. It is important that the future of network analytics in education does not simply provide new data that characterises old questions but uses its strengths in characterising chaos and dynamism to contribute to the field.

Note

1 Please refer to the digital version of the text for colour rendering of the figures.

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PART 2

Participant analysis

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9

PARTICIPANT ANALYSIS IN CRITICAL EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES

Meghan Stacey and Nicole Mockler

Introduction

At first glance, it may appear that all education policy studies must, to some degree, concern themselves with policy texts. Yet on the other hand, there is arguably not much point in analysing policy texts if the relationship between these texts and the human actors they are intended to impact is not also considered. This is one reason why it is useful to consider policy, not in a 'rationalist' sense of conception, roll out and 'implementation', but instead as a messy process in which what happens at the 'chalkface' may not be what was planned at the centre. And while forms of text-based analysis can very effectively highlight, for example, the ways in which policy texts shape particular kinds of discursive subjects and 'problems' (see, e.g. Chapters 3 to 5), to really understand how policy does or does not operate at the local level, the best thing to do is to get in there, talk to those involved, and see for yourself.

In this second half of this book, our attention therefore shifts to approaches to analysing education policy which incorporate human participants as a core or sole focus. First, we consider common methods used in working with participants. We highlight how both quantitative and qualitative research methods have been adopted, with a particular emphasis on qualitative methods such as semi-structured interviews, which we argue are especially helpful in garnering insight into individual experiences of policy. We then explore how relationships between policy texts and policy actors are often understood and approached, before raising questions as to the very nature of what it means to be a 'participant' in research – human or otherwise. Throughout this introductory chapter, we incorporate references to the remaining chapters of this

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book to show how they 'fit in' to the broader picture of participant-based critical education policy analysis we are trying to paint.

Methods for working with participants in critical education policy studies

As we highlighted in Chapter 1, and again in Chapter 2, we have an unapologetic emphasis on qualitative research approaches in this book. Qualitative research lends itself particularly well to critically oriented research because it allows for in-depth exploration of varied perspectives and experiences, enabling the problematisation of knowledge and associated power dynamics. However, this does not mean that quantitative research cannot also be useful in doing this work. We include a brief discussion of critical, quantitative research approaches in the next paragraph, before moving on to explore more common qualitative methods and how these have been put to use within the field.

One quantitative approach that has been fruitful for critical policy research involving human participants has been survey questionnaire. For example, teachers' experience of workload and their perspective on the role of policy in relation to this workload were able to be rendered on a broad scale by researchers working with the NSW Teachers Federation, the public school teachers' union in the most populous Australian state (Stacey et al., 2023). While only broad questions can be asked and answered in a survey, this approach meant that a large number of teachers – over 18,000 – were able to be surveyed in one go (for the full report, see McGrath-Champ et al., 2018). Another area of critical education policy research in which quantitative approaches have been useful, indeed essential, has been investigations into school funding. This is a particularly charged issue in Australia, where all schools receive some public subsidisation but in which some can also charge unlimited fees, and some researchers have used school funding data to calculate disparities between schools (Thomson, 2021), including in relation to 'voluntary' public school fees (Rowe & Perry, 2019; Thompson et al., 2019). A related area of investigation has been the relationship between student and school socio-economic status, and student achievement, usually calculated using large-scale data from the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Perry et al., 2022; Sciffer et al., 2022). Also related to equity concerns have been analyses of curriculum access (Perry & Southwell, 2014) and differentiation of learning environments across schools (Perry et al., 2016).

It is however qualitative research that tends to be most commonly used in critical education policy studies. When involving participants in such research, the most common qualitative research method adopted is interview and usually semi-structured interviews. Examples of studies in the field of education policy which have used interviews are many (see the next paragraph for some examples). In the chapters which constitute Part 2 of this book, however,

there are none which focus on interviews in a general sense, or even interviews with teachers. There are plenty of existing method texts which explain how to conduct effective interviews with adult participants (as well as how to analyse such data; see Chapter 2 for a brief discuss of this, including an overview of thematic analysis processes relevant to both participant and text-based data). What we do include in Part 2 is a chapter specifically addressing working with young people, given much of our work in education concerns young people (see Chapter 15). Additionally, Chapter 16 explores approaches to interviewing policy elites – those who involved in high-level policymaking. These chapters have been included as they concern categories of participants which are quite particular to critical education policy studies and which have, accordingly, particular challenges in their undertaking.

While much of what you need to approach interviews with other stakeholders in education, like teachers, can be gained from general methods texts on conducting interviews, there remain some particular considerations to make when using interviews to explore experiences of education policy. A common concern faced by researchers designing a study is how specific one's exploration of a particular policy should be. Some research focuses on specific policies that have been introduced, asking participants about these policies directly (e.g. Gavin & McGrath-Champ, 2017; Rice et al., 2016). This is not always an easy thing to do, as participants such as school teachers may not always be aware of the 'official' names given to the work they are asked to do in the context of a particular policy shift. Some researchers, such as Gavin and Stacey (2022), have worked around this by describing the content of the policy requirement in question rather than referring to it using its formal name. There are risks here regarding layers of interpretation which may distance questions and answers from the policy text itself. Sometimes this can be mitigated through a combination of both text analysis and participant data (for examples of such research in contexts such as Greece and China, see Han, 2018; Traianou, 2023). Alternatively one might begin with the participant's experience and map this back to particular texts, as in Institutional Ethnography (Chapter 13).

However, directly linking texts and actors may not be as important as it initially seems. As Clutterbuck argues in Chapter 15, policies do not need to be named for school actors to be able to explain their own experiences. With Ball et al. (2012), we would argue that it is perfectly legitimate to conduct research on experiences of an overall policy climate or direction, as well as specific policy texts or suites of texts. This can be especially important where the 'policy' one wishes to investigate does not exist as a formal policy text. In the example of Stacey (2020), the 'policy' in question was the overall tendency towards the marketisation of schooling, through various mechanisms, introduced at various points in time, which support parents' choice of school, including funding changes and changes in rules around the establishment of

schools, as well as announcements encouraging the activation of school choice and the establishment of the Australian MySchool website (*myschool.edu.au*). Other examples of research from a range of international contexts, in which the effects of an overall policy climate on stakeholders in education has been explored via interviews, include in the United States (Castro et al. 2022), in Sweden (Gustafasson 2021), in Chile (Falabella 2020), and in Australia (Wescott 2022).

Relationships between policy texts and policy actors

The question of whether and how to connect interview questions to particular policy texts is reflective of broader considerations around how the relationship between policy texts and policy actors can be understood. We have suggested earlier in this chapter and in this book the idea that seeing policy as something that is, or is not, 'implemented' is a limited way of understanding what policy is. Conducting research with policy actors at the 'chalkface' often highlights the limitations of this view, as it becomes clear that how schools, teachers and students 'do' policy (Ball et al., 2012) is not at all uniform, never neat and usually not how the policy was intended, or at least not entirely. As Rowe highlights in Chapter 10 of this book, this conceptualisation reflects a particular 'ontology' of policy as 'mutating, mobile and interpretivist'. One approach that tries to get at the complex relationship between policy texts and the 'doings' of actors within institutions is Institutional Ethnography, which is the focus of Chapter 13 of this book. Institutional Ethnography begins with the 'everyday', tracking back to texts such as policy documents to see how people's lives are organised within institutions.

Approaches like Institutional Ethnography privilege the people, not the text – those who are 'subject to' policy. But such approaches also reflect important questions around how we understand policy actors when doing critical education policy research with human participants. If policy is 'enacted', as Ball and colleagues have argued (rather than 'implemented'), then this implies an agentic role on the part of local actors. They are not somehow victims of policy, but respond to, take up and enact this in different ways. Indeed according to Ball et al. (2011), policy actors in schools undertake 'policy work' via various roles including as 'narrators', 'entrepreneurs', 'outsiders', 'transactors', 'enthusiasts', 'translators', 'critics' and 'receivers'.

The importance of recognising local actors via participant-based research methods is perhaps most clearly articulated in Chapter 14 of this book, in which Khupe et al. highlight examples of decolonial studies of curriculum policy, critiquing 'centre-periphery' approaches to curriculum development. Khupe et al. argue that instead of starting at the centre, curriculum must begin with the communities directly involved in enacting that curriculum so as to

disrupt power processes in knowledge generation and representation. Indeed, it could be argued that research aimed at decolonising education policy must, to at least some degree, be participatory – as the authors suggest.

Who or what is a 'participant' in critical education policy research?

A final consideration for this section introduction on participant-based research in critical education policy studies is just what constitutes a 'participant'. Usually, when we speak of participants in research, we are referring to human participants. However, just as the distinction between policy texts and policy enactments is not clear cut, neither are the criteria which designate what it means to be a participant in research. A recent rise in popularity of 'new materialist' research is one way in which this distinction has been queried. Drawing on the work of Karen Barad, Hayes et al. (2020) write of encountering an apparently locked gate when attempting to enter a school site for research purposes, and how the researcher's understanding of the gate as locked changes what they do next. As the authors write, 'the gate performs as it appears: locked and impenetrable' (p. 366). In this way, the authors argue for 'an immanent attention to the knowing-relating-being-doing that materializes moment-by-moment, in dynamic intra-actions between human and nonhuman bodies, enfolding past, present and future possibilities' (pp. 365–366), when doing field work in educational research. Similarly, in Chapter 12 of this book, Jennifer Clutterbuck considers the 'vital materiality' of policy; in particular, how interactions with the online platform 'OneSchool', considered as a material form of policy with effects of its own, shape experiences of work in schools.

The ways in which the 'nonhuman' can operate as a 'participant' in research is also a concern in other chapters of this section. In Chapter 10, Rowe describes network ethnography approaches in which the 'networks' which shape policy and policy flows are a core object of focus. In Chapter 11, meanwhile, Shahzad and Gorur explore actor-network theory (ANT), in which society is 'imagined as a hybrid assemblage of human and non-human actors', holding that:

> our identity, our capacities, etc. are a result of complex associations between us and other humans and non-humans. Every aspect of one's description – a work affiliation, family connections, nationality, etc. – depends on a trail of documents, rules, policies, laws etc.

Gorur argues that the idea of non-human agency is a controversial aspect of ANT, with 'agency' sometimes mistaken for 'intention'. In the context of new materialisms, such as the work of Barad mentioned earlier, and others such as Rosi Braidotti (2013) however, such ideas are becoming more ubiquitous.

Conclusion

The chapters that follow, and constitute the remainder of this book, are concerned with understanding the involvement of participants in education policy. Policy texts can do much and need to be a target of analysis in critical education policy studies. However, participant-based approaches to policy analysis are also essential because they recognise that 'policy' is not only, if it is ever or at all, a text. Human and non-human actors are a part of policy processes, responding to, shaping and reshaping what policy is and how it operates. While we may consider ways in which, for example, teachers, students and parents are 'subject to' policy, they are also a part of it, creating, maintaining, modifying and even subverting. The chapters that follow provide much deeper detail on different approaches to understanding education policy, each exploring a particular approach, considering both methods employed and associated conceptual underpinnings.

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10

NETWORK ETHNOGRAPHY IN EDUCATION

A literature review of network ethnography as a methodology and how it has been applied in critical policy studies

Emma Rowe

Introduction: network ethnography

This chapter carries out a review of how network ethnography has been utilised in education research. As a transdisciplinary methodology, network ethnography is a combination of social network analysis (SNA) and traditional ethnography, in that it draws upon and is influenced by each.

Network ethnography is relatively new and under-utilised in the field of education, in comparison to traditional ethnography, with one of the first landmark studies drawing upon this method being Ball and Junemann (2012) in their study of policy networks, governance and 'new philanthropy', and again in subsequent works by Ball and colleagues (Ball, 2012, 2016; Ball et al., 2017; Junemann et al., 2018).

Following from this, network ethnography has been increasingly taken up within the field of critical policy studies in education, commonly used to explore philanthropy and interrelated fields of governance and policy networks. By discussing the fundamentals of network ethnography and reviewing how it has been adopted in educational research, this chapter aims to provide a practical guide for scholars and research students engaging with the methodology. It discusses how the methodology is used to generate data but also how it seeks to make knowledge claims and original knowledge contributions in the field. A methodology is not simply about how we *generate* data, but also critically informs how we analyse our data and make sense of our data. This chapter identifies critiques and limitations.

Network ethnography is rooted within policy sociology, critical policy studies and policy mobilities literature, while simultaneously drawing on strategies, techniques and language drawn from SNA. Network ethnography is

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interested in the structuring of relations, and while it is applied differently among scholars, it is anchored in the notion that structures of relations influence decision-making and policy mobilities; culture, values and social norms; and assemblages of power. Certainly, the way in which power is conceptualised or understood in network ethnography differs within the literature, with theory drawn from Foucault (Hunkin, 2016) or actor-network theory (ANT) for instance (Rowe, 2022a) (see also Chapters 4 and 11). Network ethnography then is fitting for sociology of education and policy studies, being the study of formal and informal structures of relations, and the sociological implications of structural ties, relations, networks and communities (Mills, 2000). Fundamental to classical sociology is the argument that humans tend to define themselves through their group membership, the social structures they are tied to, including family, kinship and ancestry; their economic positioning or their employment – each of which is positioned within ties of relations, a network.

There are several key arguments for network ethnography as a methodology. The first argument is that it responds to the rise of opaque decision-making and policy mobilities, in which policy researchers must account for the increase of non-state actors in policymaking (Avelar et al., 2021). Second, network ethnography is responsive to policy borrowing and policy mobility that is transnational, globalised and borrowed (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Through its visual presentation of data, drawing on software such as Gephi or Cytoscape, network ethnography endeavours to demonstrate policy mobilities as peripatetic and borderless (Peck & Theodore, 2012). This is captured effectively by Hogan (2016), who argues that network ethnography accounts for the 'contemporary mobility of policy, where it cannot be constrained to geographic locations or within the boundaries of nation states' (p. 386).

This chapter will be set out as follows: first I will respond to the question, what is network ethnography? Subsequently, this chapter examines how it has been utilised specifically in the field of education. I discuss how this method has been primarily taken up in critical policy studies and use visual network maps to show this. Finally, this chapter examines the epistemological and ontological foundations of the method, and how it informs data analysis and knowledge contributions. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) write, 'theoretical and methodological considerations also include matters of ontology (what we believe the nature of reality to be) and epistemology (how we justify knowledge claims)' (p. 46). This chapter briefly discusses SNA, since it is important to understand the fundamentals of the method. Even though more current use of network ethnography in education tends to privilege traditional ethnography in comparison to SNA, there continue to be ontological and epistemological influences of SNA that are important to recognise, particularly in the utilisation of data visualisation software packages such as UCINET, Gephi, XLNode or Cytoscape.

What is network ethnography?

Network ethnography is a combination of SNA and traditional ethnography. Traditional ethnography, while carrying broad differences in the literature, studies 'face-to-face everyday interactions in specific locations' (Deegan, 2001, p. 3). As qualitative research, it draws upon interviews and participant observation to study communities or society (Ellis, 1986). The Chicago School ethnographies often utilised 'descriptive narratives' and participant observation to portray 'social worlds experienced in everyday life' (Deegan, 2001).

In the early 2000s, social scientist Philip Howard (2002) proposed 'using ethnographic field methods on cases and field sites selected using social network analysis' (p. 561). He described this as 'network ethnography', arguing that a combination of in-depth interviews, observation and extended immersion, combined with SNA, would be especially useful for studying new media or 'hypermedia' and wanting to contextualise observations about a 'system of relations' (p. 551). This criticism served to be a predominant rationale among scholars arguing for the utilisation of network ethnography in the field of education, asserting that qualitative ethnographic methods combined with network analysis enable greater *contextualisation* of relationships, while critiquing networks and structural ties (Ball et al., 2017). Therefore, to practice network ethnography, it is important to understand the fundamentals of SNA.

A cornerstone of SNA is that it treats social structures as networks, looking for 'patterns of interaction and interconnection through individuals and social groups' (Scott, 2012, p. 1) and the sociological implications of these interactions. The units of analysis can be individuals or groups, companies or organisations, and they are referred to as 'nodes', connected using 'lines' (Marin & Wellman, 2010). SNA seeks to capture complex relations and social networks, through ties, lines and nodes, utilising quantitative metrics to measure centrality, proximity and density (Scott, 1996).

As a leading scholar in this field, Scott (2012) writes that his personal interest in this field came from an interest in 'economic power' and wanting to identify 'webs of connection', among the ownership and control of oil and gas companies in Scotland. He examined financial monopolies among interlocking directorates, and considered how nodes were tied together through various social memberships including schooling or clubs (p. 2). Identifying shared memberships between companies, boards and clubs is evident in educational research, which I will discuss in further depth in the following section.

SNA is useful for analysing flows of power, money and economic resources, highlighting particular names of individuals or companies that monopolise ownership and control of capital. Borgatti and Halgin (2011) describe this as identifying 'affiliations':

> In social network analysis, the term 'affiliations' usually refers to membership or participation data, such as when we have data on which actors have

> participated in which events. Often, the assumption is that co-membership in groups or events is an indicator of an underlying social tie.
>
> *(Borgatti & Halgin, 2011, p. 417)*

By studying affiliations, the researcher is looking for a kind of patterning between ties, and how they are structured. Researchers may look to make further distinctions *within* sets of nodes, such as ties between 'institutions to institutions', or 'individuals to individuals' or *between* sets: 'institutions to individuals' (Avelar & Ball, 2019; Borgatti & Halgin, 2011). Avelar and Ball (2019) describe the distinctions as a 'dual-mode network (person-by-institution) into a co-affiliation one-mode network (institution-by-institution)' (p. 66). Affiliations can often be determined 'from a distance', such as reading newspaper reports or government records, which can be an advantage of SNA (Borgatti & Halgin, 2011).

Marin and Wellman (2010) identify the key steps in identifying affiliations:

> After researchers have identified network members, they must identify the relations between these nodes. These could include collaborations, friendships, trade ties, web links, citations, resource flows, information flows, exchanges of social support, or any other possible connection between these particular units (Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Borgatti et al. (2009) identify four broad categories of relations: similarities, social relations, interactions, and flows.
>
> *(Marin & Wellman, 2010, p. 2)*

In my own work, I have searched for affiliations between multiple sets including 'institutions to institutions', 'individuals to individuals' or 'institutions to individuals'. For instance, in searching for affiliations within dominant venture philanthropic networks in Australia, I found that the majority of the 'expert team' and board members from the Australian Education Research Organisation (AERO) are tied to Australia's peak venture philanthropic organisation, Social Ventures Australia (Rowe, 2022a, 2022b). This is made evident in multiple ways, such as shared board member roles, mapping out financial donors, or even affiliations to subsidiary organisations. By mapping these social relations and ties, a researcher can not only understand the 'flows' such as flows of money or flows of ideas but also understand policy mobilities and why AERO invests in a 'Head of Philanthropy' role (the emergence of AERO prompted government legislation to specifically enable AERO to collaborate with philanthropy) (Rowe, 2022a). It illustrates how an education research organisation such as AERO is deeply invested in philanthropy, which has the potential to impact its agenda, direction and research biases – particularly as the organisation is strongly connected to and emulated upon a research centre from England (Education Endowment Foundation), one that prioritises specific ways of 'knowing'.

Affiliations can be ascertained from a range of resources, including an organisation's website, annual reports or financial reports. However, when searching for affiliations, it is important to maintain criticality and reflexivity in considering where the information is drawn from and endeavour to 'dig into' the data via more obscure or non-traditional sources. Organisations have increasingly grown more sophisticated in terms of how they represent their 'public' face in their bid for acquiring legitimacy and approval for their reform efforts in education. I have frequently found key differences in the data when comparing between the more public representation (e.g. websites) and the formal reports that are submitted to corporate watchdogs (see Rowe, 2022c). For example, AERO states clearly in their Constitution submitted to a corporate watchdog that their stated purpose is to engage with philanthropy in order to 'strengthen the national education evidence base' (ASIC, 2021, p. 8); however, this is not disclosed or reiterated on any public platforms, including their website, associated reports or publications that can be downloaded from their website. It is clearly not a disclosure that is made on any public or online reports. This national legislative change was not reported in the mainstream media, even though it is significant for how it embeds philanthropic involvement into the national fabric of educational research.

To counter this, researchers need to consider sources of data that are less commonly used in educational research, such as reports submitted to corporate watchdogs (e.g. the Australian Securities Investment Commission, referred to as ASIC) or public databases (e.g. the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission, ACNC). These reports or databases often contain more detailed listings of board members but also financial information. It is important to not rely exclusively on websites for instance but also triangulate this with formal reports and interviews.

Thereby, a central aim of network ethnography within educational research has been engaged in network mapping in order to identify who, or what, is highly impactful in affecting educational reform and mobilising policy agendas.

A brief genesis and overview of network ethnography in education

In the field of education, network ethnography was specified as a methodology in two prominent works in sociology of education and policy studies, that is, Ball's (2012) 'Global Education Inc' and Ball and Junemann's (2012) 'Networks, New Governance and Education'. The authors set out three methods to generate data that have been emulated in subsequent research in the field. These three activities are internet searches, described as 'extensive and exhaustive'; in-depth interviews; and lastly, drawing upon these internet searches and interviews to construct 'policy networks' (Ball & Junemann, 2012, p. 13).

Ball and Junemann (2012) expanded on this method in their subsequent publication 'Edu.net' (with Diego Santori), writing in far more depth about network ethnography and identifying these methods in further detail as again involving internet searches; in-depth interviews; attending meetings and events to observe and take field notes (such as conferences); and network mapping using software such as Gephi (Ball et al., 2017, p. 22). The authors describe network ethnography as a 'hybrid mix of different tools and techniques', drawing on SNA in addition to 'cyber ethnography, multisited ethnography and traditional ethnography' (Ball et al., 2017, p. 22). These methods for generating data are summarised visually (see Table 10.1):

Ball et al. (2017) argue that network ethnography offers a far richer, more contextual account of structures of relations, by including in-depth interviews and observation (namely, attending conferences), whereas SNA presents only a 'static snapshot' (p. 6). However, it should be noted that their particular interpretation of network ethnography is exactly that – it is an interpretation that is more aligned with qualitative ethnography, and while it takes up the language and visual presentation tools of SNA, it closely draws upon traditional ethnographic studies and departs from quantitative analyses of networks. The networks seldom, if ever, represent affiliations in the same style as Borgatti and Halgin (2011), that is, as 'mathematical graphs' (p. 418).

The usefulness of network ethnography lies in the multiple methods to generate data. By undertaking rigorous and comprehensive web searches to identify networks and affiliations, in addition to attending events to record field notes, and undertaking interviews, this enables the researcher to check the accuracy of their online searches, in addition to 'humanising' the research (Avelar et al., 2021). Avelar et al. (2021) argue that network ethnography enables a researcher to capture complex policy processes, a 'methodology capable of tracing complex (and largely opaque) policy relations across global networks of education actors and stakeholders' (p. 108).

In the following section, I will show how network ethnography has been taken up in the social sciences to examine 'new philanthropy' or subjects related to new philanthropy, such as corporate reform, Teach For All, edu-businesses and think-tanks. The following section provides a table (see Figure 10.2) that categorises how and where it has been applied in the field of education.

TABLE 10.1 Generating data using network ethnography: key methods as captured in the literature

Internet searches
In-depth interviews
Attending meetings and events (observing and field notes)
Network mapping

How has network ethnography been applied in education research?

Network ethnography is relatively under-used in educational research, as a specified methodology. The following section draws on a literature review in order to identify how network ethnography has been utilised. The review draws upon multiple searches carried out using the Web of Science database first, followed by the Scopus database second, and third, the ERIC database. It is important to note that the following discussion limits itself to research published in peer-reviewed academic journals in the field of education only and requires 'network ethnography' as a specific search parameter. Chapters, reports and books have been excluded although I have endeavoured to cite relevant publications pertaining to network ethnography throughout (e.g. Avelar et al., 2021; Ball et al., 2017). This search includes a comprehensive timeframe with no starting date ('all years', which starts at year 1900) with an end-date of December 31, 2022. Only publications that were published prior to this end-date are included.

A relatively small amount of literature draws on network ethnography in the field of education, especially if comparing to (solely) more traditional qualitative methods such as in-depth interviewing or observation. The following table lists publications that have been published in peer-reviewed education journals that specify 'network ethnography' and lists the software used for network mapping in addition to the nominated keywords (see Table 10.2).

TABLE 10.2 List of publications that have been published in peer-reviewed education journals that specify 'network ethnography' as a keyword or specified method (from 1900 to 2022). The table excludes reports, books and book chapters

Author's name and year of publication	*Journal*	*Software used for network mapping*	*What are the nominated keywords?*
Adhikary and Lingard (2018): "A A critical policy analysis of 'Teach for Bangladesh'"	Comparative Education	NodeXL Cytoscape	Teach for Bangladesh Network ethnography Globalised localism Localised globalism Network governance Boundary spanner Philanthropic governance
Adhikary and Lingard (2019): "Global-local imbrications in education policy"	London Review of Education	No	Globalization Topological analytics Policy sociology of education Network ethnography Global ethnography Methodological challenges Teach for Bangladesh

Author's name and year of publication	*Journal*	*Software used for network mapping*	*What are the nominated keywords?*
Allen and Bull (2018): "Following policy"	Sociological Research Online	Mapping-software not specified	Character Education Governance Grit John Templeton Foundation Networks Philanthropy Policy Positive Psychology
Avelar and Ball (2019): "Mapping new philanthropy and the heterarchical state"	International Journal of Educational Development	Gephi	Education Policy Education governance New Philanthropy Social network analysis Network ethnography
Ball (2016): "Following policy"	Journal of Education Policy	Gephi	Education policy Education governance New Philanthropy Social network analysis Network ethnography
Ball and Junemann (2011): "Education policy and philanthropy"	International Journal of Public Administration	Software not specified	Education policy Philanthropy Policy networks Governance
Barnes (2022): "Parents, carers, and policy labor"	New Media and Society	Gephi	Network ethnography Parent and carer advocacy Policy labor Social Media Social network analysis
Ellison et al. (2019): "Policy field and policy discourse"	Education Policy Analysis Archives	Social Network Visualizer (SocNetV), and edited using Inkscape 0.91	Policy Sociology Network analysis Policy Networks Policy Discourse
Hogan (2016): "Network ethnography and the cyberflaneur"	International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education	Gephi	Policy sociology Network ethnography Cyberflâneur Research Education

(*Continued*)

TABLE 10.2 (Continued)

Author's name and year of publication	*Journal*	*Software used for network mapping*	*What are the nominated keywords?*
Hogan (2016): "NAPLAN and the role of edu-business"	The Australian Association for Research in Education	Gephi	NAPLAN Edu-business Governance Privatisations Public/private partnerships
Hogan et al. (2016): "Commercialising comparison"	Journal of Education Policy	Gephi	Pearson Policy Neo-social Data Accountability Network ethnography Comparison
Hogan and Stylianou (2018): "School-based sports development and the role of NSOs as 'boundary spanners'"	Sport, Education and Society	Gephi	Sport Policy Governance School sport Children's sports participation Partnerships Networks Boundary Spanner Network ethnography
Hunkin (2016): "Deploying Foucauldian genealogy"	Power and Education	Not specified	Early childhood education Quality Critical policy analysis Genealogy Discourse Australia
Macdonald et al. (2020): "Globalisation, neoliberalisation, and network governance"	Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education	Gephi	Outsourcing Neoliberalism Network ethnography Education Health
Mangione et al. (2021): "The dynamics of external provision in physical education"	European Physical Education Review	No	Outsourcing Network ethnography Network analysis Neoliberalism
McKenzie and Stahelin (2022): "The global inter-network governance of UN policy programs on climate change education"	International Journal of Educational Research	Not specified	Network governance Network ethnography Policy mobilities United Nations International organizations Education policy Climate change education

Author's name and year of publication	*Journal*	*Software used for network mapping*	*What are the nominated keywords?*
Oldham (2017): "Enterprise education"	New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies	Gephi	Enterprise Education Governance Curriculum Network analysis
Olmedo (2014): "From England with love . . . ARK, heterarchies and global 'philanthropic governance'"	Journal of Education Policy	NodeXL	Education Policy Philanthropy Networks Heterarchy Neoliberalism
Olmedo et al. (2013): "To Infinity and beyond . . . "	European Educational Research Journal	NodeXL	No specific keywords listed. Here are mine: Teach For All Heterarchy Heterarchical network Governance
Olmedo and Grau (2013): "Neoliberalism, policy advocacy networks and think tanks in the Spanish educational arena"	Education Inquiry	NodeXL	Heterarchy Neoliberal Policy Networks Policy Advocacy Think tanks
Rowe (2023): "Venture philanthropy in public schools in Australia"	Journal of Education Policy	Gephi	Venture philanthropy Policy mobility Network ethnography Policy networks Network theory
Rowe (2022b): "Philanthrocapitalism and the state"	ECNU Review of Education	Gephi	Policy Philanthrocapitalism Policy networks Reform State Venture philanthropy
Rowe (2022a): "The assemblage of inanimate objects in educational research"	International Journal of Educational Research	Gephi	Policy networks Network ethnography Venture philanthropy Sociology of translation Evidence broker Inanimate object

(*Continued*)

TABLE 10.2 (Continued)

Author's name and year of publication	*Journal*	*Software used for network mapping*	*What are the nominated keywords?*
Rowe (2022c): "Policy networks and venture philanthropy"	Journal of Education Policy	Gephi	Governance Teach for Australia Network ethnography Policy network Policy mobility Venture philanthropy Network governance Social network analysis
Saura (2018) "Saving the world through neoliberalism"	Critical Studies in Education	NodeXL	Education policy Neoliberalism Philanthropy Policy networks
Shiroma (2014): "Networks in action"	Journal of Education Policy	Gephi or Social Network Visualizer (not specified)	Education Policy Policy Networks Hegemony
Sperka et al. (2018): "Brokering and bridging knowledge in health and physical education"	Physical Education and Sport Pedagogy	No	Outsourcing External Providers Boundary Spanner Knowledge-broker
Sperka and Enright (2019): "Network ethnography applied"	Sport, Education and Society	Gephi	Outsourcing Privatisation External providers Network ethnography Research methods
Viseu and Carvalho (2018): "Think tanks, policy networks and education governance"	Education Policy Analysis Archives	UCINET and NetDraw software	Think Tanks Policy Networks Education Governance Social Network Analysis
Viseu (2022): "New philanthropy and policy networks in global education governance"	International Journal of Educational Research	UCINET 6.0 and Netdraw software	New Philanthropy Policy Networks Global Education Governance Social Network Analysis netFWD OECD

In order to explore how method is connected to an intended epistemological contribution, I want to imagine that the table (see Table 10.2) constitutes a proportion of our data that we have generated for our study. This data is generated via comprehensive and rigorous online web-searches, after setting out defined parameters for the search.

Conceptualising this data through a lens of network ethnography (as informed by SNA), each publication acts as a node, maintaining numerous lines (connecting to authors, journals, universities and potentially to funding). A university constitutes its own node, but so too can an individual researcher, or an academic journal, for each maintains its own network and sociological implications. A journal is connected to levels of prestige and exclusivity within the academy; citation practices, world rankings, impact factor and SCImago journal rankings, and of course, each individual academic each retains their own 'rankings', such as their h-index. Each node then constitutes a comprehensive amount of data, pertaining to statistical measures and rankings. There are a number of inquiries a researcher could make from the data, such as considering how this methodology has travelled across geographical boundaries and whether it is privileged in the global south or global north.

Network ethnography: education policy and 'new philanthropy'

From the table (see Table 10.2), it is evident that network ethnography in education has been primarily utilised and applied in studies connected to education policy and research examining 'new philanthropy', or diverse forms of new philanthropy. New philanthropy is related to venture philanthropy, philanthrocapitalism, business for social good or business for social impact (Scott, 2009). New philanthropy is the idea that the charity or not-for-profit sector can be incorporated into the business world, in order to 'do good', while profiting at the same time (Bishop & Green, 2008). Arguably, the reason why network ethnography has been predominantly utilised in this particular line of inquiry relates to the rise of non-state actors in policymaking, and the argument that policymaking is far more opaque (Reckhow, 2013). Network ethnography, by drawing on multiple activities to generate data, enables a researcher to 'dig deeper'.

The following visual shows the central fields in education research in which network ethnography has been utilised. The visual (see Figure 10.1) was generated using a software network mapping tool (Gephi) and shows a snapshot of the 'keywords' (see Table 10.2):

From this 'snapshot' of studies that utilise network ethnography in the field of education, it highlights how network ethnography is overwhelmingly utilised in studies related to education policy, and the study of policy networks, governance and network governance, and diverse forms of 'new philanthropy'. But many of these concepts are clearly connected and related, such as governance and global governance, or philanthropy and new philanthropy.

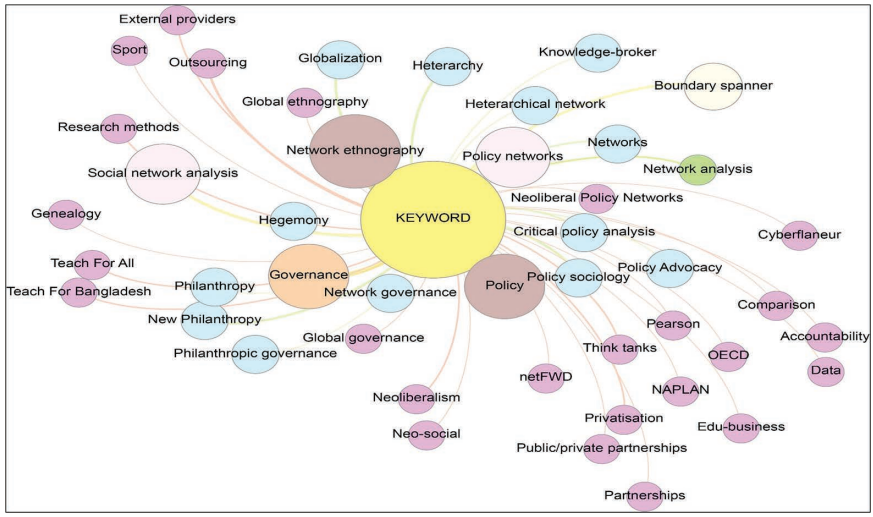

FIGURE 10.1 This visual was created using Gephi software. It shows a snapshot of the keywords taken from network ethnography literature. The larger circles indicate keywords that are utilised more frequently

By making further distinctions within this body of literature, and grouping related concepts together, it is evident that the most utilised concept in this body of literature is policy. This includes policymaking, policymakers and policyscapes[1] – followed by network (including networking or networks), global (including globally, globalisation or globalization) and philanthropy (including new philanthropy, philanthropic or philanthropies). By forming categories and examining the most frequently utilised concepts, a researcher can determine dominant themes within a body of literature that draws upon network ethnography.

The following Gephi map illustrates the most dominant themes in this field (see Figure 10.2):

A large proportion of literature that draws on network ethnography is positioned within critical policy sociology, such as researching philanthropy and 'philanthropy governance' (Adhikary & Lingard, 2018); policy networks (Adhikary & Lingard, 2019; Rowe, 2023) or Teach For and its affiliates (Olmedo et al., 2013). Sperka and colleagues (Sperka et al., 2018; Sperka & Enright, 2019) draw upon network ethnography from a health and physical education perspective, to research the outsourcing of services in schools.

The visual snapshot and the 'mapping' of network ethnography within the literature are useful in that it positions this methodology within a field of research. This is important for acknowledging how a methodology – that is, methods for generating data, analysing data and 'making sense' of our data – is connected to the intended contribution and the epistemological contribution our research seeks to make.

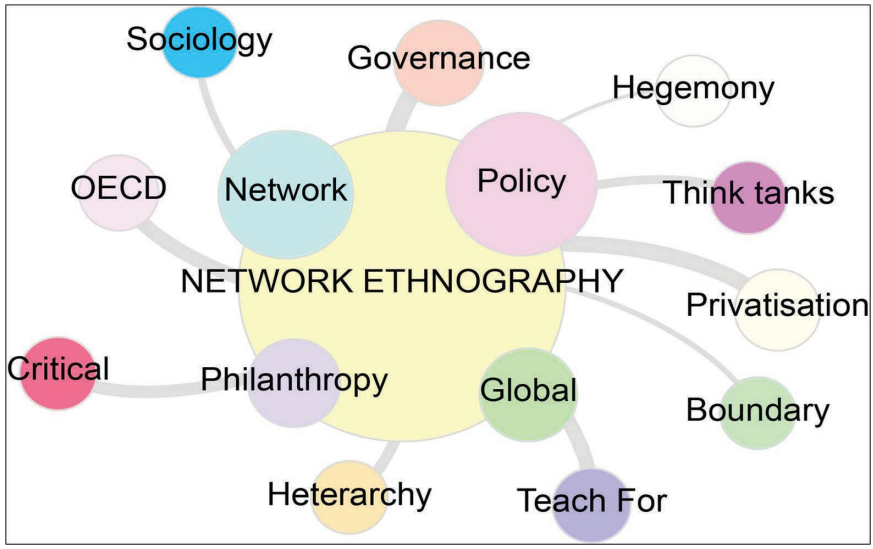

FIGURE 10.2 Network ethnography in education: research that utilises network ethnography tends to be predominantly positioned within literature that studies policy and policy networks in a globalised context, in relation to new philanthropy (see the Appendix for further explanation about this figure)

Policy ontologies: critical policy sociology and policy mobilities

Methodologies are inherently positioned within biases and world-views (Pillow, 2003) and inform the way in which a researcher generates data, analyses their data and finds 'meaning' from their data. For this reason, it is critical that policy researchers consider the epistemological and ontological groundings that inform their methods, and the way in which they 'read' and make sense of their data, or in other words, seek to make an original contribution to knowledge.

The way in which network ethnography has been drawn upon or interpreted within educational research is influenced by a theoretical conceptualisation of policy as 'in motion' or on the move, as influenced by sociologists (Urry, 2003, 2007), geographers and political scientists (Larner & Laurie, 2010; McCann, 2011; Peck & Theodore, 2010, 2012, 2015; Temenos & McCann, 2013). Policy as multiple is captured quite effectively by Ball et al. (2012):

> We want to 'make' policy into a process, as diversely and repeatedly contested and/or subject to different 'interpretations' as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions and classrooms.
>
> *(Ball et al., 2012, pp. 2, 3)*

These authors conceptualise policy as texts *and* 'things', in addition to processes that are 'complexly configured, contextually mediated and institutionally rendered' (Ball et al., 2012, p. 3). Therefore, it is critical to recognise how network ethnography is methodologically shaped and anchored within critical policy sociology, and it conceptualises policy as multiple, movable and mediated as contrasted to policy as singular, fixed and static. This carries a fundamental ontology of policy; that is, it challenges the notion of policies as static, singular or maintaining universal meanings, and rather positions policy as mutating, mobile and interpretivist. This challenges earlier concepts of policy science located within rational or positivist frameworks and defined within national territories (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Peck and Theodore (2012) argue against 'rational abstractions' of policy models (that is, policies that have acquired an audience of some kind) (p. 23), as contrasted to conceptualising policy as peripatetic, 'coconstituted' and continuous processes of 'contextualization/decontextualization/recontextualization' (Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 24).

This informs network ethnography as a method that seeks to 'follow policy', involving 'mapping, visiting, and questioning' (Ball, 2016, p. 4). The notion of 'following policy' in addition to 'following people, following things, following money, and following reform' (Ball et al., 2017) has arguably come to be the most impactful in the application of network ethnography in educational research. Following policy, people or things is influenced by multi-sited ethnographies (Marcus, 1995) and 'follow the thing' methods:

> Here, inspiration is taken from earlier rounds of innovative work on commodity chains, expert networks, mobile texts, and so forth, which have variously endeavored to 'follow the thing' by way of relational analyses spanning multiple research sites.
>
> *(Peck & Theodore, 2012, p. 22)*

There are criticisms related to 'follow the policy' research (Savage et al., 2021). These authors argue that 'follow the policy' research 'risks orienting researchers to problems and agendas already established by elite policy agents and organisations' (Savage et al., 2021, p. 307) and fails to illuminate 'other global policy forces and technologies' (p. 314). In pursuing elite policy agents, we risk obfuscating diverse viewpoints and arguably we may attribute monolithic power to certain nodes. In response to this critique, McKenzie et al. (2021) argue that this is a selective reading of the literature.

Concluding discussion: limitations or criticisms of network ethnography

Continuing the critique of 'follow the policy' research, there are limitations of network ethnography research. These critiques relate to the static and

time-dependent representations of policy networks (Avelar et al., 2021). Furthermore, there is a risk of losing our critical lens within network ethnography, particularly when becoming immersed within the field, attending conferences and carrying out in-depth interviews (Peck & Theodore, 2012).

Speaking to the first point, the mapping of policy networks is inherently static and time-dependent, and due to the nature of academic publishing is often undertaken a long time before it is actually published (Avelar et al., 2021). Avelar et al. reflect on this:

> So that is why I think it makes a lot of sense to say the networks we create and analyse are a 'picture' or a 'snapshot'. On the one hand we are very worried about keeping the data updated and making sure it represents the situation. But at the same time, once we accept we are creating meaning and that this research effort is necessarily limited, then we see that network ethnography allows us to capture moments and dynamics (even if fleeting) that shed light on how a policy or organisation came to be what it is.
>
> *(Avelar et al., 2021, p. 116)*

Network mapping certainly aims to provide accurate representations of relational structures, yet we also acknowledge that we are engaging in representations in order to highlight sociological structures and assemblages of power, potentially illuminating how education policy is mobilised through and between networks.

Another potential limitation of network ethnography is that it can become preoccupied with network mapping – or simply, showing the connections rather than analysing and illuminating how policy 'moves' (Lewis, 2023). Ball et al. (2017) write that it is 'not simply the mapping of networks' and identifying or describing connections, 'but rather to move on to begin to understand "how" policies move, and the labour of mobility, the work of networking' (Ball et al., 2017, pp. 5–6). It is important to consider network mapping as an illustration of data, which ideally provides an opportunity for richer, contextual analysis rather than analysis in itself.

Finally, network ethnography – as it has tended to be utilised within education research – can consist of intellectual incongruence and oppositional positionality within the field. As Bourdieu pointed out in earlier work (Bourdieu, 1988), an academic connects to a particular network and field, one that is contoured by its own epistemological and ontological 'ways of knowing', and in network ethnography, the researcher may endeavour to step outside of their network and seek out access to a differing field (both as a network and as knowledge field). This field may at times be perceived as oppositional or presenting an incongruence to our intellectual position. In order to acquire access, the academic may shape themselves as outsider–insider, or a 'cheerleader' for particular policy models (Peck & Theodore, 2012). Certainly, this is a common theme

in ethnographic research in general and potentially raises ethical concerns (Li, 2008; Vaughan, 2004). Avelar et al. (2021) discuss in further depth potential ethical issues a researcher may experience, such as feeling pressure to act as a kind of 'free consultant', in exchange for acquiring access (Avelar et al., 2021).

There is a risk here of undermining our critical lens, and there are indubitable and multiple pressures to soften a critical lens. We may soften a critical lens to maintain access to a research group. Furthermore, we may temper criticality for the opportunities that are offered by various organisations, particularly when working in spaces of policy entrepreneurialism. I would argue that this is even more profound in this temporal moment when we are experiencing a significant upsurge in markets seeking to create profit-making opportunities from education. These opportunities often relate to advancement of capital and questions of power, which is clearly at the centre of sociological research. Critical policy scholars must therefore stay reflexive and attentive to self-interests and assemblages of power as they make their sociological critiques.

Note

1 Appendix. Figure 10.2: Policy includes policymaking, policymakers, policyscape(s)); network includes networks, networked, networking, network's; global includes globalisation, globalization, globally, globalised); philanthropy (includes philanthropic, philanthropists, philanthropies, philanthropy's); governance; OECD (includes oecdpisa); Teach For; Critical; Heterarchy (or heterarchical, heterarchies, Heterarchy); think tanks; sociology; boundary (includes boundary spanners or boundary spanning); hegemony (or hegemonic); privatisation (or privatization(s), private, privatizing).

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ACTOR-NETWORK THEORY

A material-semiotic approach to policy analysis

Rizwana Shahzad and Radhika Gorur

Introduction

Education policy critique draws upon a range of theories and methodologies, from statistical longitudinal analyses that trace the trajectory of the relationship between poverty and achievement to detailed ethnographic studies of single schools or classrooms. Although education is steeped in humanistic thinking, in more recent times, post-humanist approaches and 'new materialisms' have begun to be valued in education policy research. New materialisms are approaches that consider material objects to be significant components of the social world. While the term 'new materialisms' is often traced to the work of Coole and Frost (2010) and Bennett (2010), following Landri (2015), we include actor-network theory (ANT), which precedes these works by about three decades, under this umbrella. ANT is consistent with the description of 'new materialisms' by Devellennes and Dillet (2018) as interested in understanding and shaping human–non-human interactions in social worlds. This chapter elaborates the salient features of ANT and demonstrates how it may be put to work in studies of education policy.

ANT originated in science and technology studies (STS) in the late 1980s through the work of Bruno Latour, John Law and Michel Callon. Initially, ANT was focused on studies of science – particularly laboratory science and studies of technology. Over time, a diverse 'diaspora' of ANT scholars have deployed ANT and its variants in different fields including anthropology, feminism, geography, organisational sociology, environmental planning and health care (Saldanha, 2003). At the same time, ANT began to lose some of its awkward jargon and to engage in interesting ways with upsetting binaries such as subject/object and centre/periphery, with profound implications for

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ontology and ontological politics. These later studies have sometimes been referred to as 'second-wave ANT' or post-1999 ANT (Law, 1999). Many of the principles of second-wave ANT were outlined in Latour's (2005) *Reassembling the Social*, and Law's (2004) *After Method*.

Beyond exploring how science, technology and society shape each other, ANT scholars have also concerned themselves with 'politics, governance and regulation' (Gorur et al., 2019). ANT studies critique projects of modernity and the values associated with enlightenment and scientific rationality, such as evidence-based policy, instrumentalism, thin forms of accountability and straightforward narratives of progress. They encourage us to look behind the scenes at the messy and complex realities which are elided in clean accounts of rationality and progress, arguing that such elisions perpetrate epistemic and ontological violence. These sensibilities draw attention to those who are marginalised or harmed by contemporary policy conceptualisations which are 'data driven' and 'evidence-based', and in this, ANT aligns itself with and is sometimes used alongside feminist and decolonial theories.

Key concepts of ANT

ANT has introduced a number of innovative concepts that challenge certain basic assumptions about knowledge, subjectivity and society that underpin more traditional sociological theories. By emphasising anti-foundationalism, socio-materiality and relationality, it directs attention to the often-mundane practices through which ideas come to be taken for granted, practices standardised, and policies assembled or disassembled. We elaborate these aspects of ANT in this section.

Anti-foundationalism

Foundational theories are based on the possibility that some truths can be held as true without requiring prior justified beliefs, on the basis of coherence, experience or reason. ANT is anti-foundational in that it does not take any phenomenon for granted – rather, it encourages exploration of how truth claims come to hold or fall apart, how beliefs become stronger or decline, how practices become routine or open to question. It rejects the notions of a single truth, meta-narratives and a mimetic theory of representation (Latour, 1987, Pickering, 2010). ANT 'treat(s) everything in the social and natural worlds as a continuously generated effect of the webs of relations within which they are located' (Law, 2009, p. 141) and it attempts to explore how relations cohere to enact realities.

This anti-foundationalist stance produced surprising accounts of science in the making. Examining scientists in action, ANT studies demonstrated that facts and truths emerge as a result of complex associations between social,

technical, natural, physical and economic elements. It is only when all the associations are put in place but held in position can a fact be produced. This is described by Latour as the Janus-faced nature of science. Whereas scientists may claim, 'When things are true, they hold', Latour argues that the story is also that 'When things hold, they start becoming true' (Latour, 1987, p. 12).

ANT thus makes a distinction between 'science in the making' and 'finished science' using concepts such as 'translation', 'problematisation', 'enrolling allies', 'obligatory passage points', 'trials of strength' and 'centres of calculation' (Callon, 1987; Law, 1992) to describe the 'behind the scenes' activities involved in producing scientific facts. These concepts have given ANT a technical vocabulary with which to analyse how relations between actors come to be stabilised, and how power is mobilised and distributed within a network or assemblage.

ANT's anti-foundationalism also has enormous implications for the social sciences and for education policy research. Such phenomena as neoliberalism, globalisation, race, class, gender and ethnicity are not taken as a priori explanations of phenomena. Instead, these phenomena would themselves become objects of research. Ong and Collier (2008), for example, argue that taking neoliberalism as an explanation for policy convergence is too simplistic. They show that neoliberalism is not a tsunami that has swept over the global landscape; it is assembled afresh at each location. This accounts for the differences in how neoliberalism is practiced in different places and in its effects on different societies.

Law (2008) argues that ANT's anti-foundationalist stance breaks down what appears monolithic into a series of practices or chains of association. This shift offers both empirical detail and hope for change. In describing phenomena as chains of associations, ANT studies open up prospects of interventions (Law, 2009; Gorur, 2017).

Society as relationally composed of humans and non-humans

A key departure from traditional sociology is ANT's view of the composition of society, which is imagined as a hybrid assemblage of human and non-human actors imbricated in complex relations. Our identity and our capacities are a result of complex associations between us and other humans and non-humans. Every aspect of our description – work affiliation, family connections, nationality – depends on a trail of documents, rules, policies, laws, institutions and so on. So, ANT argues that individual actors are hybrid assemblages, dependent on the support of a whole network (or society) of humans and non-humans.

If individual actors cannot be described without reference to society, then society can also not be described without reference to the actors that constitute it. Any identifiable 'society' is formed by the individual actors that compose it. Individuals and societies are thus *relationally produced* – individuals

are assembled through the societies which enable them to function as individuals, and societies are made up of these composite individuals. This is why 'actor' and 'network' are hyphenated – *actors and networks produce each other*.

A key implication of ANT's ontological relationality is that power and agency are not seen as inherent qualities of any actor, but as effects of relations between actor-networks. The job of the researcher is to explore how power and agency circulate between actors, how they are destabilised or made durable, how they are curtailed or extended, how they morph and change. In this dance of agency and power, non-human actors are thoroughly imbricated. They are key to the processes of cementing relations, translating interests and extending power. Latour's example of the hotel key (1991) exemplifies this point. To prevent hotel guests from slipping the room key into their pocket or handbag and then losing it when they are out and about, the management can post signs and reminders requesting patrons to leave the keys at the reception. But guests could ignore the request because it would require them to make a detour to the reception and await their turn for the receptionist's attention. But if the keys were weighted down with a heavy and bulky fob, guests would willingly make their way to the reception to avoid carrying the heavy key around. The heavy fob extends the agency of the hotel management. The keys exert agency over the guests.

The idea of relationality has implications for the examination of social phenomena, including studies of education policy. Seeing phenomena as relationally produced requires that the thick network of actors which produce the phenomenon must be traced. ANT studies are therefore invariably detailed empirical accounts which trace associations between different actors to explore how a certain policy phenomenon is produced.

Materiality

Although the previous sections have established that ANT takes non-human actors seriously, we separately explain materiality here because this is one of the most controversial and most misunderstood aspects of ANT. In ANT, the term 'actor' (also known as 'actant') does not refer only to 'humans', it also embraces 'non-humans' such as technology, objects, nature, and organisations. In the words of Latour, 'an actor in a semiotic definition – an actant . . . can literally be anything provided it is granted to be the source of action' (1996, p. 373). Thus, for ANT researchers, anything that establishes itself as doing something – acting – is an actor*/actant*.

The shift from 'actor' to 'actant' is methodologically translated into the notion of 'generalised symmetry', which argues for symmetrical analytical treatment of both human and non-human actors without assigning a privileged status to human actors (Callon, 1986; Latour, 1987; Fenwick & Edwards, 2010) or *a priori* assignment of active or passive roles to different actants (Callon &

Law, 1997). This stance has enabled ANT researchers to explain how relations come to be inscribed and made durable or resisted and contested. It has enabled thick and complex descriptions. However, his symmetrical analysis and the understanding of non-humans as *agentic* has been one of the most controversial and most criticised aspects of ANT, in part because 'agency' is often mistakenly thought to mean 'intention'. But as more theories, under the umbrella of 'new materialisms' (Braidotti, 2006; Landri, 2015) have begun to gain popularity, this attention to non-human actors is becoming more accepted.

Taking materiality seriously is not only about appreciating participation of non-human actants but also about attending to how their material properties might engage in the processes of *translation*. In ANT, translation is the process by which actors come to be drawn into networks and kept in place. The notion of translation has been famously elaborated in Callon's (1986) seminal paper *Some elements of a sociology of translation* (1986). Callon described the processes of 'problematisation', 'interessment', 'enrolment' and 'mobilisation' as the means by which actors were convinced (i.e. their interests were translated) to join an assemblage. The materiality of non-human actors – for example, the weight of the hotel key in the example above – plays a part in the success or failure of translation. As Latour (1999) explains in *Pandora's Hope*, conducting a study in the rainforests of Boa Vista for prolonged periods can be uncomfortable as well as inefficient and difficult. To make research feasible, the scientists draw samples of soil, twigs, leaves, etc., and record measurements and take photographs. These translations of the forest into different material forms enable the scientists to sit in the comfort of their hotel room to begin their research. Later still, once the samples are catalogued, they may be turned into sketches, photographs or numbers, which enables them to become more easily transportable without loss (actual leaves might crumble or decompose, but sketches, photographs or numbers are less prone to decay or accident). Examples of translation in education policy include papers by Gorur (2011, 2015); Addey and Gorur (2020) and Gorur and Addey (2020). The pervasiveness of digitisation in education has made it all the more important to understand the ways in which materiality participates in the processes of ordering societies and translating interests.

While the physical aspects of materiality may be particularly valuable in certain types of empirical research, when it comes to policy research, a more important focus would be 'materialisation' – that is, how abstract entities are made 'material' or observable, tangible and quantifiable. The notion of 'quality', for example, is abstract, but improving 'quality' is a key goal of most education policies. To enable measuring and monitoring, quality is translated into a set of observable indicators. In education policy studies, this notion of materialisation is particularly salient to understand how worlds are made calculable and comparable (Gorur, 2015).

Performativity and multiplicity

Two further related notions are critical features of ANT. First, ANT argues that knowledge practices, including performance measurements, research, and surveys, do not merely produce descriptions or representations of existing realities; they produce new realities (Mol, 1999; Cetina & Preda, 2001; Pickering, 2010). This notion of performativity is different to the way in which Lyotard and Ball use the term, as pressure to demonstrate outcomes and excellence. In the ANT understanding, performativity has to do with ontological politics – that is with the production of realities. For example, in education, we can explore the performativity of assessments such as PISA. When PISA results are announced, it often sets in motion a series of changes. In Australia, for instance, the desire to do well in PISA has, at least in part, resulted in the development of a national curriculum, a national assessment in the form of NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy), and new accountability practices such as the publication of comparative data on schools on the MySchool website. These new practices have changed the reality of education for many actors in highly consequential ways. Even the anticipation of assessments can change realities. For example, NAPLAN coaching and tutoring services have opened up in Australia, and one can now buy workbooks through which parents or teachers can prepare children to perform well on the test, thus changing reality.

This notion of practices as performative ups the ante for the responsibility of both policymakers and researchers, since we enter the realm of 'ontological politics' through our practices of regulation, administration, knowledge making and so on. Methodologies come into view as political rather than neutral or benign. The focus shifts to the politics of categorisation, classification and standardisation, since these produce 'kinds of people' (Hacking, 1991), norms, deviance, etc.

If realities are produced through practices, they are also multiple, produced through a variety of often mundane, day-to-day practices. For example, 'school' is produced in different ways by different actors. Policymakers enact schools as sites of a nation's future economic success, and a site of intervention to raise student performance. Teachers may produce schools as spaces of pedagogic expertise, sites for disciplining unruly youth, or sites of care. Children may produce school as a site of joys and sorrows, of friendships and squabbles. These multiple realities co-exist, sometimes intersecting and overlapping. However, since they have to be enacted through practices, they are not infinite – they are 'more than one but less than many' (Mol, 2002). Understanding realities as multiple requires that researchers explore how multiple realities interact with each other in the social world to create social phenomena and enact power and difference.

How is ANT done?

Law distinguishes between ANT and 'strong' theories by emphasising that strong theories are explanatory, offering reasons for why something takes place, whereas ANT is descriptive (Law, 2009). It focuses on how something occurs, leaving those seeking more comprehensive explanations and accounts dissatisfied. Fenwick and Edwards complement Law's views by noting that 'ANT is not "applied" like a theoretical technology, but is more like a sensibility, an interruption or intervention, a way to sense and draw nearer to a phenomenon' (2010, p. ix). They stress that as a methodological approach ANT is concerned with an enquiry into 'how' actors 'come together and manage to hold together . . . to form associations' (Fenwick & Edwards, 2010, p. 3). So, the most basic questions ANT seeks to answer concern how different actors associate and assemble, how they act, how networks get established, stabilise or falter, how power and agency are exercised, how realities and knowledge are done. Some scholars therefore regard ANT more as a methodology than a theory (Venturini, 2010).

ANT studies are necessarily empirical case studies (Lee & Hassard, 1999). The basics of ANT – socio-materiality, performativity, relationality and multiplicity – form a certain sensibility with which ANT scholars set out to examine social or scientific phenomena. The work of the researcher is to describe the various associations between actors that make up a given phenomenon. In a well-constructed ANT account, actors are active participants in the unfolding narrative (Latour, 2005). A good ANT account describes the relations between actors. ANT researchers let the actors involved in the phenomenon describe their own understanding of that phenomenon. In this sense, ANT accounts bring to the fore the theories of multiple actors. According to Latour (2005):

> If I had to provide a checklist for what is a good ANT account – this will be an important indicator of quality – are the concepts of the actors allowed to be stronger than that of the analysts, or is the analyst doing all the talking?
> *(Latour, 2005, p. 30)*

But ANT does not simply describe who is connected to whom; it also describes 'how relations assemble or don't' (Law, 2009, p. 142) and the nature of these connections.

ANT scholars use a range of methods, including documentary analysis, interviews, surveys, focus groups and digital methodologies. Understanding non-humans as actors poses some challenges: how does one 'interview' non-human actors? However, with practice, these questions become easier to answer. A policy document carries within it traces of many connections. It may mention research studies and surveys such as PISA or a report by Pearson. It

may make reference to a speech by the Prime Minister, or to policies in a different nation. Non-human actors thus leave traces and their effects become visible as these traces are followed and mapped. By analysing policy documents, literature, historical records and data, we are able to follow non-human actors, hear their stories and trace their effects.

According to Latour (2005), the descriptions, narratives and stories presented by ANT studies serve as a 'functional equivalent of a laboratory' – a place where trials, experiments and simulations are performed. Through this analogy of laboratory, he points out that the descriptive accounts presented by ANT might not be neat and coherent, and they might not present the whole account. Mol suggests that ANT research presents variations, sets up contrasts and proposes shifts, adding that 'the art is not to build a stronghold, but to adapt the theoretical repertoire to every new case' (Mol, 2010, p. 256). ANT, therefore, does not simply repeat and confirm or refute existing accounts but rather presents a number of new cases, accounts and descriptions that are different from existing ones.

Examples of ANT research in education policy

ANT began to make an appearance in the field of education and education policy from the late 1990s, starting with early-ANT inspired work and then branching into a range of second-wave ANT studies. ANT-inspired research and, more generally, STS-inspired research in education have focused on a range of issues, such as standards and quality (Fenwick, 2010; Koyama, 2012; Mulcahy, 2011); curriculum, teaching and learning (Edwards, 2011; Nespor, 2012; Sørensen, 2009); data and technology (Bigum, 1997; Ratner et al., 2019; Komljenovic, 2021); assessments (Addey, 2014; Gorur, 2011, 2015); globalisation (Addey & Gorur, 2020); and higher education (Alarcón López et al., 2021; Fox, 2005). ANT-informed research on education policy include studies by Edwards (2002), Waltz (2004), Gorur (2010), Hamilton (2011), Mulcahy (2018) and Landri (2020). With rising interest in how new technologies, climate change and, more recently, COVID, are impacting education, the material semiotic sensibility of ANT and of STS more broadly are beginning to gain greater traction in education policy research. In this section, we present two examples based on our own research on education policy that were able to benefit from the conceptual and methodological underpinnings of ANT.

Strategic incoherence: the assessment multiple and education policy

Education policy research has increasingly focused on issues and controversies surrounding student assessments as technologies of transparency and accountability. Using the conceptual and methodological framework of ANT, Shahzad (2022) has recently contributed a sub-national education policy perspective on

student assessments, with empirical accounts of the technology of educational governance in Punjab, the most populous province in Pakistan. With 11.14 million students, 366,671 teachers, and 48,238 primary, middle and high schools (PMIU, 2021) Punjab is not only Pakistan's largest sub-national educational system, but it also serves as a laboratory for major education reforms.

Her research draws on Latour's advice to follow the actors (1987), trace the networks (1996) and let the actors do the talking (2005). She employs a mix of data collection and analysis tools (interviews with education policymakers and implementers; analysis of policies, planning documents, school education statistics and budget documents; and analysis of published information or data in print, electronic and social media) to include multiple human and non-human actors engaged in 'education policy doing' in Punjab. Using this methodological approach and ANT concepts (such as multiplicity, performativity, centres of calculation, relationality and punctualisation), she explores the mechanisms and arrangements through which contemporary modes of ordering and calculation are creating new parallel structures for asserting power in Punjab, which she refers to as 'the assessment multiple'. Her research demonstrates how competing interests and evolving interconnections of diverse actor-networks, especially international development partners, contribute to creating and sustaining coexisting multiple centres of calculation such as the nine Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISEs), Punjab Examination Commission (PEC), Punjab Education Foundation Quality Assurance Test (QAT), and Literacy and Numeracy Drive (LND) test.

This 'assessment multiple' (Mol, 2002), she contends, mobilises, enacts and circulates multiple realities that are neither coherent nor comparable; nonetheless, they coexist without much confrontation or friction mainly through discontinuity (Law, 2008, p. 14) and distribution (Mol, 2002) at different sites, that is, they are distributed across different centres of calculation. The strategic distribution and (in)coherence of the assessment multiple, on the one hand, allow transnational actors to exercise agency and power in Punjab's education policy, while on the other, it increases the complexity and messiness of policy doing in the province – a messiness that cannot be contained by provincial ordering exercises as done by the new Assessment Policy Framework, 2019 in the province. She suggests that government must steer through the complexities of the political economy of reform and restructuring to reduce the messiness of the assessment multiple, ultimately making meaningful calculations possible.

Making the user friendly: the ontological politics of digital data platforms

Datafication and governing by numbers is now a global policy phenomenon. Gorur and Dey's (2021) paper empirically examines this phenomenon as it

unfolds in India. It describes the processes by which India's vast and complex system of 1.5 million schools across 29 states and seven Union Territories, serving 260 million students, was tamed into a single management information system called UDISE+. To be able to gather data from schools scattered throughout the nation, including private and semi-private schools, remote and single-teacher schools, the government relied on schools and teachers to upload a range of data, such as enrolment statistics, the teacher–student ratio, whether or not the school had a toilet and drinking water, etc. The regular input of accurate data was seen as critical to the success of a range of reforms initiated by the government.

Understanding the data platform UDISE+ as performative, the study explored the ontological politics that emerged with this data platform. It also engaged the ANT notion of configuring the user (Woolgar, 1990) to understand how NIEPA (National Institute for Educational Planning and Administration), the federal agency responsible for developing and administering UDISE+, persuaded overworked school principals and teachers, plagued as they were with unreliable electricity supply and poor internet access, to upload accurate data in a timely fashion to feed the world's largest education data management system, with mixed success.

Based on interviews with a series of school-based officials and lower-level bureaucrats in one state in India, and the examination of policy documents, government websites and key officials at NIEPA, the study argued that in order to produce a 'user-friendly system', NIEPA had to persuade a range of actors to be 'friendly' towards the system. These strategies were then elaborated as follows. First is by inviting and securing the user through a TV advertising campaign which presented data uploading as a patriotic duty and a matter of pride but also the pain of penalty if schools defaulted. Second is by persuading users to upload accurate data in standardised formats by using software options that prevented missing fields or entering unlikely numbers into a field, providing FAQs and friendly pop-ups to guide data input (though interviewees reported that the amount of time and energy required to satisfy frequent requests to upload data meant that accuracy was sometimes compromised). And finally, by rearranging relations of trust between different local actors, by building in validation checks and using transparency to keep each other honest. However, relying on parents and colleagues to tell on each other if the data provided was inaccurate did not necessarily work, because, for the school-based and provincial actors, loyalty and the ties with the people in the immediate community were greater than their allegiance to distant federal bureaucrats. This chapter concludes by exploring the consequences of data dreams, and argues that India's UDISE+ and the accountability system of which it is part can only work as a trusted database if it manages to create mistrust between actors at the local level.

The politics of ANT: ANT-inspired research

A key criticism of ANT has been that it does not account for the pre-existing power of actors (Collins & Yearley, 1992). It does not presume that the classical pillars of sociological research – class, gender, ethnicity and race – are the key to the way power and difference are produced in society. Instead, it takes a radical emergence approach and considers that power is produced relationally and contingently from the actions and practices of actors within the network from moment to moment (Latour, 1986; Law, 1986). ANT responds to this criticism by asserting that any actor-network that exerts power leaves behind traces that can be empirically studied (Latour, 1987). Thus, the influence exerted by pre-existing actor-networks, such as race and religion, will be traced in the empirical description. Accordingly, when researchers treat these pre-existing actor-networks in the same manner as other actor-networks within the assemblage, they can identify and describe the precise way in which these actor-networks exercise power.

Latour contends that for understanding power relations, we must learn from actors 'not only what they do but how and why they do it' (1999, p. 19). Consequently, the focus is on the technologies and mechanisms of power rather than on the broad assumptions about power and subjugation. Latour (1987) and Callon and Law (1997) place emphasis on the symmetrical treatment of all actors, focusing on their associations and listening to their descriptions and stories to understand how, exactly, identities are shaped, and power comes to be deployed. Edwards argues that ANT 'provides a framework for analysing the exercises of power' (2002, p. 355). Latour also claims, '[p]ower and domination have to be produced, made up, composed. Asymmetries exist, yes, but where do they come from and what are they made out of?' (2005, p. 64). ANT helps understand asymmetries in the exercise of power by tracing how power is materially and discursively extended, and the practices which enable this extension (Latour, 1996).

In their special issue on STS in education, Gorur et al. (2019) argue that ANT/STS are particularly suited to the study of education policy because:

> STS has a rich array of concepts and analytical methods to offer to studies of: knowledge practices and epistemic cultures; the interrelationship between states and knowledge; regulatory practices, governance and institutions; and classrooms, pedagogy, teaching and learning. Most importantly, it provides a fresh perspective on how power operates in ordering societies, disciplining actors and promoting ideas and practices.

More recently, Landri and Gorur (2022) have argued that ANT's 'flat ontology' can be usefully deployed in the study of international and comparative

education, bringing a relational understanding to the notion of 'context' that pushes beyond 'context as container'.

With its attention on non-humans and its focus on practices, ANT has much to offer in studies of contemporary sites of education policy, which increasingly involve algorithmic decision-making, technology-mediated knowledge-making, governing by dashboard, and the proliferation of ed tech in education.

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12

THE VITAL MATERIALITY OF POLICY

Jennifer Clutterbuck

Introduction

Policies that govern the rapidly evolving place of technology in education systems require equally evolutionary analytical tools. I illustrate throughout this chapter the approach taken in researching a data infrastructure integral to the digital education governance of state schooling in Queensland, Australia: namely, OneSchool. Contemporary policy discussions are inclusive of the human and nonhuman participants of synthetic governance (Gulson et al., 2022). Policy creators are not the only makers of meaning but also join other policy actors in the socio-technical-political spaces created by the entanglements of policy, data, and digital infrastructures. This chapter contributes to the policy analysis literature by considering such entanglements through a materialist lens. First, I present how a methodological bricolage was crafted to be adaptable to the policy artefacts examined. Second, I show how the incorporation of new feminist materialism into the bricolage provided distinctive insights into the analysis of the development and use of policy in its varied formats.

I consider the materiality of policy through two notions that are as inseparable as they are irreducible to each other. In the first notion, I focus attention on the material substantiations of policy, as problems and proposed solutions are rendered into announcements, documented words, and coded interactive screens, to govern actions that achieve desirable (and often measurable) outcomes. In the second notion, attention is paid to the affective agency and performativity of the matter of policy (Barad, 2007, 2008). Attending to the importance of policy's matter adds to the current privileging of language, discourse, and culture in policy analysis; the matter of policy matters (Barad,

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2008; Ahmed, 2010). The 'lively powers of [policy's] material formations' (Bennett, 2010, p. vii), as it shifts between concept, document, code, infrastructure, data, values, and more, are important to the process of analysing policy. Policy's matter alters the ways it performs as an active participant within education effecting its 'thing-power', its vital materiality (Bennett, 2010, p. ix). When considering the vitality of policy, I focus on its ability to:

> impede or block the will and designs of humans . . . to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own.
>
> *(Bennett, 2010, p. viii)*

In this chapter, I present insights into how the vital materiality of policy was important in understanding how the data infrastructure, OneSchool, affected education practitioners and their practices. The data infrastructure OneSchool is a key policy artefact in state education in Queensland, Australia. Launched in 2008, OneSchool was conceived and developed by the government department that continues to use it to manage more than 575,000 students' data from 1,258 primary, secondary, and special, public government schools. OneSchool is mutually constitutive of policy; its development and uses are governed by policy, while it is integral for policy development and enactment. Researching the ways OneSchool affected education practitioners and their practices required analysis of the inter- and intra-actions of the technologies of governance: policy, data, and data infrastructures. Key outcomes of the research included the identification of the materiality of these three elements of what I call the datafied policy space. The datafied policy space is used as a 'siting device' (Haraway, 2020, p. 60) to focus attention on the inter- and intra-actions that occur between policy, data, and data infrastructures. I suggest that focusing on the effects and affective agency created by these actions enables researchers and policy analysts to imagine not-yet-realised possibilities in rapidly changing times.

I continue this chapter with an explanation of the incorporation of new feminist materialism into the bricolage. My thoughts and reasonings are provided as a behind-the-scene view as I analysed data in relation to processes, products, and practices of policy within the rapidly shifting field of digital education governance. The methodological bricolage was recrafted at key ruptures. Ruptures occurred as new questions arose and unexpected data remained unexplained. Next, two of these rupture-inducing questions are explored from their creation to the analysis of participants' responses. The first question 'What is policy?' assisted in the development of a shared language with which to explore policy's spatial, geographic, and temporal mattering. The second question 'Was it worth it?' activated a recrafting the bricolage. I then discuss the ways in which the vital materiality of policy was recognised through the words and actions of participants as they moved toward and away

from the technologies of governance. Lastly, I show that recognising the vital materiality of policy offers a way both to understand contemporary policy and to illuminate paths for policy in a speculative futuristic time, place, and matter of 'elsewhere' (Haraway, 2004, p. 63).

Constructing a methodological bricolage

A bricolage of methodologies and theories underpins this research into the technologies of education governance. The technologies of governance, that is the knowledges, skills, tools, and apparatus of authority and control, manifest within education systems as policy, data, and data infrastructures. These three elements and their intersecting spaces were investigated through a bespoke methodological approach that incorporated theorising, data collection, and analysis methods that were adaptable to the rapidly changing field of digital education governance. Adaptability is an important characteristic of methodological approaches used to research rapidly shifting technological fields.

The bricolage cycles (Cartel & Boxenbaum, 2019) of crafting and trialling created a methodological approach that continually responded to the demands of the research. I found these iterative cycles reminiscent of the recursive prototyping and testing processes applied to the technical builds of policy and data infrastructures. Research amendments that resulted from the cyclical reviews of the bricolage methodology were viewed as desired redevelopments rather than troublesome errors of a 'failed' research process. Amendments were made throughout the research – in response to the research – to participant questions, analysis methods, and the theoretical consideration of data.

Crafting the theorising tools

The theoretical tools selected to create the methodological bricolage aligned with both the research and researcher. As an insider researcher, my professional positioning within Queensland's state schooling system provided an autoethnographic perspective that was considered through the Foucauldian conceptual pairing of power and knowledge. My insider observations were challenged and confirmed by those of participants who also resided in Queensland's state schools, Central and Regional offices and the OneSchool development project. During interviews, participants and I reminisced; challenging and confirming each other's recollections of events to validate versions that went beyond those captured in official documentation. My insider positioning provided access to a wide range of viewpoints, gathered from those I knew, and from those I knew 'of' throughout the 'hierarchical geographies' (Clutterbuck, 2022, p. 4) of Queensland's state schooling system. Hierarchical geographies incorporated both the physical locations of schools and Central and Regional offices and the hierarchies established through the socio-political conditions

and interactions of school leaders and senior bureaucrats. Taking advantage of my insider positioning supported Foucault's (1980) view that only those with 'involvement' in the 'struggles' that take place within the researched area can authentically record a 'historical work that has political meaning' (p. 64). As a participant in schools and governing authority spaces, I had over the years been working through the 'struggles' of creating policy, data, and data infrastructures alongside many of the interviewed participants. Within policy analysis, doing policy, whether creating or enacting, rather than simply thinking about policy, connects the researcher with the subject of their analysis. Barad (2007) considers the 'knowledge-making practices' that researchers undertake as the 'material enactments that contribute to and are part of, the phenomena [described]' (Barad, 2007, p. 247).

As I attempt to present the research in a linear fashion in this chapter, I am reminded that when looking back across a research project, time becomes somewhat unstable. I met many participants and had unknowingly gathered ethnographic research data in the form of personal and work diaries and notebooks before even considering the research. A survey was conducted prior to the interviews with categories pre-determined from my pre-knowledge. Almost 200 Department of Education staff (n = 199) participated in the online survey that sought their views on education policy, data, and digital infrastructures.

Descriptive and thematic analyses were used to make sense of the survey's quantitative and qualitative data. The findings were used to inform the interview questions and conversations. There was also a plan to use similar analysis methods with the interview data. However, the initial manual and machine thematic analysis was insufficient in capturing the importance of the ways in which participants shared their experiences. The analysis methods of the methodological bricolage were recrafted to incorporate narrative inquiry to enable an analytical focus on participants' storied accounts. Acknowledging the role of narratives as a 'universal form of human sense making' (Riessman, 2017, p. 258) provided a focus not only on what participants said but also on how they shared and arranged their stories. Participants' narratives brought policy to life, and these shared (and at times co-constructed) stories were recognised as valuable data.

Analysis of what and how stories were told provided a framing for the at times contradictory perspectives of the communities in which policies were presented (Ozga et al., 2011). In the next section, I continue to attend to the nature of research practices (e.g. questioning) into policy and policy practices, to indicate how the materiality of both nature and practice matters.

Asking the questions

Two interview questions became privileged within the research, for their role in recrafting the bricolage and for the resulting data that led to important

findings. The question 'What is policy?' formed when analysis of the survey data indicated participants' different views and understandings of 'policy'. The subsequent interviews began with this question.

The second question 'Was it worth it?' relates to participants' perception of the worth of the data infrastructure, OneSchool. The question was prompted during the early planning days of the research, when Alex, a senior bureaucrat commented 'perhaps your research can determine whether all the effort was worth it'. This question became the final interview question.

Analysis of the data generated by this final question made visible the enchantments and disenchantments experienced by senior bureaucrats and school leaders in relation to policy, data, and data infrastructures. Participants were seemingly simultaneously driven toward and away from the technologies of governance. The initial theoretical tools, however, were insufficient to make sense of this phenomenon. It was at this stage that the methodological bricolage was recrafted to include a feminist materialism approach. In particular, Bennett's (2010) concept of the 'vital materialities' of 'things' (p. x) and Barad's (2007) belief that we needed to move beyond the importance of language, culture, and discourse to recognise that indeed 'matter, matters' (Barad, 2008, p. 122) were incorporated. Integrating a feminist materialism approach was used to understand the observed affective agency of non-human elements within the policy assemblage, which were starting to become apparent in interviews.

As such, this feminist new materialism approach enabled attention to the entanglement of human and non-human bodies within policy assemblages. Focusing on the importance of materiality within the entanglements of school leaders, policymakers, policy, digital technologies, showed how policy 'feels, converses, suffers, desires, yearns and remembers' (Barad in Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2012, p. 67). Such actions are shown in policy's practices as they archive instances and variations of themselves, imbricated with previous and future policy, and the practices and beings of education practitioners. Noting the material nature of policy practices signals how an understanding of OneSchool's governance of educational practices, and the practitioners themselves, are inextricably linked to an understanding of policy.

What is policy?

This section presents data in response to the first question outlined earlier, 'What is policy?', which illuminated the limits of common understandings of policy and the need to consider its materiality. As was introduced in Chapter 1 of this book, there are multiple understandings of policy, each influenced by the situated performativity of policy creators and enactors. Policy literature has a long history and a dynamic future, and these literatures enable a view of policy's shifting materiality. Policy's materiality is recognised as shifting over

time. While Easton (1953) viewed policy as being involved the 'decisions and actions that allocate values', Gulson et al. (2022) present 21st-century policy as being shaped by 'datafication and artificial intelligence' (p. 1).

Barad's (2007) concept of 'spacetimemattering' (p. 234) was used to realise the importance of the ways that participants spoke about policy as being impacted by space/place, time, and its vital materiality and matter.

Survey comments made by participants from across the hierarchical geographies of Queensland's state education system disrupted many of my own views, and those within the literature, of what policy was, and how and where policy existed. Statements made by secondary teachers indicated that policy was 'not part of my role' and that 'my support [for policy] is not requested or encouraged'. A Regional Office-based specialist[1] who worked across a variety of schools was dismissive of policy, explaining, 'my work is reactive rather than proactive and focusses locally on my schools'. Other survey participants commented that policy existed 'elsewhere'. A secondary teacher stated that '[policies] are done at management level' and a regional senior bureaucrat added that 'the region does not develop policy – that is done at the state level'. During a previous conversation with a senior bureaucrat, the comment was made that 'we don't do policy here [Central Office] anymore, that's for legislators'. These comments show that policy's materiality enables it to be moved or even removed from an educational practitioner's environment.

These and other responses to the interview question 'What is policy?' were manually and then machine analysed. The manual process established coding that identified six themes for how participants viewed policy: legislation, requirement, guide, flexible, protection, and document. Text passages containing participants' answers to the question 'What is policy?' were then entered into Leximancer. Leximancer is a thematic analysis tool that uses content, themes, and semantics (Leximancer Pty Ltd, 2018). Machine analysis was added to reduce a risk of privileging the view of policy as presented in the auto-ethnographic data that had been shaped by my personal timespacematter circumstances. Second, as stated earlier, the bricolage was designed to align with both the research and the researcher. As someone who is enamoured by technological solutions and disentangling the semantics of educational (often jargonistic) language, Leximancer appealed to me. The themes and concepts determined through the machine analysis were considered alongside the initial coding and manually compiled into a 'definition' of policy:

> Policy has to do with people doing things; it relates to legislation, procedures, and guidelines, references the purpose and delivery of education, and affects the work of educationalists.

This definition of policy captures a sense of 'action' or 'doing'. However, the dispassionate nature of the definition hides the often emotive and contradictory

reactions of participants during policy discussions. The theoretical tools of Foucault's power/knowledge coupling helped make sense of the content of responses but did little to explain the reactive and emotional responses which included the physical reactions of rolled eyes, folded arms, and deep sighs. It was here that materiality became a useful tool with which to consider responses and reactions. Materiality offered a helpful way to analyse the codified matter of policy and the concept of policy as a form of governance and control. To study things, you first need to know that they exist, either through their visibility or from the reaction of self or others (Durkheim, 1895/1982). For example, Waverley (school leader) became quite anxious at the 'What is policy?' question, lowering their voice and quietly confiding, 'I don't know if I can name any of them'. For Waverley, policy was a force with power that could pose a risk if 'forgotten'.

The frequent negative tone to interview discussions about policy shifted when both school leaders and senior bureaucrats considered the role of policy in providing welcomed guidance and even protection for their daily practices:

> Policy is a tool to make you think that all of the things along the way to ticking all of the boxes.
>
> *(Sharon, school leader)*

> Policy works like guidelines or guides. It operates like borders, we work within the policy, work within the guidelines.
>
> *(Lex, school leader)*

Policy viewed as a protection was seen as a force that would:

> ensure we are accountable, [and] don't get ourselves into trouble.
>
> *(Blake, senior bureaucrat)*

> should something land on the front page of the newspaper – as long as you're covered by the policy – you'll be okay.
>
> *(Karen, school leader)*

Within the many definitions offered by participants, the language of policy was shown to matter, and the discourse of policy was shown to matter, but the mattering of its material form remained unexplored.

The matter of policy

The mattering of policy's material form is captured in an interview with Treedale primary school's leadership team. In answering the question 'What is policy?' Callum replied, 'a skinny document that sets the broad parameters'. When

asked how OneSchool related to policy, he replied: 'I don't know if it links to policy particularly'. The team discussed if OneSchool had space or functions that allowed them to upload school policy documents. Their view of policy focused on its document form and showed how the different material forms of policy are not readily recognised. Throughout the interview Callum repeated 'What is policy?' returning to the question to reconsider and expand on their answer:

> I think I'm getting myself into a bit of a hole here. What is policy? It has a strategic purpose [pause]. There's probably an operational part of policy that gives you the 'how to'. Policy is the organisational stuff, the guidelines . . . the broader context, the purpose, the vision statement. When I said a 'skinny document' [pause] I really meant distilling the essence.
>
> *(Callum, school leader)*

Sharing their thinking process as they determine what policy is, this school leader's dialogue illuminates the states of matter that policy exists in for them, from a physical document to an ethereal distilled essence. This took a turn, however, when the conversation between the leadership team shifted to the problematic ways in which OneSchool screens controlled the school's student academic reporting practices. Sarah suddenly interrupted, 'That's an example of policy and how it filters down through OneSchool!' The team realised that OneSchool was performing as a policy instrument governing schools in a manner that forced them to enact the changes required by the latest changes to the academic reporting policy.

The vital materiality of policy is shown here to have been transferred to the OneSchool data infrastructure. It was OneSchool that the Treedale school leadership team reacted to as impeding their desired way of reporting, rather than the policy. The academic reporting policy was available online as a document; however, schools readily accepted that practices conducted through OneSchool, being the education department's system, were in line with policy. While this leadership team recognised that all forms of the policy governed their practices, it was OneSchool that physically prevented them enacting the policy in their own manner and brought about their ire. The view that it was OneSchool who governed their practices, rather than the academic reporting policy *through* OneSchool revealed how OneSchool and policy's materiality entangled with the discursive practices of schooling. The governance of OneSchool over school practices was more readily recognised by education practitioners than the governance of policy over OneSchool functions. Their reaction was to OneSchool's functionality as the technical manifestation of the policy's 'essence'. In part, this entanglement is realised in the complex combinations of mandates and autonomous school-based decisions that governed the use of OneSchool in schools. As Min, a senior bureaucrat explained, 'whilst

it is important to follow policy, there seems to be lack of clarity regarding the mandate of policy statements versus policy'. 'Sasha', a school leader at Pemberville state school, explained that when it came to the use of OneSchool, 'there are massive inconsistencies across the state and that's been something that has driven me insane'.

Recognising the way in which data infrastructures alter a policy's matter from document to code assists in understanding how education practitioners engage with policy. The discourse of policy is seen to alter across its material forms, with 'discourse' here understood as inclusive of text, language, and communication, as well as the relationships between human and nonhumans within the contexts of space, time, and matter.

Recognising the 'spacetimemattering' (Barad, 2007, p. 234) of policy enables the analysis of policy to incorporate the effect of education practitioners succumbing to the allure of the oft-times problematic infrastructures required for the digital governance of education. Data infrastructures such as OneSchool are shown to become part of a policy work. As Helen, a senior bureaucrat, said:

> People interface with policy in very different ways. If you are using a system, you are interfacing with that system not the policy – although you really are – as the system interfaces with the policy.

Policy analysis therefore requires analysis of the unity of elements that constitute the policy work. The final published departmentally approved document is but one aspect of the policy work. The policy is inclusive of the evidence used to determine the need for the policy in the first place – established through data gathered from data infrastructures – the solution, and the expected reframed conditions. It is to be remembered that such processes, like time itself are not always linear. Indeed, as Barad (2007) reminds us, '[t]ime has a history' (p. 182) and so too does policy. Following policy through time and expecting linear, evenly spaced, and sequenced progress points are possibly naïve. As 'Robert', a senior bureaucrat from Central Office, commented, 'sometimes it's about finding data evidence to support the policy position just to firm up that that *is* our position'.

Policy creators are not the only makers of policy meaning, and quickly become participants in a much broader discussion. Policy discussions frequently become inclusive of the humans and nonhumans of synthetic governance (Gulson et al., 2022). Despite the entry into education of human and machine networks in problematic ways, school leaders and policymakers indicated that they moved toward and away from those objects in line with how they were affected by them (Ahmed, 2010). Data from the interview question 'Was it worth it?' reflected an enchantment with acknowledged problematic policy practices. The technologies of governance (policy, data, and digital infrastructures) are

recognised here as having developed the power themselves to 'rise up' (Foucault, 1994, p. 245), and the data illuminating this are explored next.

Was it worth it?

'Was it worth it?' was a research question to determine the worth of a data infrastructure designed to manage student data (it also became a challenge to my professional being, having been involved in the development of OneSchool). Previous professional experiences had me expecting very discordant answers to this final interview question. The deliberately vague question allowed participants to answer from their own professional positionality. The resulting data rather than divisive, indicated consensus in the positive: OneSchool was viewed by all participants as 'worth it'.

The closest to negative responses came from Mark, a senior bureaucrat. Mark started his response with seeking clarification: 'that's a loaded question. Was it worth the money that was spent on it? I didn't pay for it [laughter]'. He then shifted to expressing a positive value for OneSchool:

> I can't see a world without a common platform. I can't conceptualise something without OneSchool being there. It is complex, and it solves lot of complexities we would not have otherwise solved.
>
> *(Mark, senior bureaucrat)*

Sasha (school leader) noted that 'in terms of teachers on the ground, I know that it has increased their workload. The requirement for data entry is much greater'. Sasha then continued:

> On the other hand, class dashboards can be valuable tools for sharing students' achievement and progress with parents during meetings and parent/teacher interviews. It can also be very useful for management to access behaviour records when dealing with parents and carers. It allows multiple users within a school to have consistent access to data on attendance, behaviour, and academic progress.

These comments highlight how participants constantly moved away and toward OneSchool, a policy artefact, and the coded material manifestation of policy.

Emily (school leader) highlighted how access to information influenced their positive opinion:

> I think it's fantastic I love the capabilities of it and what you can do in it . . . [all] that data and I love that it goes with the child. When you get a new kid, you just look and go yep, you know where they are going to fit.

Likewise, Hannah (school leader, who had recently become a senior bureaucrat) spoke of OneSchool as the 'one-stop shop' for accessing student and school information:

> I love OneSchool, and I think thank goodness we have it – we could not go back to what we had. Absolutely loved it as a principal and love it now when I'm working with schools.

Wyatt (senior bureaucrat), Hannah's colleague, added:

> The data profiles and headline indicators are produced [by Central Office] every three months or whatever but the OneSchool system is very much now, and I can see what's going on without a delay.

School leaders and bureaucrats are shown here moving toward OneSchool for what it offers – knowledge – positioning them as active participants in the circulation of power (Ahmed, 2010). However, while the disenchantments did not lessen the enchantments, neither did the enchantments diminish the disenchantments.

Analysis of the negative experiences shared throughout the interviews provided insight into how the vital materiality of both policy and data infrastructures entangled as they became active components of the policy assemblage. When discussing OneSchool through the perspective of participants' performance and performativity within policy contexts, the responses were often negative. When referring to policy governed curriculum requirements, 'Wendy', a school leader, described OneSchool as 'a nightmare, sorry but it is'. Wendy's frustrations with curriculum policy requirements were redirected to the infrastructure where she interacted directly with the policy through coded screens. OneSchool impeded the ways in which education practitioners wished to dis/engage with policy, acting as a 'quasi agent' (Bennett, 2010, p. viii) in the enactment of policy.

Policy that determined OneSchool's use was, at times, contrary to the will of users. Sasha (school leader) raised the issue of not being able to record details of home visits in OneSchool. In Sasha's school, when it came to attendance, 'we are working really, really, hard. I'm doing home visits, and it's such a major part of our strategy in terms of parental engagement with attendance'. School leaders found it problematic to record such visits in a way that indicated their importance, eventually making the decision for visits to be 'recorded as informal discussions which doesn't capture the nature of the work or the investment that is being put into that stuff . . . they are the little things [about OneSchool] that drive me insane' (Sasha, school leader). Discussing the issue further, Sasha concluded that their frustration was because 'by following the [attendance] policy you don't get an outcome, so we have to add

on to the policy'. Here we can see how the vital materiality of policy not only impeded Sasha and her team's ability to show the importance of the home visits but also impeded the desire for OneSchool to be the 'one stop shop' for all student information.

These interactions with OneSchool show how the vital materiality of data infrastructures reshapes education practitioners' interactions with policy and in doing so reshape the materiality of the policies themselves. As education practitioners experienced positive interactions with policy, data, or data infrastructures they move toward them with expectations of further positive affective interactions. Even though OneSchool was viewed as problematic, people moved toward it for what they could gain (knowledge) and in doing so moved toward the policies that governed the data that provided student information. When the cost (time and effort) of data entry and management was high, practitioners moved away from data infrastructures and by doing so simultaneously moved away from data-governing policies thus disrupting the flow of data.

The flow and reflection of thing-power

A materialist approach to policy analysis provided a way to analyse and discuss how the 'vital materialities' of 'things' developed and 'flowed' (Bennett, 2010, p. x). Analysing the use of OneSchool indicates that power flows to individuals (teachers, school leaders) and groups (schools) in ways that enable them to become 'the vehicles of power' rather than simply 'its points of application' (Foucault, 1980, p. 98). The matter of power matters; identifying power as policy, power as data, and power as knowledge affects education practitioners' practices.

Policy, viewed from the perspectives offered by school leaders and senior bureaucrats, is 'not ensured by right but by technique, not by law but by normalization, not by punishment but by control' (Foucault, 1978, p. 89). The more normalised the techniques of using policy encoded into OneSchool to control the discourse of education, the more OneSchool became an active participant, seemingly with its own propensities. OneSchool's tendency to control practitioners and their practices (as Sasha found with entering home visit information) flowed both from the desires of users to move toward or away from both the infrastructure and the policies encoded within its screens. OneSchool's affect is seen to alter by what is 'around' it, 'behind' it and how these peripherals alter 'the conditions of its arrival' (Ahmed, 2019, p. 21).

The vital materiality of policy

I encourage those who seek to analyse policy to take the 'matter' of policy seriously by considering both the materiality and performativity of policy. That

is, the performativity of policy has been shown to be bounded by its material conditions as it presents as document, code, or 'essence'. In these material formations of policy, the mattering of the matter of policy is as important as the ways that 'Language matters. Discourse matters. Culture matters' (Barad, 2007, p. 132). With the expansion of 'synthetic governance' (i.e. 'human *and* machine governance' that bring together 'machines *and* bodies' (Gulson et al., 2022, p. 4 [emphasis added])), the material nature of policy requires greater consideration than ever before. By noting 'the material nature of practices and how they come to matter' (Barad, 2007, p. 45) a more fulsome analysis of policy can be achieved.

I have illustrated how the materiality of education policy is made visible through the reactions of school leaders, teachers, and education bureaucrats toward policy and policy artefacts such as OneSchool. Students also react to the materiality of policy as it drives the practices governing and datafying their schooling (see Daliri-Ngametua, 2021). The reactions are not simply in response to the directives within a particular policy, rather responses to policy as a material rendering of power, and paradoxically of protection against power. 'Sasha', a school leader, explained how policy provided 'borders for whatever protection we might need'. Policy, viewed as materially rendered 'borders', provides a safe place in which education practitioners can operate. The vital materiality of policy is identified here as impeding and blocking the possible risks from which 'people need to be protected within our system' (Sasha, school leader). Sasha demonstrated such blocking as she described policy processes in OneSchool metaphorically as, 'big red letters to say stop here and do this'. However, it is also important to note that the materiality of policy does not replace the importance of language, discourse, and culture in policy analysis. As Sasha commented, reminding us of the importance of time and space in the analysis of policy:

> The school still does what it wants to do, whether it is a policy or not. It's a good idea at the time, so let's do it . . . that may be more of a school culture thing.

Overall, determining the vital materiality of policy, its lively presence, its thing-power through the reactions to the policy and to the reactions of the humans and nonhumans that surround it, assists policy analysts in traversing the non-linear path of policy. These entangled paths are made visible in the datafied policy space as the technologies of governance interact. The datafication of policy is revealed through the data informing policy, and how this is coded into being to direct the management of data. The datafied policy space also shows how infrastructures are both policy artefacts and simultaneously managing the data that inform policy, and how the materiality of one element is reflected onto another as they interact.

In this chapter, I have shown how a methodological bricolage provided a way to 'keep up' with policy shifts by drawing on a research project focused on the effect of a data infrastructure on educational practitioners and their practices. The inclusion of new feminist materialism into the bricolage illustrates the importance of the matter of policy and the relationship between the material and the discursive. The need to attend to the materiality of policy has evolved within the increasingly digitalised and datafied environment of contemporary education. Investigating policy through new feminist materiality alters the policy being researched – no longer is OneSchool a policy artefact but it is a material form of policy that impedes, facilitates, and alters the humans and non-human within the policy assemblage. The analysis of policy requires attention to the nature of policy practices, and it is here that identifying the vital materiality of policy benefits the researcher who seeks to analyse policy.

Note: Pseudonyms are used throughout for all participants and schools.

Note

1 (Guidance Officer, Physiotherapist, Behaviour specialist)

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13

INSTITUTIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Discovering how education policy organises the everyday work of people

Nerida Spina

Introduction

> [Institutional ethnography] is a sociology, a method of inquiry into the social that begins and always stays with actual people and their doings; it seeks to discover just how actual people's doings are coordinated with others.
>
> (Smith & Griffith, 2022, p. 3)

Australian education policy is full of ideals, from the desire to build a more equitable system to goals of climbing international rankings in the pursuit of excellence. The Mparntwe Declaration is one example of a policy that establishes these kinds of aspirations (Australian Education Council, 2019). Admirable as these may be, educational policies that advocate for goals such as "excellence" and "equity" are often removed from the everyday realities of the people who work in education: imagine a school principal spending significant time reviewing documentation to ensure every child with a disability at their school receives the funding to which they are entitled, yet feeling conflicted because they have not had time to support a beginning teacher who is struggling to implement inclusive pedagogies in the classroom.

The goal of institutional ethnographic (IE) research is to restore the realities of life to research, while generating meaningful and rigorous analysis that unearths the operation of power. Ultimately, IE research shows how social relations and peoples' everyday doings are coordinated within institutions. While IE enables the analysis of education policy, it is distinct from many other research approaches in that it begins from the standpoint of people such as teachers or educators, rather than with a textual analysis of conceptual ideas contained in policy. This chapter commences with an introduction to IE and

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its foundational premises. It then explains how an IE project typically unfolds, from interviewing participants through to analysing texts and creating a map of power relations across institutions. Examples of IEs conducted in education are used to illustrate how it has been used across diverse settings to reveal how education policies shape the lives of people.

The evolution of a sociology for people

When Canadian sociologist Dorothy E. Smith first developed IE, it was unusual for women to undertake university study, or even to continue working once married. Smith found herself in a workplace where she was the only woman among 40 male academic counterparts. The perspectives that were given space in public discourses and institutional policies, including education, belonged to men. Dorothy observed that the everyday realities of women were all but invisible in wider discourses. As she saw it, research and academia were largely controlled by men. Sociology, she noticed, "operated in abstractions, tidying up the messiness of people's complex lives in order to produce concepts that were woven into ruling practice" (DeVault, 2021, p. 4). These realisations led Smith to develop the method of inquiry known as IE.

What is institutional ethnography?

While IE researchers typically use ethnographic methods, IE is more than an ethnography of an institution. A fundamental aim for the IE researcher is to generate a picture of how power works to orchestrate the everyday lives of people across institutions. While an "orthodox ethnographic gaze of looking within a bounded setting or group" (Doherty, 2015, p. 349) has many methodological affordances, institutional ethnography adds the opportunity to "look up and into" (Smith, 2006, p. 5) the operation of power. IE examines how those with authority exert power, often through institutional texts and policies, and are therefore able to rule the lives and relations between people in institutions. Some foundational IE concepts are introduced below.

What is the institution?

The term "institution" does not refer to a single organisation such as an early childhood centre, college, school or even education department. Instead, the term describes the "complex set of relations that form part of the ruling apparatus normally organised around a specific function, such as education" (Smith, 1987, p. 160). The word institution is used because it makes room for analysis of a range of different forms of organisation. Schools, for example, are typically connected through the regional offices of education departments or authorities. In turn, these are connected to central offices, government

departments and national bodies that oversee education policy and funding. Across these networks, texts (which could be as big as a national policy and as small as an email) are used to create and sustain institutional connections, as people interact with these texts and each other.

What is work?

A key task in any IE is to make the everyday/night work of people visible (Smith, 2003, p. 61), including the often overlooked doings that constitute daily life. Smith's generous definition of work includes anything that "people do in the course of their everyday lives . . . everything that people know how to do and that their daily lives require them to do" (in Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 72). For many people in education, a lot of what happens in the everyday does not fall within official definitions of work. A primary school teacher planning a cooking activity to demonstrate science concepts might make a trip to the supermarket on a Sunday afternoon to buy groceries for the lesson. This might necessitate putting together a resource list, driving, selecting grocery items and scanning items at the checkout. The night before the activity, the teacher might pack up bowls and other items at home to bring in to school. On the day of the activity, she might arrive at work early to set up the classroom for the activity, and so on. Smith uses the words "everyday" and "every night" or "every day/night" to refer to these many forms of hidden work that happen, and that allow institutions to accomplish goals. This simple example illustrates how days, nights and weekends are often interpolated with "hidden" forms of work. As Smith (2003) writes, it is important to see all forms of work, in order to turn it "from its extraordinary invisibility into visibility" (p. 63). Why is it worth taking the time to make work visible? Smith (1999) describes:

> Whatever exists socially is produced/accomplished by people "at work," that is, active, thinking, intending, feeling, in the actual local settings of their living and in relationships that are fundamentally among particular others – even though the categories of ruling produce particular others as expressions of its order.
>
> *(p. 75)*

Finding the research problematic

In IE, the research problematic (Smith, 1987) or *disjuncture* refers to the difference between knowing from an embodied perspective, and knowing from an objectified perspective. If you are involved in education – as an educator, leader, policymaker, parent, student – you may well have sensed a misalignment between how things happen in "real life", and how they are described

in institutional policies. As single mothers, Alison Griffith and Dorothy Smith (2005) described their guilt and feelings of inadequacy as they supported their children through school: "we used to get together and bitch about how we were treated as 'defective' parents, and eventually came together to develop a research project that would create an understanding of why 'single parents' were such a problem for schools" (Smith & Griffith, 2022, p. 14). In contrast, schools presumed that all families had a middle-class structure and resources (including time) to participate in a range of work in support of their children's schooling.

That problem, based on their own understandings of what it was like to be a single mother with school-aged children, led to Griffith and Smith's (2005) seminal work *Mothering for Schooling*, in which they put together a picture of how education policy and discourse (in Canada) had intensified parenting through expecting families to provide ever increasing help to their children as they progressed through school. In doing so, they revealed how middle-class families with two parents were presumed to be the norm, and were valued by schools because they had significantly more time to meet institutional goals of achieving higher educational standards with fewer resources. Their research showed that although single-parents and women in lower-income groups were equally supportive of their children's education, "where mothers' work does not, or cannot, participate fully in [the social relation between schools and families], the reproduction of a middle class is jeopardized" (p. 13). This example speaks to IE's approach of researching the *problematic* or *disjuncture* "between different versions of reality – knowing something from a ruling versus an experiential perspective" (Campbell & Gregor, 2002, p. 48).

Researching the everyday/night work of people

Data collection in an IE typically begins by talking with the people who are directly involved in the problem being researched. Rather than a structured interview, this is likely to take the form of a semi-structured conversation that aims to discover more about the actual work and doings of participants. Discussion that starts by listening to participants' experiences of the research problematic is always the entry point to IE data collection.

Although IE begins from the premise that people are experts in their own lives, it recognises that a great deal of work is invisible and that the IE researcher must therefore learn how to elicit people's *tacit* or embodied knowledge. One common approach is to ask people to talk through their experiences and activities from a typical day. These activities may be known in the body but not talked about because they may be seen as too boring or unimportant to discuss. In my own IE research that investigated how educational data was reshaping teaching, numerous teachers expressed surprise that I would be interested in the detail of their work (Spina, 2020). However,

the IE researcher can scaffold research participants to move this tacit knowing into conscious knowing through "the course of telling" (Smith, 1997, p. 395). Conducting observations and inviting participants to reflect on research observations are another useful ways of bringing tacit knowing into consciousness. In other words, the researcher must ask questions about work that is overlooked or glossed over through institutional language.

The power of policy and institutional texts in modern life

Often, the objectified ways of knowing about our lives are enshrined in policy as well as a plethora of other organisational texts. Texts are at the heart of power operations, because they replicate the taken-for-granted ideas of those in positions of authority.

In building her sociological approach, Smith expanded on Foucault's (2002) conception of discourse, which he described as being "a group of statements in so far as they belong to the same discursive formation" (p. 121). By discursive formations, Foucault referred to practices that "systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 2002, p. 54). As discourses produce knowledge, groups of people, such as "students with disability", come to belong to the same discursive formation. These discourses, or *systems of representation* (Hall, 2001), produce power/knowledge that varies depending on who speaks, when, how and with what authority. Smith (1997) wrote that Foucault moved our understandings from "the exercise of power upon the individual body to the exercise of power through the diffused and decentred order of discourse" (p. 116). Smith's intent was to "preserve Foucault's conception of the order of discourse, but to extend it to stretch in ways that escape Foucault's paradigm" (Smith, 1997, p. 25) by beginning from the embodied experiences of people, and explicating how everyday life is organised, most often, by texts. Smith and Griffith (2022) explain:

> For institutional ethnography, discourse refers to translocal relations coordinating the practices of definite individuals talking, writing, reading, watching, and so forth, in particular local places at particular times. Participants create texts for other participants to read; they read what others have written and take them into account in their own work. People are active in participating in a discourse, and their participation reproduces and changes it . . . We stress again: discourse is an organisation of relations among actual people engaged and active in actual local settings – offices, conferences, workshops, classrooms, homes – whose activities, our work, are textually coordinated.
>
> *(p. 34)*

The power of texts is often taken-for-granted, and may not register as an important part of life. Campbell and Gregor (2002, p. 29) provide an example of textually mediated relations by describing the interchange between a student and a bus driver, as the student boards the bus. The actions of both student and driver are coordinated around a text in the form of a bus pass (perhaps a physical ticket, electronic card or school bus policy that arranges students' transport home). In this example, the text authorises students to ride home, and is an important (although often invisible) part of daily life. The textually mediated relations between student and driver can be understood not only as organising the daily lives of one particular student and bus driver but also as reorganising activity in many local sites across the world where students use a bus pass to ride home. That is, the bus pass text coordinates relations translocally. The term translocal encapsulates the idea that local circumstances are often connected with circumstances in other places, often via texts and discourses that are produced from outside of the local (or, *extralocally*). The power of texts becomes apparent in an IE as they are analysed and connected because this builds an analytic picture of how institutions create and maintain power.

Importantly, texts are "characterised by a detachment of discourse from the locally produced speaker" (Smith, 1990, p. 123). For instance, a student enrolled in a postgraduate education degree might need to complete a form for a milestone, such as submitting a thesis for external examination. This form and the institutional language of "milestones" and "timely completions" are unlikely to capture the long and stressful days and nights that went into the thesis preparation; nor the little joys when a piece of writing came together, or a special connection was made with a participant in the research. Various institutional texts that set out milestone expectations are likely to have a significant impact on when students meet with their research supervisors and what they talk about. This abstraction removes the everyday experiences and knowledge of people, meaning that while texts regulate our lives and our interactions with others (such as supervisors and students), they also render much of the everyday invisible.

This understanding requires the IE researcher to pay particular attention to these abstractions in interviews by asking participants questions that how abstractions such as "milestones" are experienced in daily life. This can be especially difficult for researchers who themselves have extensive knowledge and experience within an institution. Gallagher (2022), who had many decades of experience working as a teacher and in policy roles before embarking on her doctoral journey reflected that, "my professional knowledge and experience made me aware of how easily I could fall into the use of abstracted language and institutional talk" (p. 61). She was careful to use probing questions such as "what does that look like in your day/work?" (p. 198) to get behind the institutional talk during interviews.

Policy analysis: texts as active and occurring

IE researchers view texts as "active and occurring" (Smith, 2001, p. 174) acknowledging that texts have no power to regulate or control activity until someone acts upon it. When people read policies and other institutional texts, they understand that some texts carry institutional weight, authorising (and often, requiring) a response. A single policy may unleash many chains of activity within an institution. These are described as text–act–text sequences (Smith, 2005) because the result of one text is often the production of another.

For example, when a politician announces a new policy such as a change to initial teacher education degrees, staff in organisations such as the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) respond, perhaps by developing instructions for universities and updating degree accreditation requirements. When a university dean in initial teacher education receives an email detailing new course accreditation requirements, they may email senior academics instructing them to implement the new requirements. The end result might be a flurry of activity that leads to the generation of a raft of new texts. New course structures are developed, and ultimately, the everyday experiences of pre-service teachers, university staff and teachers who supervise practicums are reshaped in a variety of ways.

As an IE researcher, a key research task is mapping these sequences of activity to build a picture of how power operates through texts that authorise particular activities. The research might have commenced through exploring the experiences of people – such as a frustrated pre-service teacher or supervising mentor teacher. The IE researcher's task would involve understanding the research problematic and then carefully making empirical connections using chains of texts to trace these experiences *back* to education policy (and the associated political pronouncements). For this reason, IE policy analysis does not begin with one particular policy, nor does it occur in the same way as might be done using traditional textual analytic approaches.

Policy and textually mediated ruling relations

The term *ruling relations* captures the power structures that coordinate the everyday, "hook[ing people] into the social relations of the economy and of ruling (institutions)" (Smith, 2005, p. 40). As described earlier, this form of rule often remains invisible until an intentional effort is made to explicate everyday knowledge and doings (e.g. through an IE research project). She writes:

> [IE] aims to go beyond what people know to find out how what they are doing is connected with other's doings in ways they cannot see. The idea is to map the institutional aspects of the ruling relations so that people can expand their own knowledge of their everyday worlds by being able to see

> how what they are doing is coordinated with others' doings elsewhere and elsewhen.
>
> *(Smith, 2005, p. 225)*

Institutional rule (or the enactment of power) often happens through texts, because their standardised, reproducible form enables them to coordinate the consciousness of people working in different places and times. Individuals within the institution are unlikely to be aware of the plethora of texts that work together to make things happen across the institution. However, they will be able to identify the texts that are used in *their own* everyday work. Ethnographic data collection methods such as observations and the collection of artefacts further enable the researcher to map connections between participants and others within the institution. The texts and artefacts to be collected will be decided after listening to the accounts of participants. For instance, if a teacher indicates that at the end of each day they must fill in a template created by a deputy principal, an IE researcher would typically seek to collect the template, and then talk with the deputy about how they developed the template. Often, this chain of inquiry might lead to further data collection. For example, the deputy might indicate that they developed the template to meet a directive from a regional office, which may lead to research conversations at the regional office.

As a research methodology, IE is focused on discovery based on the experiences of people, and mapping their connections across institutions. As Smith (2006) describes, when planning an institutional ethnography, "you aren't able to previsage what it is that you are going to do, or what you are going to discover" and suggests that "isn't stumbling around an integral part of the process?" (p. 46). In forensically following textual chains, beginning with texts identified by participants, the researcher can generate an empirically sound view of how institutional policy orchestrates what happens in the everyday.

Institutional ethnography in education

IE has been used to examine a range of different settings from early childhood to schools and higher education (Spina & Comber, 2020). What follows are two examples encompassing early childhood and school settings.

Texts as instruments of accountability in early childhood education and care (ECEC): Quality Improvement Plans (QIPs)

Numerous IEs have been conducted in prior-to-school settings. Grant et al. (2016, 2018) used IE to investigate how significant policy change in Australia has reshaped the work of early childhood education and care (ECEC) educators. The National Quality Framework (NQF) was introduced in 2012, establishing licensing standards that were linked to a national rating and assessment

system. Their work, which was based on Grant's (2017) doctoral thesis, began from the standpoint of kindergarten teachers and highlighted the significant work involved in meeting national standards. Their use of IE enabled a contrast between objectified and everyday ways of knowing about practices that sit underneath concepts such as "quality" and "good teaching".

As part of national regulations, approved providers must have a "Quality Improvement Plan" (QIP) in place. One of the recommendations in the Guide to Quality Improvement Plans (ACECQA, 2014) is that centres "adopt a collaborative approach to self-assessment and the development of their plan, involving wherever possible children, families, educators, management and other interested parties" (p. 8). While this might seem to be a logical approach that ensures educators, families and stakeholders work together, beginning from the standpoint of people illustrates the professional dilemmas that can be created by policy. Grant (2017) talked with educators in single-teacher ECEC settings, who had significant challenges demonstrating evidence of collaboration. One of the participants, Lisa, described that while she was required to produce evidence of collaboration in her centre, the people who were employed at the centre had not previously been expected to contribute to planning or documenting as part of their roles. Collaboration was seen by busy teacher aides and families as another task. Lisa said:

> So there's resentment there that we're asking them to do more stuff that what we signed them up to do and why should they? Why should we be asking that of them? . . . it is a bone of contention in this environment . . . it's been at the expense of my, my personal time and my personal life so, is that going to be a priority or can somebody else pick that up? And that's tricky.
> *(Grant et al., 2018, p. 523)*

To meet documentation requirements, Lisa found herself doing an enormous amount of work during personal time, but that also reduced the amount of time available to plan creative lessons and engage with children. Grant's IE mapped how the everyday work happening in ECEC revolved around accountability instruments, including QIPs, and showed that power operated through texts that provided "the terms under which what people do becomes institutionally accountable" (Smith, 2005, p. 113). Like Lisa, other participants in the research talked about the heavy workloads that had been created because of institutional expectations that they demonstrate quality. Taking photos to prove particular practices, printing signage about hygiene, documenting collegiality, printing, cutting, gluing, emailing are all forms of work that take time. Grant and colleague's IE mapped how this work could be traced back to the goals of quality education outlined in national standards. The research highlighted the irony of a policy aimed at improving the quality of education having generated time consuming work where "proving" quality encroached

on the time and energy available for planning for – and being present with – young children and their families. Grant and colleagues' work resonates with IEs conducted internationally in ECEC. For instance, Nilsen (2021) has examined how evidence and documentation have entered into the lexicon and practice of ECEC as a consequence of the neoliberal turn (p. 361).

The coordination of teachers' and principals' work in schools

IEs are all about discovery, and following textual chains to put together a picture of ruling relations. My IE (Spina, 2020), based on my PhD (that was part of a larger research project; *see* Harris et al., 2018), was based on my own feeling that NAPLAN had changed schooling. Working as a classroom teacher in a NAPLAN year level and then as an academic in an education faculty, I talked with educators who increasingly felt that education policy had reshaped teaching so that it was increasingly "all about data". This disparity between lived accounts of teachers and official versions of data (as a useful tool for achieving excellence) became the research problematic.

When I commenced my research, I began by listening to teachers as they talked about data. My interviews were conversational, allowing teachers to talk about their day-to-day activity. I invited participants to share any texts they used in their work that were related to the research problematic. Teachers brought a range of artefacts to interviews, including large folders of assessment, posters with student achievement, laptops with spreadsheets of data, assessment calendars, standardised testing instructions, meeting agendas and the like. From here, teachers were asked to talk about how they worked with data on a typical day. Questions such as "where did that document come from?" and "what do you do with that data once you have finished recording it?" encouraged teachers to talk in detail about their work. The salience of particular texts in an IE becomes apparent as different people begin to describe the same texts and activities as important. For example, a number of teachers at one school indicated that a school calendar directed them to collect a range of assessment data each term. This calendar generated an enormous amount of assessment work across the year and could be traced to broader institutional directives.

Before I could ask a question in my first conversations at a school, the teacher who I was talking with said, "Well, my first comment is that data is the new, dirty four-letter word. You know, it was just like, BOOM! And it's all about data". Other teachers made similar comments such as that "You feel like your actual teaching time is shrinking and that is the thing that is needed the most" and that "It is a huge concern for everyone. We feel we're losing that teaching". One teacher, Emma, explained:

> And in all honesty, it is always – sadly – people are just feeling like they're not doing a good enough job. Mmm. And yet they are. They are great

> teachers. They are doing a really great job. But, there is just a general feeling that we're not getting there. Not getting where we need to be.
>
> *(Spina, 2020, p. 110)*

The relentless focus on data (primarily NAPLAN) at her school had created a feeling of two versions of reality: the embodied version that staff lived each day, and the reality that was enshrined in various organisational texts in which teachers were left feeling inadequate. Emma went on to describe teachers crying during staff meetings as they felt an extreme pressure to raise students' results. Institutional policies that establish student achievement goals might frame the teachers at the school as underperforming.

In the case of Emma, her school (and education department) had numerous policies that were focused on increasing school data. This included streaming classes using student achievement data (including NAPLAN), which meant teachers in lower streamed classes felt the comparisons being made were unfair. In addition, the school had numerous students and families living in shelters and cars and was located in an area with substantial unemployment. At the time, objectified ways of knowing about Emma's teaching (according to institutional texts) was through using various data, primarily relating to student achievement. However, from the perspective of Emma and her colleagues, a good teacher was doing so much more than this. Regardless of this disjuncture between ways of knowing, Emma and her colleagues (and leadership team) found themselves in a situation where a great deal of their time was taken up with data collection and reporting. Another teacher at the same school described her work this way:

> Well, I don't sleep much. Or have any kind of life outside of school. And that is mostly because I'm preparing, doing reports and filing and filling out behaviour and recording stuff . . . and writing emails . . . and then there is a whole heap of lesson prep to do. And then there is marking. And then right at the end sometimes I focus on my actual teaching. Which is meant to be the core of my job, but it's not! So, I guess the collection of data, and recording of data . . . I think recording of data takes the most time. Out of all the things I do as a teacher. That takes the most time.
>
> *(Spina, 2020, p. 107)*

From a research perspective, tracing how this work entered teachers' lives showed that school principals authorised much of this work. Following textual chains led me to talk with school principals, who talked about how they had constructed school level policies (such as the development of assessment calendars). In talking to the school leaders (principals, deputy principals, heads of curriculum), it was apparent that their work with data "flowed from above". Although the schools were located in diverse settings – as far as 600 km away from each other – the talk of principals was remarkably similar. They described

how regional directors from their education department exerted authority over their work. *This* work was also highly textually mediated. For example, a principal from a regional school said:

> In our region, the regional director has an A3 spreadsheet . . . And some of my colleagues know about this . . . and that's our performance. It's based on NAPLAN [Pause] So if you've got . . . a white [coloured box] in each of the strands in Year 9 NAPLAN, then you are free. You are what they call a "free principal". You journey along, and you charter your own journey in your school. [Pause]. If you're . . . less than that . . . Well then you're supervised with different levels of supervision.
>
> *(Spina, 2020, pp. 78–79)*

Various texts that monitored student achievement and established NAPLAN goals were used to mediate the relations between regional offices and school principals. School principals responded by reorganising important aspects of schooling, including the requirement for teachers to create "data stories", "data grabs" and "data walls"; to engage in "high yield pedagogies" and NAPLAN "blitz days", to stream classes by student achievement data, and direct the "best" teachers to NAPLAN year levels. Without describing these

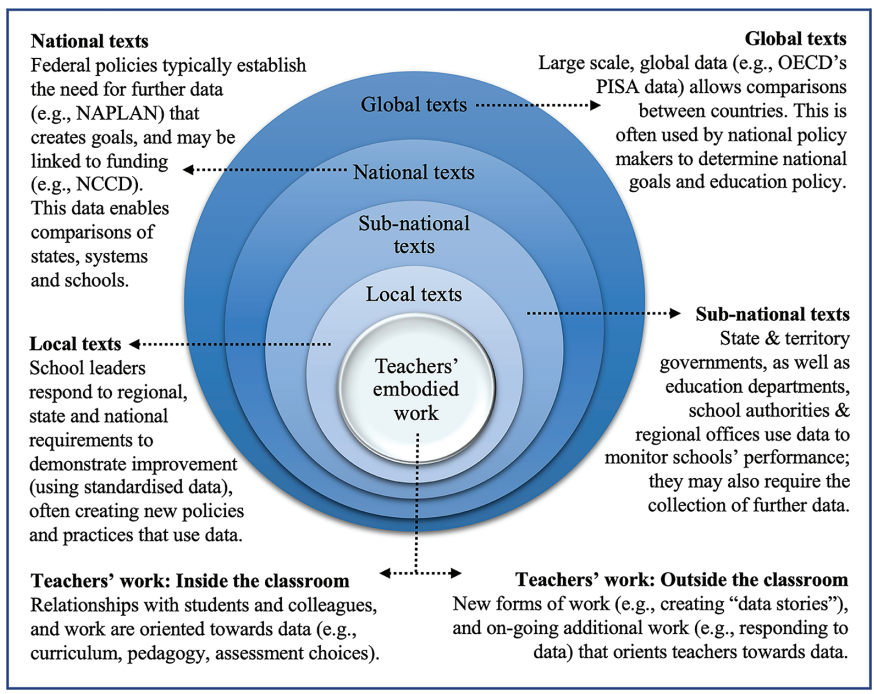

FIGURE 13.1 Map of ruling relations and the reorganisation of teachers' work

practices in detail, it was clear that departmental policy had reshaped the work of school leaders and teachers in significant ways. Following these text–act–text sequences further, it became possible to build a picture of how global and national education policy flowed into schools, as outlined in Figure 13.1.

Building a picture of how power works using empirical evidence is an important way of analysing how education policy operates. This analytic approach creates a picture of how policy reform shapes life in ways that are not typically visible. Views such as that of the former CEO of ACARA that NAPLAN is "only a few hours across three days at four points in a child's schooling" (Randall, cited in Ferrari, 2014) can be difficult to challenge. Institutional ethnographic research provides a unique approach to inquiry that maps how systems of power operate to coordinate social relations, and a language for speaking back to power.

Food (or coffee) for thought

To conclude, consider this activity that has been used to teach institutional ethnography:

> Choose a site for observing for approximately [one hour]. I recommend a coffee shop or a shopping mall. Wherever you pick, choose a place where you can observe rather unobtrusively – without staring. Keep some notes, openly, as if you are writing in a journal. Don't worry about specific focus. Just allow yourself to follow what is happening. Stay alert to sensory data. Length: 5 pages of notes, plus an introductory paragraph describing your preparations, and a final section that summarizes what you learned – both about observing and about the site itself. Try to separate direct observations from interpretations. Consider the difference between observing particular individuals versus observing the social organization of the site as a whole.
>
> *(Church, 2021, p. 180)*

You can imagine the kinds of texts you might see: a menu, a sign with opening hours and so forth. Perhaps the opening hours are dictated by the shopping centre or school where the café is located. Perhaps the menu and pricing is created by a franchisor. Perhaps, there is legislation outlining alcohol service requirements and industrial conditions such as pay rates on Sundays. You can imagine that there is much you could explore based on one hour of observation. By talking to people, and by following textual chains, you could create a picture of how the institution (in this case, hospitality) works, and how policy can shape everyday relations between people. Institutional ethnographic research creates a picture of the policy terrain and power structures that shape and organise the everyday work and lives of people. This knowledge gives voice to people within the institution, offering new possibilities about policy and practice grounded in the perspectives of those at the frontlines of education.

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14

DECOLONISING CURRICULUM POLICY RESEARCH THROUGH COMMUNITY-CENTREDNESS

Constance Khupe, Maren Seehawer and Moyra Keane

Introduction

Change in education does not occur in a vacuum. It is based within a social, economic and political context which both shapes the current situation and provides impetus for change. The formulation of new or revised education policies results from prevailing socio-economic and political circumstances or can even be driven by constitutional imperatives – as in the case of South Africa at the dawn of democracy in 1994. However, as Christie (2008) observes, educational reform can be limited in the extent to which it actually addresses identified challenges. In the case of South Africa, one contributing factor to the limitations of such policies is arguably the exclusion of the voices of the recipient communities that these policies are meant to serve. By recipient communities, we mean South African students' local communities; that is, students themselves, their homes, families, teachers, village councils and elders. Such communities are important stakeholders in education and should therefore, we argue, have input in educational policymaking by being afforded meaningful participation in research. In this chapter, we therefore explore the idea of community participation in policy research by presenting and discussing three studies. Two studies were undertaken in rural and remote South African communities in the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. These studies offer methodological insights on enhancing community contributions to local level curriculum decisions. It is important to note that our understanding of community is not tied to rurality or remoteness, but equally includes urban areas. Our third example is thus a study undertaken by a group of teachers in an urban setting in Eastern Cape Province. It complements the first two studies by offering insights into challenges of operationalising existing education policies and

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allows first tentative suggestions on how Indigenous ways of knowing and being, as understood in the South African context, could be portrayed more appropriately in future curricula.

As is the case in other Southern African countries, Indigenous ways of knowing and being (often also referred to as Indigenous knowledge systems) are alive and practised in many homes and communities. By Indigenous ways of knowing in this context, we refer to ways of living in nature and ways of knowing nature (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011). Thus, many South African children grow up with different ways of knowing and being (Seehawer & Breidlid, 2021). We argue that this ontological and epistemological diversity is essential for students' belonging and for enriching the scope of our understanding the world and each other. Thus, such diversity needs to be reflected in educational policies that, in turn, are informed by research practices that allow for the recognition of diversity in the ways in which knowledge itself is generated. As elaborated below, South African (education) policies simultaneously recognise and marginalise this epistemological diversity. Indeed, it might be this blurry, unspecified position that hampers true educational transformation and that, thereby, hinders overcoming persisting conditions of coloniality. The consequences of continued coloniality are laid out by Donald Molosi (2019), who, in the tradition of many African thinkers (e.g. Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o, 1981/1986; Fanon, 1961/2004), speaks out against the persistent internalised perception of the Western world as superior. Writing of his own colonial education in Botswana, Malosi calls for nothing less than a revolution in education:

> We Africans have internalised the fiction of our own inferiority so profoundly that the majority of us define high social status by how far we can distance our identity from the languages, cultures, and histories of our ancestors!
>
> *(p. 4)*

We argue that conditions of coloniality as characterised for the Southern African context by Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2015) will continue to be the educational experience of African students until the voices of communities are recognised as a valid foundation for curriculum policymaking. And this speaks to some urgency in action before much of Africa's rich heritage of knowledge traditions is lost. As such, in this chapter, we use a decolonial lens to critique the centre-periphery approach to curriculum policy development. We call for the recognition of community voice as a starting point for meaningful curriculum policy research, which may, eventually, foster education that is relatable for all. The three studies presented below exemplify attempts at such decolonial approaches, and at the inclusion of a broader spectrum of voices in curriculum design (Hildebrand, 2007).

In the following section, we provide the policy context within which the three studies were undertaken. Next, we provide the methodological context and framework by discussing decolonised research approaches. Thereafter, we introduce our three studies as examples of decolonial policy research. Our chapter concludes with implications for educational research and makes recommendations based on findings from the three studies.

Policy context: the South African curriculum

> "Education, training and innovation are central to South Africa's long term development. They are the core elements in eliminating poverty and reducing inequality, and the foundations of an equal society. Education empowers people to define their identity, take control of their lives, raise healthy families, take part confidently in developing a just society, and play an effective role in the politics and governance of their communities".
>
> (National Planning Commission, 2011, p. 261)

This statement represents the social justice ideals that are expected to underpin curriculum planning in South Africa. And curriculum is policy – the current Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) is named as such. Under apartheid, curriculum was used as an instrument for the suppression of Black people. The Bantu Education Act of 1953 prescribed teaching Blacks their own tribal cultures, and claimed "that such cultures were of a lower order and that, in general, the Blacks should learn how to prepare themselves for a realistic place in White dominated society" (Christie & Collins, 1982, p. 60). It is obviously imperative that post-apartheid educational policy needed to shift away from discriminatory education. This shift may not be complete unless it is appropriately supported by research.

Ever since the demise of apartheid, policy statements in South Africa represent an explicit aspiration to disengage a colonial past and carve out a path towards redress and inclusivity. The post-apartheid educational landscape has been characterised by three major curriculum reforms that took place in a very short period of time. The changes came as *Curriculum 2005* of 1997, the *National Curriculum Statement* (NCS) in 2000, as well as the present *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement* (CAPS), which was implemented in 2011. All three curricula suggest inclusivity of knowledges and worldviews, albeit to different levels. Taking the school subject of science as an example, the second post-apartheid science curriculum acknowledged South African students' diversity in worldviews which might "influence their understanding of science and their progress in the Learning Area" (Department of Basic Education, 2002, p. 12). It was stated that "curriculum development which takes account of world-views and indigenous knowledge systems is in its early stages" and the curriculum aimed to be an "invitation" for research on this issue; "an enabling

document rather than a prescriptive one" (Department of Basic Education, 2002, p. 12). In the current science curriculum, in turn, Indigenous knowledge systems are – while still mentioned – literally degraded to a footnote. This footnote allows teachers the "freedom to expand concepts and . . . organise learning experiences according to their own local circumstances", provided the selected examples of Indigenous knowledges "link directly to specific content in the Natural Sciences and Technology [curriculum]" (Department of Basic Education, 2011b, p. 14). More recently, discussions are shifting towards the fourth industrial revolution (4IR), with an expressed desire for enhancing the use of technology in education, while critiques cast doubt on any prospects that the deep-seated socio-economic disparities that are so pervasive in the country's basic education would go away simply because students have smart learning devices (Moloi & Mhlanga, 2021; Sithomola, 2021). These discussions continue in the academic space – among experts who usually have no lived experience of the conditions of the majority of the population for whom the curriculum reform is planned. The communities in which those policies are meant to be enacted remain on the fringes. The questions of "what knowledge and whose knowledge?" (Shizha, 2005, p. 66), and even "to what end?", still beg answers even after all the reforms that have been made.

In discussing the approaches that were taken to educational reform in South Africa, Christie (2008, p. 133) has this to say:

> The policies could not be implemented as envisaged. They were formulated in terms of what would be ideal, rather than in terms of changing what actually existed . . . The overall result was that the deep inequalities did not shift substantially.

The paradox of calls of inclusivity on the one hand, and the epistemological exclusion of community voices in curriculum decisions on the other hand, requires ongoing conversation. Community voices continue to be silenced by unbalanced power dynamics which amplify the voices of government policymakers and educational researchers over those of communities. We concur with Maringe et al. (2015) that decontextualised policy development does little to improve local conditions within the education sector. The South African experience already suggests that curricula change may not on its own positively change the educational experiences of learners, and material conditions of communities who are already on the margins of society.

Attempting decolonial educational policy research: three cases from South Africa

Research unavoidably involves power relations between researchers and communities of participants. The alignment of traditional (positivist) research

practice with colonial tendencies has led to its criticism as extractive, as disempowering and as viewing communities as objects (Khupe & Keane, 2017; Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 1999). Besides, traditional research overemphasises the role of the individual as the centre of research methods (e.g. interviews), rather than focusing on the community (Gobo, 2011). Decolonial studies seek to counter this dominant view of research in order to balance power between researchers and participating communities/co-researchers, as research is done *with* and not *on* the community. In addition, as Louis (2007) argues, opening up space for community participation, and involving them in the formulation of research agendas ensures that their communal needs are met. Nel (2019) in her thesis *An African Indigenous Decolonial Framework: Reconstructing Curriculum for Health & Well-Being* provides a framework with "Curricula informed by and for community" at the centre. In this synthesis of three studies on and about Indigenous ways of knowing and science education, we expand on what communities see as central.

Our research studies, which we frame as decolonial or guided by decolonial aspirations, include a set of assumptions about knowledge, knowledge generation and knowledge sharing processes. These assumptions influenced the choices we made about data generation, analysis as well as the ways in which we interpreted the data. First, the generation of knowledge is a social and relational undertaking (Louis, 2007; Wilson, 2001). As McNamee (2014) suggests, our ways of talking and relating to each other and the world should be the focus of study, rather than the intention of "discovering reality". Second, knowledge is not neutral and therefore cannot be separated from the knower (Hlatshwayo et al., 2022). Therefore, participating communities are custodians of knowledge that is credible and relevant for their contexts. Third, knowledge is a product of social, historical and cultural influences; hence, the knowledge that any community holds is not static but changes both spatially and temporally (Turnbull, 1997). When the research agenda is negotiated, room is created for the inclusion of voices within communities, and for the researchers to learn through this immediate engagement. In keeping with these assumptions, our research intentions and plans were continuously reshaped by the communities: data "instruments" included interventions, conversations, rituals, ceremonies, art work and a range of participant and community processes. We contend that approaches to research on curriculum matters could benefit from recognising the knowledge in communities for greater relevance of curriculum policies to local contexts.

Study 1 – Extending knowledge boundaries

This study (see Khupe, 2014) was carried out from 2009 to 2011 with a community in rural KwaZulu-Natal, in the foothills of southern UKhahlamba (Drakensberg) Mountains. The study happened in a curriculum context

where the principles of the NCS included the valuing of Indigenous knowledge systems, and science subject statements included Indigenous knowledge and worldview in the intended learning outcomes (Department of Basic Education, 2011a, 2011b). The Life Sciences notes on Learning Outcome 3 expressed the need for the rediscovery of Indigenous knowledge "for its value in the present day" (Department of Education, 2003, p. 12), to raise "learners' awareness of the existence of different viewpoints in a multicultural society, and encourage open-mindedness towards all viewpoints" (p. 13). However, the apparent embracing of Indigenous knowledges and worldviews in both the NCS Life Sciences and Physical Sciences subject statements had not been supported through assessment or through the development of relevant learning materials. As a result, there was little IK-science integration at classroom level. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to work with the community to respond to the following questions:

1. What Indigenous knowledge can be identified from the community?
2. What constitutes the worldview that informs the community's Indigenous knowledge?
3. What aspects of the participants' knowledge could be included in school science, and how?

The study followed a transformative participatory approach, bringing together community and university researchers in collaborative participation (Mertens et al., 2013). The research process sought to build and establish collaborative relationships and mutual capacity building. Constance, the university researcher, is an African female of Zimbabwean nationality. Conscious of her limitations regarding community protocols (Vakalahi & Taiapa, 2013), she requested two local men who hailed from the community to provide guidance on matters of culture. She sought to be respectful to the community's prevailing cultural protocols.

High school students, science teachers and community Elders participated in this study. The students were involved through group discussions, consulting Elders, playing Indigenous games, taking and interpreting photographs of their environment and free writing. They visited a natural history museum in their local town. Science teachers were interviewed individually, and one of the teachers attended and spoke at a local science education research conference. The Elders opened up their Traditional Council meetings for group discussions following the established ritual of beginning with a song and prayer and sharing a meal. The research team agreed and provided funding for the construction of a "museum hut" at the school, which would symbolise the integration of the community's Indigenous knowledge within the science curriculum. Alongside these activities, conversations with participants were ongoing, enabling continuous learning for the university researcher. The

cultural consultants provided continuous guidance on cultural matters. A key component in communications throughout the study was use of isiZulu, the language of participants (Khupe, 2017).

Curriculum suggestions

The students, elders and teachers made suggestions on what could be learnt at school. The elders suggested the inclusion of practical skills, for example, crop farming and livestock rearing, to contribute to subsistence in their community. They raised questions regarding the value and relevance of schooling in its current form, which they described as "paper-based knowledge". In addition, the Elders suggested the value of respect be taught at school. They mourned the loss of respect among younger people as directly related to poor educational outcomes. For their part, the students expressed great value for honesty, trustworthiness; respect for oneself and for others; care for others, care for the environment, and gratitude. They imagined the future in terms of how they would contribute towards the common good, and how they would return the good done towards them. The students suggested content knowledge on environmental issues, practical skills as well as technological issues. The participating teachers embraced suggestions for the integration of Indigenous knowledge and school science. They thought that such integration would help students to better understand school science. The teachers proposed greater opportunities for dialogue with community elders to identify negotiated knowledge spaces between local knowledge and school science.

The contribution of the community to the outcome of this study highlights the potential that place-based, culturally responsive research can have in developing science curricula. On the one hand, this way of conducting research helps address issues of relevance – through extending boundaries for decisions about the content and values that the students learn. On the other hand, its collaborative nature challenges university researchers to learn from the community. For Constance, a great point of learning was how, despite being African, she had framed the study in a reductionist way. She questioned the framing of her research questions which sought to fragment Indigenous knowledge systems into "bits that fit" the science curriculum. She learnt that it was not just the content that would make science relatable to students in this community but also how the science was communicated and taught.

Study 2 – What is relevant science?

This study was also conducted within a remote rural community in Kwa-Zulu Natal, bordering Lesotho, by Moyra, a White South African woman/teacher (Keane et al., 2016). It included a small primary school, high school and

spread-out rural community. Three main questions were set out at the start of the study:

- What is relevant science learning?
- What Indigenous knowledge could be incorporated into school curriculum?
- What understandings of worldview need to contribute to and inform our teaching and curriculum design?

After initial meetings, the first answer to the question of "What is relevant knowledge for the school curriculum?" was "We are hungry". The following Research Journal extract (Keane, 2006: Journal 1) provides the reflections and dilemma faced by the researcher.

On the one hand, I could consider that I am not "getting" the data I want, on the other hand (I wondered): "What is wrong with my question?" Maybe even the concept of research was problematic; obviously immediate practical needs are of greater concern than the publishing of research. Western research methodology texts assume that "participation" is synonymous with "equitable participation" – aligning with the notion of democracy; or "invited participation" where the researcher decides when, where and how much "participants" participate. If participants decide on directions and interventions, this could override the research agenda. Furthermore, who decides on who participates? In this case, the Chief and Elders decided who would come to meetings and what the agenda would be, and a Council negotiated who would receive food security interventions. I was consulted, and respect was a key value, but the research plan unfolded as the process emerged. Starting from a framework of human rights as well as ubuntu,[1] transformation research may be about transforming the researcher's ways of thinking and reducing resource imbalances rather than "transforming" a community. In a long process of interactions, classroom projects, discussions and the inclusion of an NGO farming project linked to the curriculum, various aspects of unarticulated questions arose: "How do we make sense of our world? What is important here?"

The community expressed various answers which may be shown as three types of knowledge:

- Factual knowledge (this includes language and ways of living with nature) which relates to:
- Performative knowledge or talents, and values (including ceremonies and rituals of dance and story). This relates to the third aspect:
- Deep ontology/philosophy; representational knowledge (ubuntu); understanding the interdependence of all living things.

Examples of these ways of knowing included affirmation of an African identity of belonging and connection. Students said: "I can do science"; "science

was everywhere"; "we learned to believe in ourselves – that someday we will achieve our dreams to be helpful in the community".

An Elder summed up many conversations as: "We need to return to our roots – to cultivate the land – everything comes from the earth" (Keane, 2006, p. 257).

While community members were initially hesitant in engaging with a somewhat abstract inquiry of "what is relevant science for your community?" the discussions, examples and numerous engagements showed profound ways that "science" education [and does it need to be divided into subject specialities?] needs to be reconceptualised and included for the benefit of them all. *All* here meaning the Elders, the youth, families, the school, and Nature itself. Examples for policy focus interestingly included the four aspects cited in the UNESCO paper "Revisiting Learning: The Treasure Within" (2013): Learning to know; Learning to do; Learning to Be; and Learning to Live together.

Study 3 – Experimenting with existing policies to inform future policies

The third study was carried out by a small team consisting of five science teachers based in Makhanda, Eastern Cape and Maren, a Norway-based researcher as the initiator and facilitator of the project. Community was in our case understood as a community of practice of science teachers, although the study largely benefitted from students' home communities as well. As was the case with Constance's study, this study followed up on the latest science curriculum (Department of Basic Education, 2011c) that allows teachers to include Indigenous knowledges as long as these do not deviate from the curriculum. The purpose of the study was to explore through participatory action research (PAR) how science teachers could integrate some of their students' Indigenous knowledges into the regular teaching of the science curriculum and to do so in a manner that was professionally useful for the involved teachers. PAR is an approach to research that seeks to empower those involved with it and aims at researching *with*, not *on* people, as Paulo Freire explains (1982/1988). While we suggest that erasing all power imbalances between researcher and research participants is an illusion, there is yet potential for co-learning and co-creation of knowledge. Some of the teachers described the research process as transformational and empowering. They emphasised the process as involving the team as *people* rather than just *participants*. A central experience was the close connection between relationality and knowledge generation; the experience that gaining friends and gaining new knowledge are really two sides of the same process (Seehawer et al., 2022).

Outcomes for the current policy situation

Our research process could be compared to learning how swim. The water conditions, that is, the conditions to teach Indigenous knowledges in today's South African science classrooms, are not at all conducive. Beyond the footnote about teacher's freedom to include Indigenous content, the curriculum hardly contains Indigenous knowledges. It does not provide any advice about how teachers may proceed, there are no textbooks on Indigenous knowledges, teacher training does not prepare teachers to integrate knowledges, not all teachers are custodians of Indigenous knowledges and in general, and teachers are under so much pressure to cover the regular curriculum that they have little capacity to add anything beyond the regular curriculum content. Thus, the immense and complex task of integrating knowledges that is a part of South Africa's educational policies is currently left to the individual teacher (Breidlid, 2013) – which entails that it is rarely, if ever, happening.

However, despite grim water conditions, the teachers still managed to "swim", by drawing on students' families and communities. The teachers first identified topics in the regular curriculum that they found suitable for the integration of Indigenous knowledges, such as *soil* (grade 5) or *water purification* (grade 10). Second, they asked their students to inquire at home about uses of soil and methods of chemistry free-water purification and to share this knowledge in the classroom. As stated earlier, we do not equate "community knowledge" with Indigenous knowledges, and besides Indigenous knowledges, students also reported other practices and knowledges in class. However, through this approach, Indigenous ways of knowing that were alive in the students' homes found entrance into, and were valued in, the classroom (see Seehawer, 2018 and Seehawer & Breidlid, 2021 for detailed accounts of these cases). The research process enabled teachers to recognise their agency concerning the teaching of Indigenous knowledges and some of the teachers continue to integrate Indigenous knowledges into their regular lessons (Seehawer et al., 2022). Ultimately, however, if the integration of Indigenous knowledges is to become more than the marginalised practice that it is today, the responsibility must be taken from individual teachers and explicitly anchored in the relevant policy documents (Msimanga & Shizha, 2014).

Insights that could inform future policies

Such studies may offer insights into how Indigenous knowledges could be more appropriately captured in the curriculum and other relevant policy documents. In our case, the teachers did what the curriculum should be doing: define a clear rationale for why and with what pedagogical approaches Indigenous knowledges should be taught in school (Seehawer, 2023). Regarding South Africa's multi ethnic classrooms, another pertinent question is whose

Indigenous knowledges should be taught, "the teachers', the learners', or the mainstream?" (Òtúlàjà et al., 2011, p. 699). One conclusion from the study, which is in line with the other two studies, is that Indigenous ways of knowing should not, as they currently are, be adjusted to fit into existing curricular structures. Instead, the curriculum should be adjusted to fit the epistemological nature of Indigenous knowledge systems (Seehawer, 2023).

Concluding remarks

While education as a basic human right is enshrined in the South African constitution, we are asking: education for what? Whose education? Who decides? And, as has been the focus of our three case studies, *how* can we answer these questions? Access to education has certainly increased in South Africa, yet students still experience epistemic exclusion and alienation (Molosi, 2019). Curriculum reform in post-apartheid South Africa has made some significant changes, yet inequality and coloniality still persist. Participation in education has widened to all racial groups, however, measures of achievement and quality (such as numeracy, literacy and preparedness for university) still show much the same patterns of privilege evident during apartheid. Our research experiences suggest that community participation in local-level decision-making can contribute to decoloniality and to more positive curriculum experiences and greater relevance of education. Intentions, values, relationships and taking time are key to disrupting the entrenched research methodologies and methods. Reciprocity, care, unlearning and revising set university-approved plans may be needed. Ignoring communities speaks of colonial arrogance and ignorance.

Both Keane (2006) and Khupe (2014) ask how the curriculum can help deliver better life chances for the children in marginalised communities – where currently education is often not enriching their lives materially, culturally, or on the levels of survival, safety and well-being. These curriculum suggestions made by participants are indicative of the belief that the school has capacity to do more than what is being done now. Participants have hope that schooling may enable them to deal with the challenges that they face, so that they inherit their rightful African legacy and identity. To what extent can the school serve its community directly through contextually relevant curriculum? And to what extent are education researchers willing to contribute to making that possible?

South African curriculum development and change need to be supported by research that "empowers people to define their identity, take control of their lives, raise healthy families, take part confidently in developing a just society, and play an effective role in the politics and governance of their communities" (National Planning Commission, 2011, p. 261). We contend that decolonial, community-centred research approaches can contribute to curricula that can achieve this level of community empowerment.

Note

1 Ubuntu is an African way of being that acknowledges our inter-connection with all other beings; "I am because you are". It is therefore our obligation to take care of one another – through this we become more human.

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15

BEYOND SURVEYS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Including the views of children and young people in education policy analysis

Angelique Howell

Introduction

Enduring and complex issues such as student disenfranchisement can be conceptualised as shared fervent concerns – intensely emotional and vital issues of concern to a range of stakeholders (Mayes & Holdsworth, 2020), including students, teachers, school leaders, parents and policymakers. The consequent need for dialogue in developing appropriate education policies is recognised in policy documents such as the Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Declaration, which outlines the Australian governments' commitment to 'working in *collaboration* with the education community' (Council of Australian Governments [COAG] Education Council, 2019, p. 5). However, in an educational context that is 'often fraught with wider political agendas' (Bourke & MacDonald, 2018, p. 156), the notion of *collaboration* raises issues of who is part of this 'education community' and thus endorsed to participate in these discussions, as well as the provisos of such participation (Fraser, 2008). It is widely accepted that students' voices must be represented in ongoing education policy development (Bourke & MacDonald, 2018), as they are the consequential stakeholders of policies that directly affect them (Groundwater-Smith, 2011). However, accounting for students' views in education policy discussions presents a formidable challenge in a society which favours constructions of children and young people as upcoming human capital (Apple, 2001) who need to progress through normative stages of development before being authorised to speak on their own behalf (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008; Lee, 2001; Qvortrup, 1997). Founded on dominant Western theories of developmental psychology, these constructions have been critiqued for their positioning of children and young people as not yet competent 'becomings' (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008) who

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are 'naïve, malleable and easily stirred by "feelings" beyond reason and rationality' (Mayes & Holdsworth, 2020, p. 99), leaving adults sceptical of young people's trustworthiness and ability to provide and grasp accurate information (Christensen & Prout, 2002).

Despite these obstacles, support for 'student voice' has flourished since the almost universal ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (United Nations, 1989). Article 12 is most frequently cited, as it outlines the right of children and young people to be heard and taken seriously. However, it is also one of four general principles of the Convention, meaning that it should be considered in the interpretation and implementation of all other rights protected in the Convention, including children's and young people's right to access education (United Nations, 2009). While its theoretical underpinnings are complex, student voice is essentially founded on social justice principles of 'inclusion, or membership of a community, in which [students] are valued and respected contributors' (Flutter & Rudduck, 2004, p. 5) who have a legitimate perspective, presence and active role (Cook-Sather, 2006). There is now little question of the validity of students' views in education reform efforts (Quaglia & Corso, 2014) and that, accordingly, students need to be included as full participants rather than represented by others (Bourke & MacDonald, 2018; Jones & Bubb, 2021) who speak about and for them (Fielding, 2004). This chapter begins by deliberating the use of surveys and focus groups to include the voices of students, before moving to discuss drawings, one of a wide range of participatory visual research methods (PVRMs), as a more inclusive approach that may better account for the voices of those who are not already advantaged by the system. Children's experiences of Australia's National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) test are then explored through the drawings of children in Years 3, 5 and 7, completed after the conclusion of the final test. These images were accompanied by written descriptions of the meaning embedded in the drawings, an approach that recognised the children as the primary interpreters of their images, thus reducing the need for adult interpretation (Mitchell et al., 2011). A combination of thematic (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and visual discourse analysis (VDA) (Albers, 2012) suggested that children's experiences of education policies such as NAPLAN do not necessarily conform to what adults expect (or want) them to be.

Eliciting student voice through surveys and focus groups

Student surveys are a prominent feature of current efforts to integrate student participation in discussions of school policies and procedures because they guarantee anonymity, meaning that students can express their ideas without fear of judgement or reprisal (Bourke & MacDonald, 2018). They are also simultaneously cost-effective, provide a platform that enables the participation

of a large number of students, and are easy and quick to administer (Finefter-Rosenbluh et al., 2021). When used in conjunction with data gathered from staff, the resulting insights can form a sound basis for decision-making and action (Quaglia & Corso, 2014). However, surveys can also constitute a superficial means of assessing student satisfaction and quality assurance drives (Charteris & Smardon, 2019; Mockler & Groundwater-Smith, 2015) that Quaglia and Corso (2014) liken to relentless requests 'to respond to [surveys] asking, "How did we do?"' (p. 34). The inanimate nature of numerical data also requires consideration, as when aggregated, the unique qualities of individual data sets can be obscured, leading to misinterpretation of the data (Quaglia & Corso, 2014).

Focus groups are recognised as a deeper and more thorough approach that is generally preferred by students and facilitates meaningful dialogue between adults and students (Bourke & MacDonald, 2018; Dockett et al., 2009; Howell, 2016, 2017). A key strength of focus groups is the insights that emerge from interactions between the participants, which can not only clarify their understandings, experiences and feelings but also elucidate why students experience their schooling in the ways they do (Morgan, 2019). However, focus groups require mutual vocabulary and a common ground, raising concerns around: (1) the potential for focusing on homogeneity rather than diversity within the group and (2) the issue of group dynamics, as those who are marginalised may be silenced by the privileged majority (Gillett-Swan, 2014; Morgan, 2019). It must also be acknowledged that schools are inherently hierarchical institutions which typically deny students and teachers requisite standing, potentially leading students to focus on the 'right' answer to signal their compliance with the views of the school (see, e.g. Gallagher et al., 2010).

Research calls attention to the need for a nuanced understanding of participation, which is likely to be different for different young people according to their needs and interests, and which may change over time (Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). For example, Shay (2019) raises concerns about the involvement of Indigenous young people in traditional qualitative research methods such as focus groups, which are typically recorded digitally for later transcription and analysis. She notes that 'Indigenous scholarship about yarning and how data are recorded appear to be synonymous with the broader research literature . . . [espousing] to elicit the same quality of knowledge . . . in a culturally safe [manner]' (p. 3). Shay argues that while using digital technologies may be appropriate within a co-design approach, they may potentially compromise the participants' capacity to be authentic in their responses, and cause the loss of valuable contextual information such as social interactions and 'relationships with people, institutions, country, community, and animals' (p. 6).

Of course, standard research methods are not inherently flawed. Rather, the danger lies in the potential to succumb to the apparent need for justification within dominant frameworks, which actively seek immediate answers to

inherently complex issues (Lee, 2001). When this occurs, opportunities for hearing a wider range of voices may be suppressed in the interests of acceptance (Lichtman, 2013). Accounting for the voices of all students therefore requires focusing on a more generous sense of method (Law, 2004), which recognises that 'the logic of justification does not dictate what specific data collection and analytical methods researchers must use' (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 15).

Eliciting student voice through visual methods

Participatory Visual Research Methodologies (PVRMs) have become increasingly popular and generally well received in participatory research (Fairey, 2018). Informed by the study of a range of visual data including, but not limited to, photography, video, digital storytelling and drawings (Bland, 2012; Mitchell et al., 2011), PVRMs seek to give voice to those who have traditionally been marginalised (Fairey, 2018).

As enthusiasm for children's equitable participation continues to proliferate, Susan Groundwater-Smith (2011) proffers a reminder that 'equity has a sibling relationship to ethics' (p. 61). The study therefore adopted an approach of ethical symmetry; an approach that positions relationships between researchers and child participants as equivalent to those of adult participants (Christensen & Prout, 2002). Mirroring the right of adults not to participate in research, article 12 of the UNCRC has established that it 'is a right (not a duty) [for children] to express a view' (Lundy, 2007, p. 934). In this study, 12 children declined to participate from the outset, and the remaining children were assured verbally and in writing that they could choose the extent to which they wished to participate. Furthermore, if they chose to contribute, their responses would not be published without their express consent, even if their parents had consented to such publication.

Recognising that participatory research is not immune from the ethical pitfalls of traditional methods, including superficiality, focusing on the privileged majority, and assuming a homogenous view of students, the study also considered the environments in which the children's responses were created (Pauwels, 2015; Wright, 2010). For example, observations recorded in one classroom detailed the teacher's critique of the children's responses, with affirmative comments, such as 'Oh, what a lovely smiling face and clean uniform!' afforded to those whose drawings signified a positive experience. Another child whose response embodied their experience of NAPLAN as a negative event was conversely asked, 'Now why would you say that?' effectively negating previous discussions that there could be no 'right' or 'wrong' response. These actions silenced the voices of students whose views differed from those of the teacher and affected the extent to which all children were able to freely complete their responses.

As with any research, not every ethical issue that may arise in participatory visual research can be foreseen. However, several procedures need to be employed to uphold ethical and participatory ideals (Mitchell et al., 2011) and create optimal conditions in which students can 'purposefully bring shape and order to their experience' (Cox, 2005, p. 125). First, the above example demonstrates the vital importance of clear communication between researchers and teachers or other adults about the nature of participatory research and its foundations of student voice and agency. In addition, students need opportunities to engage with the researcher beforehand (Mitchell et al., 2011), as '[g]ood relationships need to be built in order for trust to be established' (Groundwater-Smith, 2007, p. 124). To eliminate as far as possible any researcher or teacher bias, the instructions provided to students were quite open-ended 'to avoid limiting them or directing them on what to include or exclude' (Hayik, 2012, p. 298).

The literature recognises that honouring the voices of students entails finding ways to 'remain true not only to what [they] say but to what they mean' (Sinclair, 2004, p. 113). While visual texts provide a useful method in participatory research and exploring students' experiences and perspectives on their experiences of their schooling, multiple readings are always possible (Reissman, 2008), thus highlighting the need to look beyond engaging participants in creating their responses, followed by adult analysis of the artefacts (Mitchell et al., 2011). One way to achieve this effectively is to position children as the primary interpreters of their images through a 'draw and talk' approach to elicit the children's intended meanings (Bland, 2012; Wright, 2010). Analysis of these responses therefore includes the degree to which the visual and written components of these bimodal responses convey meaning, and the convergence of this meaning with the other modality (Unsworth & Thomas, 2014).

Exploring children's experiences of Australia's NAPLAN test

NAPLAN, first implemented in 2008, is one outcome of Australia's transnational 'borrowing' of educational reform policies, particularly from England and the United States, which has seen the emergence of a national system of schooling (Lingard, 2010). It is a census test, involving full-cohort, annual standardised testing in Reading, Writing, Language Conventions and Numeracy for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 over a testing window of four days during March.[1] Only students with significant intellectual or functional disabilities are exempt unless they are formally withdrawn by their parents. In 2010, schools' average results were first published against national averages, benchmarks and the average of 'statistically similar schools' on the publicly accessible MySchool website, *www.myschool.edu.au/*.

Heated and often contentious debate surrounds NAPLAN, particularly in relation to students' responses to the test and whether they experience

NAPLAN as high stakes. On the one hand, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) has consistently maintained that NAPLAN is 'low' stakes in its design because it does not involve 'extreme high stakes consequences' such as those associated with high-stakes testing in England and the United States. On the other hand, it is argued that the publicly available display of school performance on MySchool has generated an intense focus on performance comparison, engendering student anxiety and disaffection (Wyn et al., 2014). The following discussion outlines some key findings of research that sought to circumvent this adult debate by '[going] straight to the source and [asking] the students' (Mitra, 2007, p. 727). Of the 105 students in two different SES Catholic primary schools who chose to contribute to the study, 42 were in Year 3, 17 were in Year 5, and 46 in Year 7. In order to eliminate as far as possible any researcher bias, the instructions provided to children were quite open-ended (Hayik, 2012). After the conclusion of the final test, the children were simply asked, 'could you tell me what it was like to do NAPLAN?', which also provided the children with an opportunity to reflect on their experience before being invited to participate in focus groups.

Aligning with other research that suggests self-reported high achievers are more likely to report positive experiences of NAPLAN (Wyn et al., 2014), students who experienced positive emotions were confident that they would achieve good results and reported that NAPLAN had a positive effect on their learning outcomes. This typically referred to their level of engagement with the test as well as their forthcoming results. For example, the response in Figure 15.1 from a student recognised as a high achiever in her class explicitly conveys positive emotion through the 'happy' facial expression, which engages the viewer through her direct gaze, and 'thumbs up', which is drawn alongside the representation of the test. The drawing converges with her written description, which refers to her positive references to each domain tested and to looking forward to receiving her results.

Other students who were similarly recognised as high achievers reported experiencing happiness, confidence and pride in their ability to finish the test.

Children who experienced difficulties in their cognitive, social and/or emotional learning or were grappling with complex life circumstances contributed very different responses, with some finding it difficult to articulate their reasons for disliking NAPLAN. For example, the Year 3 student who created the response in Figure 15.2 conveyed only that 'I don't like it!!' in his written response. The drawing, however, revealed themes of isolation, negative emotion and powerlessness, conveyed through his disproportionately small representation of himself, accentuated by a large amount of white space to represent isolation. Sadness is conveyed through his unhappy facial expression featuring a downturned mouth, which is darker than his other facial features, increasing its salience within the drawing.

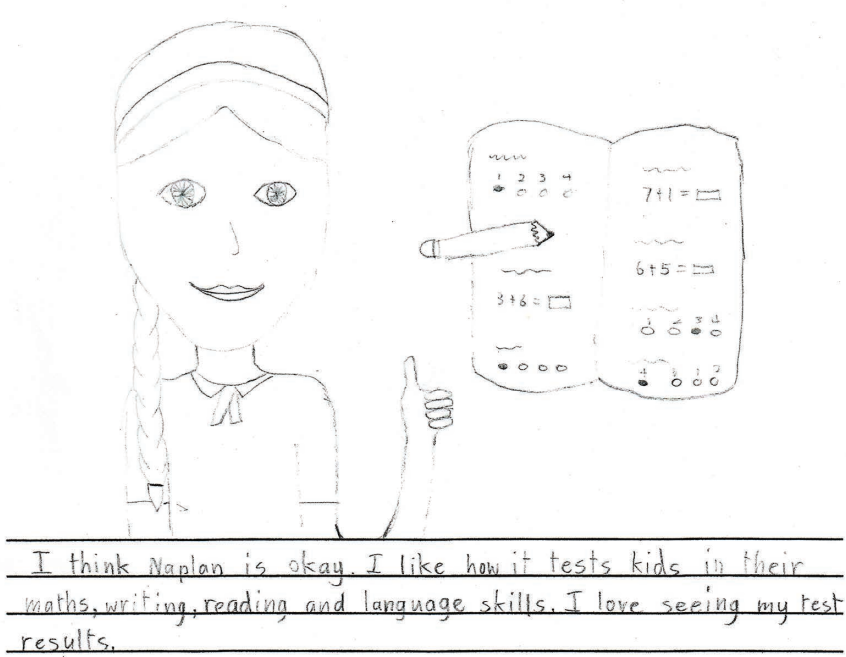

FIGURE 15.1 Example of a positive response

Child's written description: I think NAPLAN is okay. I like how it tests kids in their maths, writing, reading and language skills. I love seeing my test results. (Year 5 student, average SES school)

With 89 of the 105 students including at least one negative theme within the drawn or written elements of their responses, it would be an oversimplification at best to assume that all negative responses were created by students who experienced difficulties in their learning or life circumstances. Rather, as was the case with the positive responses, negative emotions commonly related to the students' perceptions of how NAPLAN affected their learning outcomes. Anger and confusion were typically represented by Year 7 students who failed to understand the purpose of a test that they perceived as not only a waste of time, but hindered rather than supported their learning. For example, in Figure 15.3, confusion around the purpose of the test is represented through three question marks that feature prominently in the image. This visual element is supported by the student's written description of NAPLAN as 'a confusing experience as I still cannot understand the point of [the] tests'. Jagged lines forming teeth in the 'angry bunny', together with the expression

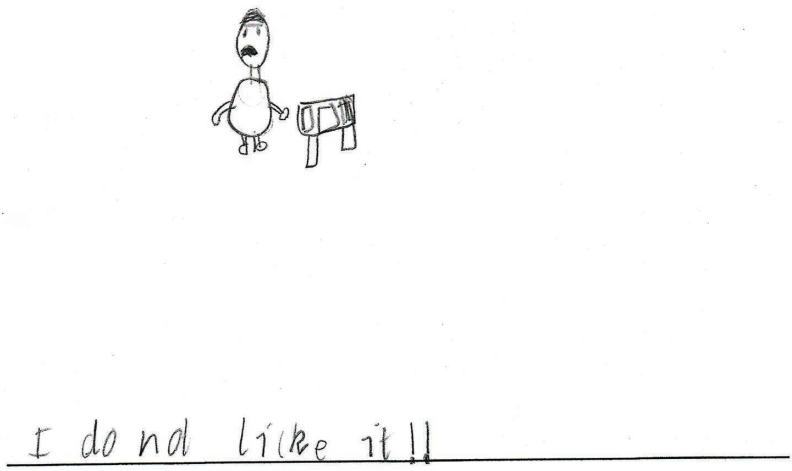

FIGURE 15.2 Example of a negative response from a child with complex life experiences

Child's written description: I [don't] like it!! (Year 3 student, average SES school)

'Grrrr!', represent anger, which is directed towards this student's belief that 'NAPLAN doesn't help us in any way' and the 'lack of possible growth as we stop doing normal work'.

Research has long established that anger is elicited by the violation of an expectation of how things should be and therefore shares the same root as anxiety (Bowlby, 1973; Laurent & Menzies, 2013). These students' responses suggest that their expectations of school were violated when NAPLAN significantly altered their learning spaces, experiences, outcomes and relationships, albeit temporarily, as their classrooms abruptly became sites of external testing (Comber, 2012). Like the response in Figure 15.3, the image in Figure 15.4 refers to confusion surrounding the purpose of the tests, with the question, 'Why do we have to do this!!??' pointedly accentuated through multiple exclamation and question marks. In this instance the resulting anger, emphasised by a large scribble, is foregrounded through a facial expression featuring inwardly downturned eyebrows and downturned mouth. However, this student's anxiety also appears to relate to comparative performance, which 'put a lot of pressure on us', leading to several instances of the word 'help', which are positioned in the background through their smaller size.

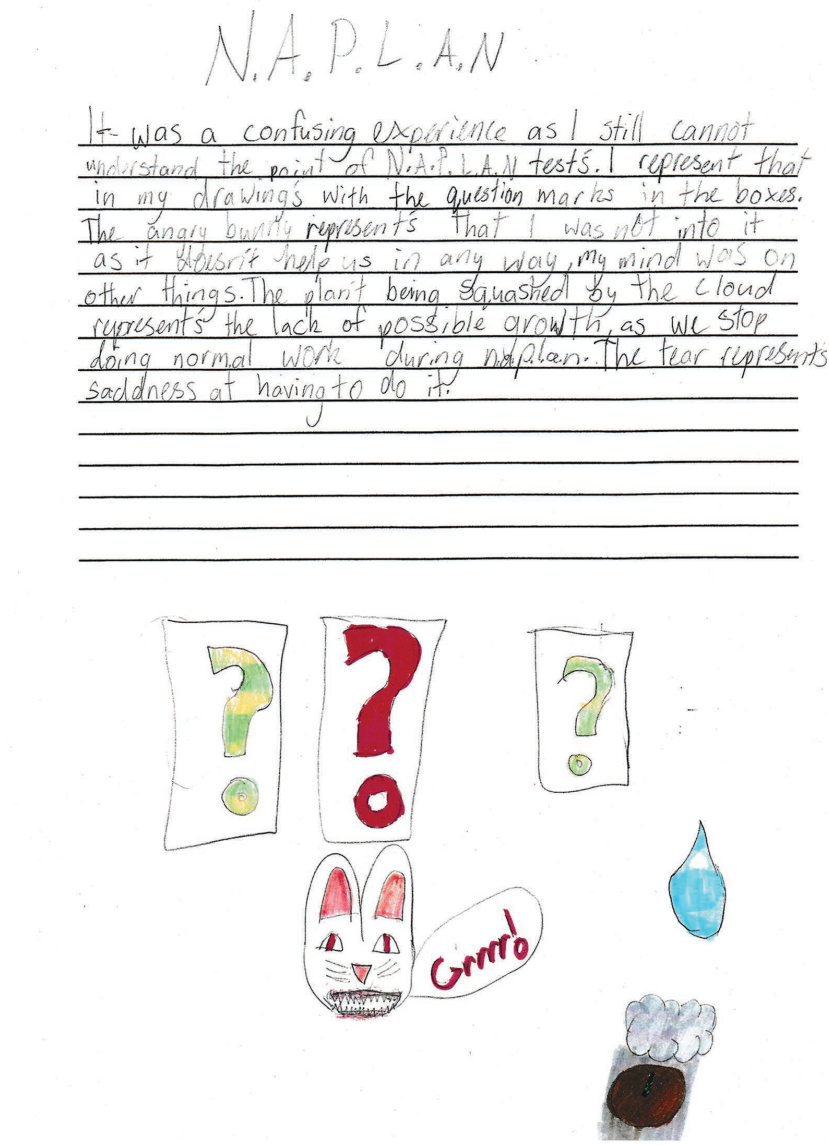

FIGURE 15.3 Example of a response depicting anger

Child's written description: It was a confusing experience as I still cannot understand the point of NAPLAN tests. I represent that in my drawings with the question marks in the boxes. The angry bunny represents that I was not into it as it doesn't help us in any way, my mind was on other things. The plant being squashed by the cloud represents the lack of possible growth as we stop doing normal work during NAPLAN. The tear represents sadness at having to do it (Year 7 student, higher SES school).

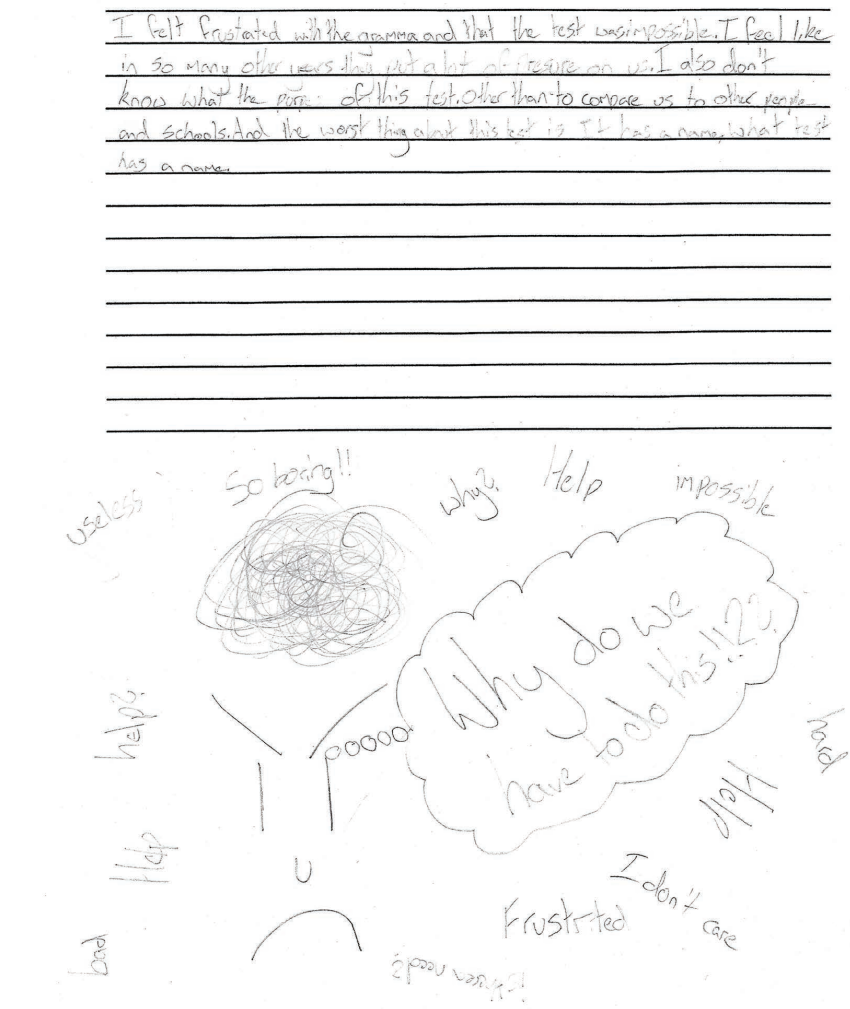

FIGURE 15.4 Example of a further response depicting anger

Child's written description: I felt frustrated with the grammar and that the test was impossible. I feel like in so many other years that this put a lot of pressure on us. I also don't know what the point of this test is other than to compare us to other people and schools. And the worst thing about this test is its name. What test has a name? (Year 7 student, higher SES school)

Anxiety engendered by the perceived pressure to perform was also evident in other students' contributions. For example, in Figure 15.5, this is embodied through representations of large eyes, a wavy line mouth, tears, question marks and the words 'I don't know!' written in a thought bubble. These elements of the visual component of his response were accentuated by the written

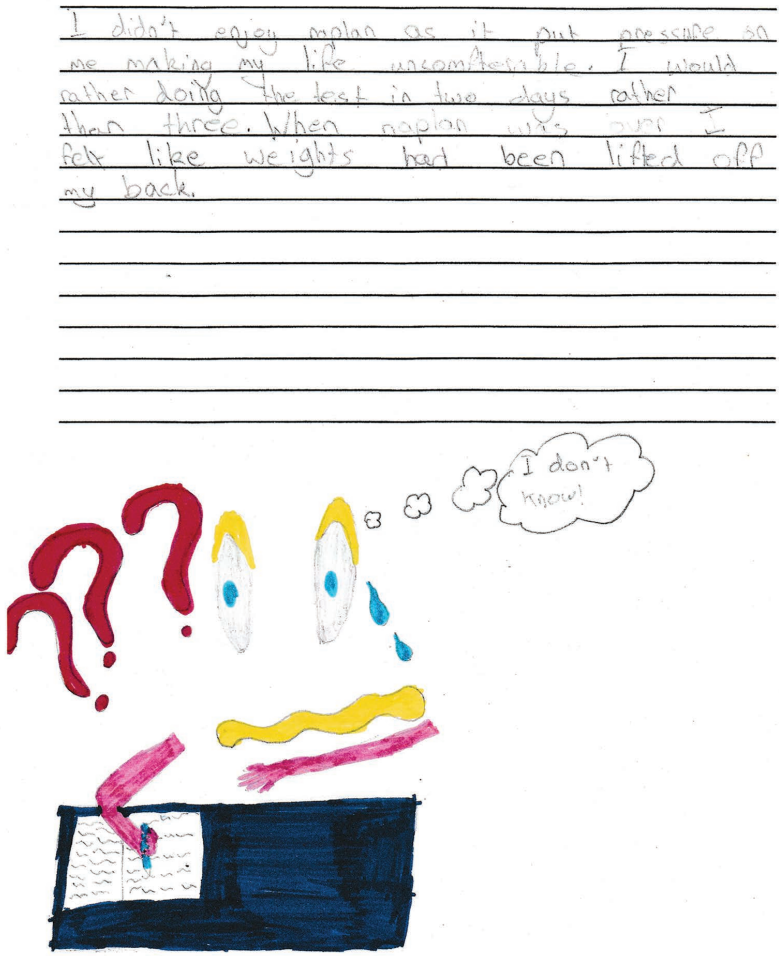

FIGURE 15.5 Example of a response representing anxiety

Child's written description: I didn't enjoy NAPLAN as it put pressure on me, making my life uncomfortable. I would rather [do] the test in two days rather than three. When NAPLAN was over I felt like weights had been lifted off my back (Year 7 student, higher SES school).

description, 'when NAPLAN was over, I felt like weights had been lifted off my back'.

The examples presented thus far represent each student in isolation, with no other students depicted in the drawings. While this was to be expected, given the protocols associated with standardised testing regimes, there was evidence to suggest that for some students, this physical isolation was experienced in

FIGURE 15.6 Example of a response representing isolation

Child's written description: I felt like I was in a bottomless pit, and I couldn't get out of my situation without help. It was hard and I thought asking for help would be useless. It made me feel sad, lonely and isolated, even though there were people at an arm's length away from me. It also made me feel like I was missing out on all the beautiful things in life (Year 7 student, higher SES school).

conjunction with an acute sense of emotional isolation. In Figure 15.6, this is represented through one Year 7 student's drawing of herself sitting alone at the bottom of a deep pit, far from the pleasant scene at the top of the image, unable to understand why she was required to do NAPLAN or to ask for help.

Not all the students' contributions articulated clear positive or negative responses, with approximately one-quarter of the children's drawings and written descriptions classified either as counterpoised, because they represented and/or described equivalent numbers of positive and negative themes, or neutral because there were no clear positive or negative themes. For example, the Year 3 child's response in Figure 15.7 simply describes NAPLAN as 'ok . . . but not the best test I have done', with a small representation of a smiling face on one side of the image and a nervous facial expression, indicated by a wavy line mouth, on the other.

Almost one-quarter of the children depicted a range of emotions through narrative representations of their experience. In every case, positive emotion was expressed only after the test was over. For example, one Year 3 student's narrative begins with a facial expression featuring a downturned mouth framed by raindrops falling from a dark cloud to represent sadness before NAPLAN.

FIGURE 15.7 Example of a neutral response

Child's written description: During NAPLAN I felt that it was ok but not the best test I have done (Year 3 student, higher SES school)

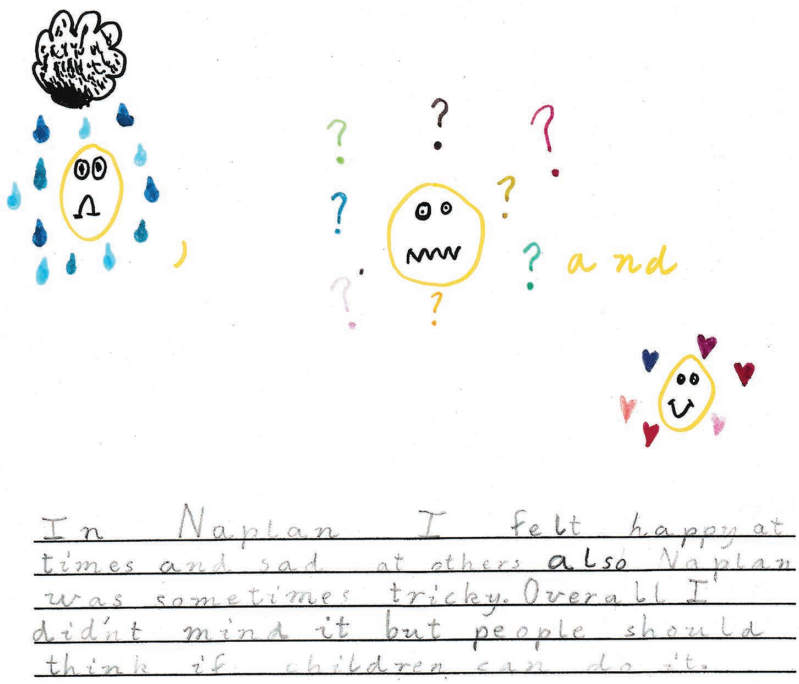

FIGURE 15.8 Example of a narrative response

Child's written description: In NAPLAN I felt happy at times and sad at others. Also NAPLAN was sometimes tricky. Overall I didn't mind it but people should think if children can do it. (Year 3 child, higher SES school)

The narrative progresses to a facial expression featuring a wavy line mouth, framed by question marks to represent nervousness and confusion while sitting the test, and concludes with a facial expression featuring an upturned mouth framed by hearts to represent happiness that NAPLAN was over.

A few younger students contributed conflicted responses, presenting divergent meanings in the drawn and written modalities in an apparent attempt to convey their experience while remaining compliant with what they believed their teacher wanted to hear. Likely recognising that written texts take precedence over visual texts in everyday school life (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Wright, 2010), each of these responses included a distinctly positive written description, while the drawing conveyed an opposing negative message. For example, one Year 3 student described NAPLAN as 'so fun because there [was] so [many] fun [questions]' within the written description (see Figure 15.9). However, this child has drawn him or herself without a facial expression in an apparent attempt to avoid conveying emotion, and incorporated the phrases, 'I am not doing this', and 'I am [exhausted]'.

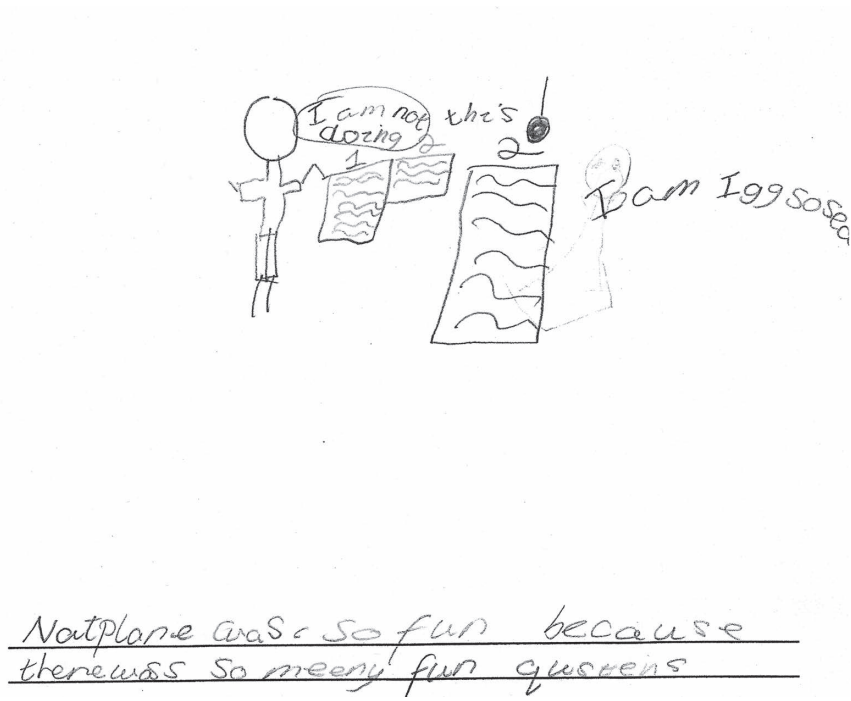

FIGURE 15.9 Example of a conflicted response

Child's written description: NAPLAN was so fun because there was so [many] fun [questions] (Year 3 student, average SES school)

While this discussion focuses on the children's drawn and written responses, the study recognised that ignoring or erasing other dimensions of children's experiences results in limited narratives and questionable assumptions about the data and students' capacity to represent their own interests (Cruddas, 2007; Mannion, 2007). It should therefore be noted that these responses were compared to data collected from children's focus groups, classroom observations and adult interviews with teachers, school leaders, senior systemic staff and parents. In combination, these data suggested that children experience NAPLAN within an emotionally charged and confusing context of contradictions and dissonances, meaning that the students received little, if any, clear and consistent information about the purpose of the tests.

Implications for policy analysis

These students' responses to their experience of NAPLAN demonstrate that just as there is no homogenous 'student voice', so too there is no ubiquitous student experience of educational policy. This is because students experience

their schooling within unique matrices of cultural, social, economic and personal contexts, which are entangled with numerous paradoxes and paradigm shifts, each overlapping and interfering with each other in unintended, often negative ways (Howell, 2016). Without due consideration of students' reports of their experiences, policy analyses remain partial and prone to fragmented solutions. This includes an inherent obligation to include the voices of students who may not have the 'cultural, social and intellectual resources to be visible and audible' (Groundwater-Smith, 2011, p. 54) through traditional methods. While surveys and focus groups can generate useful data, the potential drawbacks of superficiality and silencing of marginalised students remain a barrier to their use in substantive policy analysis. While not all students enjoy drawing, visual methods are recognised as a more readily accessible means of creating 'rich individual stories and collective narratives' (Leitch, 2008, p. 51) that work in synergy to unsettle adult assumptions by detailing the complexity of students' lived experiences of education policy (Moss, 2008, pp. 62, 69).

Conclusion

Incorporating a range of student views presents a formidable challenge in a society where talk of negative emotion is actively avoided (Macy, 2007), and students are constructed as highly emotive, irrational 'becomings' to be invested in and 'developed' in particular ways for the good of the country and its future economic prosperity. Within this context, students' negative reports of their schooling are typically dismissed by those whose policies ostensibly strive to achieve more equitable learning outcomes for all students. Despite this impediment, student voice has gained traction and is increasingly viewed as crucial to democratic inclusivity and positive change by 'providing rich data for school reform efforts' (Mitra, 2007, p. 730). However, its transformative potential is often lost through uncritical enthusiasm that is typically accompanied by limited methodological reflection (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018; Gallacher & Gallagher, 2008). This often translates to tokenistic enactments that typically include the participation of 'confident, high achieving, popular, and articulate' (Mayes et al., 2019, p. 159) students, while those who are marginalised remain unseen and unheard. The resulting critique has often been used 'to justify doing nothing at all rather than involve children and young people in tokenism' (Lundy, 2018, p. 340). Unintentional or not, this achieves little more than reproducing current practice and thus maintaining the status quo (Bourke & Loveridge, 2018; Groundwater-Smith, 2011).

This chapter does not argue for visual methods as the 'gold standard' of student participation. Indeed, as Gallacher and Gallagher (2008) argue, caution must be taken against the claim that participatory methods always democratise the research process, empower students and exist only in direct opposition to

more traditional methods. Neither does it argue that participatory visual methods are immune from the problems and pitfalls of other research methods. Barnikis et al. (2019) argue that 'thoughtful research design[s] and openness to the unexpected' (p. 4) are needed, aligning with Gallacher and Gallagher's (2008) reasoning that student participation is 'less a question of methods and techniques than of attitude' (p. 511). As Lundy (2018) notes, 'Participation is always imperfect: There could always be more time, more resources and more children [and/or young people] involved' (p. 351). What this chapter does do is argue for honest and open dialogue with children and young people in ways that include those who are not flourishing in the system and not as easily seen and heard, as well as to remain vigilant and monitor progress in the rapidly expanding field of student voice research.

Note

1 At the time of data collection, the tests occurred over three days during the first full week in May.

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16

RESEARCHING POLICY ELITES IN EDUCATION

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Introduction

Much policy sociology research that deals with contexts of policy influence and text production in education involves conducting interviews with elites, who can be defined as those 'with vastly disproportionate control over or access to a resource' (Khan, 2012, p. 361). Following Pareto and Michels and early theories of elites in political science, the genesis of elite sociological studies can be traced to the classic work of C. Wright Mills (1956) in the USA, with his depiction of a power elite consisting of industrial, political and military elites. There has been fluctuating interest in elite studies since that time (Savage & Williams, 2008; Khan, 2012; Howard & Kenway, 2015). The growth of inequality across the past couple of decades (Pikkety, 2014; Savage, 2021) has witnessed renewed interest in the sociology of elites and in the education of elites (Maxwell & Aggleton, 2015; van Zanten et al., 2015; Koh & Kenway, 2016). Yet, despite this recent interest, Howard and Kenway (2015) suggest that there has been limited focus on matters of methodology – defined as 'theoretically informed analysis of research approaches and techniques' (p. 1005).

In the field of policy sociology in education specifically, there is limited literature that addresses questions of methodology (Addey & Piattoeva, 2022), and even less that engages with the particular issue of researching policy elites in education (Grek, 2011, 2022; Ozga & Gewirtz, 1994; Selwyn, 2013; Walford, 2012; Savage et al., 2022; Ozga, 2022). Two decades ago, Batteson and Ball (1995) pointed to the paucity of research in this area, calling 'for a more thorough-going methodological and theoretical reflexivity' (p. 214). Elite interviews are important in policy sociology in education because they offer

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the potential for access to knowledge in and about policy processes that is not by and large publicly available. The aim of this chapter is to extend this literature through a comparative analysis of elite interviews in three separate policy studies that each involved elite interviews, but in quite different contexts.

This chapter proffers a comparative analysis of three cases to highlight common and distinct concerns, challenges and issues, including questions of access, social relations in the interview situation, the veracity or warrantability of interview data and representation of the data by both the interviewee and the researcher. A central concern is thus the role of the researcher and their positionality in recruiting and accessing participants, conducting interviews, and analysing and representing interview data. In what follows, we introduce the three cases and discuss the literature on interviewing elites and issues to do with power. We then move to consideration of the three cases, followed by a synthetic and comparative analysis derived from the insights of each. The argument of this chapter demonstrates that issues involved in interviewing policy elites often provide as much useful data for our research as the actual content of the interview. Addey and Piattoeva (2022) refer to the messy, subjective, provisional and deeply embodied hinterland of research in education policy, a reality very evident in researching and interviewing policy elites. Reflections about such matters are productive, as Ozga (2022) suggests, for policy sociology in education research.

Theoretical considerations when researching policy elites

Work on the policy cycle in education, involving contexts of influence, text production and policy enactment (Ball, 1994), can at times be read as emphasising processes and relationships in a somewhat abstract way, and often it is not explicitly acknowledged that these processes are constructed, framed and practised by individuals, thereby prioritising structure over agency, or in Bourdieu's frame, emphasising field over practice. In this chapter, we seek to bring the actors back into the analysis, but as situated within the imbrications of structure and practice, and not simply as free agents. As Khan (2012) argues, studies of elites need to acknowledge individual and collective actors, as well as the structural relationships in which they are situated. In contexts of policy influence and policy text production that are relevant to our three cases, the actors are policy elites in government, an intergovernmental organisation and an edu-business. Using Khan's (2012) definition of elites, it is particular knowledge capital (or ready access to it) that these policy elites possess and which defines them as such. If we think about the context of policy practice or policy enactment in schools, school principals might also be seen as policy elites, given their significant role in mediating the uptake and enactment of centrally developed policies.

In terms of power, Khan's (2012) definition of elites emphasises structural location and access to or control over resources that grant elites power over others. However, we want to emphasise that the power relations that give shape to elite interviewing are not limited to power vested in a particular structural location or as possessed by an individual or group. It is necessary to also analyse elite interview situations in terms of a conception of power as a relation between forces – a conception that has been developed from Nietzsche by scholars such as Foucault. A relational conception of power draws attention to how the interview situation will be affected by the presence of those involved and the relations between them: the power of a senior bureaucrat that inheres in their position within the State will manifest differently in relation to a doctoral researcher, on the one hand, and a senior professor on the other. Moreover, the differences in this case may not simply be due to the way that the senior bureaucrat acts towards different researchers, but may result from what the doctoral researcher feels can be said or done compared with the professor.[2] As Ball (2013) writes, from a Foucauldian perspective '[p]ower is not . . . a structure but rather a complex arrangement of social forces that are exercised; it is a strategy, embedded in other kinds of relations' (p. 30). Each of the three cases discussed in this chapter exemplifies different strategies at work in the interview situation.

It should also be noted that while policy elites are powerful because of their positions within influential policymaking organisations, such as a department of education, their authority, the legitimate right to exercise power, also flows from the capitals they possess. With the enhanced significance of data, datafication and the digitalisation of data in education governance, Grek (2022) argues that their power also now stems from their expertise as knowledge brokers, their powerful capital.

Three cases of elite interviews in education policy sociology

The first case discussed is from a study conducted with elites located in a national government (ministers, undersecretaries, State Council members, Education Council members, University Vice-Chancellors) and focused on understanding the Omani higher-education (HE) policy architecture and its operations in respect of policy production (Al'Abri, 2016). Semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of 43 policymakers and others involved in Omani HE were used to generate data. This study was framed *inter alia* by Offe's (1984) insight that state structures mediate the processes of policy production, with potential impact on policy content, and it investigated the complex interweaving of national, regional and global factors that affected and framed the policy architecture, policy processes and policy content in Omani HE. The study was undertaken in a specific political structure, namely

a Sultanate. In the case of Oman, this structure is a type of constitutional monarchy with small shoots of democracy.

The second study focused on the education policy work of the OECD, paying special attention to the role of the Directorate for Education and Skills inside the organisation and the enhanced influence of the OECD's education policy work globally (Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2016). This study included more than 50 interviews with senior policymakers, including three visits to the OECD headquarters in Paris and a seminar presentation to members of the Directorate for Education and Skills on the research in progress. The study thus involved relationships with policy elites located in an international intergovernmental organisation. Some analysis of the habitus of the policymakers and the professionals working in the Directorate, derived from reflection upon relationships and positionings in the research interviews, has already been undertaken (Lingard et al., 2015).

The third study focused on the increased role of edu-businesses in education policy and practice and involved interviews with elites in a multinational corporation: Pearson plc (Hogan et al., 2015). The recent literature suggests that elites today have become more global in character and reach (Khan, 2012). Grek (2022, p. 22) observes that 'education elites are now much more fluid and changing actor formations, existing in-between national and transnational spaces, being state and non-state actors, and deriving their power from their key position in relation to knowledge production and expertise'. This study of edu-businesses proceeded from the assumption that policy analysis today must consider the relationality between global and national scales, relations between national and transnational spaces and between corporations, governments and international organisations. Employing a network ethnography methodology (see Howard, 2002; Ball & Junemann, 2012), ten semi-structured interviews were conducted via Skype with edu-business participants.

The three cases enable a comparative approach that acts as both a method of inquiry and a frame for analysis (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003). While each case is contextually different, all three organisations function as significant loci of action in the field(s) of education policy. The OECD, for example, tends to influence global policy debates and national reform agendas (Sellar & Lingard, 2013; Lingard & Sellar, 2016). The Omani government, like all states in nations, is responsible for developing and enacting national education policy (Al'Abri, 2019). Pearson is increasingly powerful in how it works to establish a global policy consensus in education and how it seeks to influence education policy by selling products and services (see Hogan et al., 2015). We argue in what follows that all three of these organisations provide policy advice and seek to produce policy, and as such, contain various levels of policy expertise (Fisher, 1994). Furthermore, elites within the three organisations contribute to the policy cycle in education in these different contexts.

The Omani case

Elite interviewing takes on greater salience in an idiosyncratic political structure such as that in contemporary Oman, one of only two extant Sultanates along with Brunei, and where policy research of the kind referred to here is not common. Oman is a state-centric polity with some emergent democratic practices. In terms of the context of policy text production, agenda setting comes either from the Sultan or from inside the interstices of the state, unlike in a more democratic polity, where some policies result from external public pressures or from democratic elections. Researching policy and interviewing elites are thus still sensitive in this political system. As such, elites are not easy to access, given the closed and hierarchical nature of politics and decision-making. This case involved research interviews with significant policymakers in agencies where HE policy is developed and enacted, such as councils, Ministries and universities. The interviewees were purposefully selected due to their powerful leadership positions (e.g. ministers, undersecretaries, general directors, university vice-chancellors) in the Omani HE policy architecture.

Many of the policy elites interviewed had PhDs from high-status universities in the Global North, making them elite in multiple ways, and perhaps more open to being interviewed by a doctoral researcher. Indeed, a majority of interviewees commented on, and approved of, the researcher's enrolment at a globally recognised Australian university, given their own experiences attending high-performing Western universities. However, access was not always straightforward. These policy elites were surrounded by multiple gatekeepers who were cautious about what would be done with the data collected. As Al'Abri (2016) argues, studying policy and politics in a developing nation is not an easy task, as demonstrated by the paucity of research in the area and, in this case, gatekeepers' lack of familiarity and trust regarding such research agendas, including the place of research interviews. Accessing elite policymakers was difficult in this context with gatekeepers rather than the policy elites at times prohibiting access. However, once the researcher had gained access to elite interviewees, his status as a young student researcher became less of an issue.

Establishing trust and rapport in the interview situation was another challenge in the data collection process. Grek (2011) states that researchers have to demonstrate that they are trustworthy by evidencing familiarity with the context being researched – here HE policy and policy architecture in Oman – as well as accepting the account provided by interviewees. This of course raises issues regarding the warrantability of the data. Given the Omani Royal political system and the sensitivity of researching policy there, it was not an easy task to gain trust immediately from interviewees. There was some questioning of the study and about the data that were being collected. During the course of the interviews, the researcher developed techniques to build trust, from the

presentation of information and informed consent sheets to talking about the importance of the study for developing the Omani HE system. Indeed, follow-up invitations were received from two ministers and other policy elites to give presentations about the findings of the study when it was completed. These might be seen as requests for an ethical 'giving back' to participants, but these requests were also perhaps an attempt to reconstitute the study as 'research for policy'. Positioning the study according to this 'research for policy' stance, rather than a more critical 'research of policy' (Lingard, 2013) approach, appeared important for gaining access, generating useful interview discussion and creating trust in the interview situation.

Researching policy elites raises specific ethical issues. For example, Ministers could not be guaranteed anonymity because of the positions they held and the timeframe of the research. Ministers may not have been divulging information that was not already public or resonant with official government positions, or may have been representing the topics discussed with a public audience in mind.

Warranted claims from the data were thus a concern. As is the case with most political systems in the Gulf area, the Omani government is not publicly open and lacks transparency. The elites that participated in this study often spoke of how policy *ought to be* produced in relation to policy development, rather than discussing the 'reality' of current policies and processes. Interestingly, in two different interviews, interviewees had their advisers with them and they regularly checked and verified their answers with them. The interview situations in which advisers attended and assisted in answering research questions reflected Grek's (2011) point that sometimes interviewees simply use researchers as an 'audience' and provide official accounts, rather than revealing anything in the interview about tensions, behind the scene compromises, the messiness involved in policy production and so on.

These issues regarding access and the veracity of data cannot be understood without comprehending the political context and characteristics of the Omani Sultanate. These potential problems with the interview data provide further insight into the workings of this system. Issues of access to elites and the experience in the interview situation, including attempts to control the representation of policy and processes, became important data for the research, telling us about the actual workings of the political system and its modes of policy production. This experience confirms Offe's (1984) argument that policy architecture mediates what gets onto the policy agenda, how it is dealt with and represented and the policies that are produced.

The OECD case

In this second case, we consider how critical sociologists of education policy might engage with elite policy analysts in contexts increasingly dominated by

the generation and analysis of large data sets and the analysis of this data within the analytical frameworks of economics. Since the 1990s, we have seen a rapid acceleration in the production of data and accountability infrastructures in education (Lingard et al., 2016; Gulson et al., 2022) and the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is the most prominent international example. As Burrows and Savage (2014) have argued, the rapidly growing capacity to generate and analyse large social data sets challenges 'the predominant authority of sociologists and social scientists more generally to define the nature of social knowledge. It permits a dramatically increased range of other agents to claim the social for their own' (5). Given Khan's (2012) definition of elites as being those who have disproportionate control over a resource, and Mayer-Schönberger and Cukier's (2013) prediction of the rise of a professional class of 'algorithmists' who have access to the 'black box' of big data analysis, we are concerned with a new type of policy elite: symbolic analysts for whom large quantitative data sets have become the primary form of social knowledge and who may not see the value of critical and qualitative policy sociology. The status of these elites derives as much from their positionality in new social research hierarchies and their knowledge capital as it does from their institutional location.

In the study that forms the basis for this case, the researchers conducted interviews with staff working at the OECD in Paris and were invited to present on research-in-progress to staff from the Directorate for Education and Skills in October 2014. This presentation was an illuminating experience. Since beginning the study, the researchers had discussed critical views of the OECD that were encountered when talking with other academics or reading research articles discussing the role of the OECD in education policy. Often, the organisation is represented as a monolithic entity imposing an agenda of neoliberal reform on nations and test-based accountabilities in education. However, the OECD is an intergovernmental organisation that responds to the direction and oversight of member nations. This is often a messy and contested political process that is belied by the Organisation's glossy published outputs.

When visiting the OECD headquarters in Paris, the researchers were struck by the feel of the space, which is not dissimilar to a university and indeed we have heard it described by staff as a non-academic university with a focus on policy. As with any large organisation, OECD staff hold a spectrum of political and professional views, and we have become aware of internal political and professional contestation in relation to the current directions of the Organisation's education work, particularly the strengthened focus on quantitative as opposed to qualitative data. Many staff have PhDs from prestigious institutions and are engaged in demanding intellectual and research work. In some circumstances, this lent a collegial air to interviews and aided with access and the quality of data, just as the presence of elites with PhDs enabled interviews in the Omani case.

Importantly, relationships in the interviews with elites at the OECD worked differently when the researchers were interviewing staff with an outward focus on policy and engagement with member nations and staff with a more internal focus on technical analyses (see Lingard et al., 2015). The policy people, particularly those who interact with member nations, work to represent the institutional account and saw us as another 'audience' for their policy messages (Grek, 2011), while the technicians spoke to us in a more egalitarian register, researcher to researcher, and were often more open concerning issues and problems in respect of international testing.

Savage and colleagues (2022) have also commented critically on the capacity of some academic researchers, whom they refer to as academic elites, to travel to access such policy elites for research interviews and have suggested this might result in '*research of elites, by elites and for elites*' (p. 313). When sitting face to face with a group of OECD staff members during the seminar presentation the researchers were asked to give, they felt acutely aware of how easy it is to write critical polemics that will be appreciated by a group of like-minded academics; however, when talking to a group of clearly intelligent, highly educated and well-informed insiders, we felt the impotence of critiques that serve to further disengage critics from new modes and spaces of policy analysis and production. We would argue that such a disposition affects the interview relationship and the data so derived.

At the end of the presentation, a staff member approached the researchers and asked whether they would write a short 'executive summary' style report expanding on the finding that the work of the Directorate for Education and Skills may risk becoming unbalanced in favour of large-scale assessments, at the expense of its policy reviews that draw on both quantitative and qualitative data. This staff member saw possible allies with whom to strengthen the case, particularly inside the OECD, for the importance of sustaining the Directorate's reviews of policy, both national and thematic. This was an important moment of potential enrolment into the politics of an elite policy space that indicates how elite interviews can create opportunities to actually influence the policy process.

This incident provoked much reflection about the researchers' role when interviewing elite policy analysts. First, a cynical critique was not offered in the presentation and clearly the representation of data generated through conversation with these elites was relatively well received. This was important for a presentation of research-in-progress because the researchers needed to ensure continuity of access, which Grek (2011) suggests sometimes leads to 'capture' of researchers by the research participants' accounts of policymaking. However, this was not simply a matter of conceding to an uncritical position for instrumental logistical and access reasons. Rather, the attempt to provide a carefully nuanced critical account enabled better analysis and opened up possible alliances with certain staff in the organisation, providing opportunities for

the analysis of elite interviews to be folded back into the shaping of contexts of policy influence and production.

To conclude this case, we want to emphasise two points. First, the researchers sought careful engagement with the complexity of the practices that traversed the multiple policy contexts they were researching. This meant reflecting on the different kinds of institutions, political agendas, scientific practices, education policies, policy enactments and so on that are involved in the policy work of the OECD. Second, as Stengers (2005) has argued, it is important to resist the 'belief in the power of proofs to disqualify what they have no means to create' (p. 82). Instead of practising disqualifications across old divides (quantitative/qualitative, academic/government, academic/intergovernmental organisation, academic policy researcher/policy elites), this case suggests the value of finding new ways to think with the practices of others in elite policy spaces, including in the research interview. This is particularly the case for critical policy sociologists who are primarily versed in qualitative methodologies and who will need to find new ways of relating to the proliferation of large social data sets in social policy. As Muecke (2012, p. 55) reminds us, politics is a matter of alliances and calls for a 'criticism without judgment', which would be a mode of criticism that involves establishing 'real relations . . . and robust pragmatic connections across an array of different modes of existence'. To be clear, this is not a matter of simply going with the flow and accepting the status quo and its dominant representations. To the contrary: we would argue that elite interviews, under the right circumstances, can provide opportunity not simply to generate verifiable data, but also to influence the unfolding of policy across various contexts.

The Pearson case

The third case deals with interviews conducted with 'corporate' policy elites from the edu-business, Pearson. This follows the acknowledgement that edu-businesses have become influential policy actors in education today in the context of network governance (see Ball, 2007, 2012; Ball & Junemann, 2012).

Reflecting on attempts to research corporate policy elites, most individuals initially approached for interview were cautious about the nature of the research. The researcher's experience largely reflected that of previous research about the inherent difficulty in gaining access to those with the 'power and ability to protect themselves from intrusion and criticism' (Mikecz, 2012, p. 483). As Thomas (1993, p. 82) reflects, corporate elites are good at insulating themselves, and 'when they do venture out of the corporate suites it is to address important issues and constituencies, such as stockholders, other business leaders, financial analysts, government officials, customer organizations, and community groups'. Unsurprisingly then, most edu-business representatives declined to be involved in the research. However, this experience was

vastly different with Pearson representatives, and analysis of the conditions for this difference provides the analytical focus for our third case.

The individuals at Pearson who were approached for interview were attentive, quick to respond to requests and willing to be involved. Each person interviewed suggested other high-level Pearson executives that might be useful to talk to and generally facilitated an email introduction. This relative ease of access to policy elites within Pearson raises questions about why Pearson elites were so willing to consent to interviews. Pearson has been in the public spotlight, especially in the USA where they have borne the brunt of fierce public criticism (Hursh, 2015). This has been directed through media outlets, social media campaigns and even public demonstrations. Perhaps counter intuitively, this context explains why Pearson representatives were amenable to being interviewed. By communicating with external stakeholders and responding to how its educational activities are evaluated by the public, Pearson seeks to position itself as accountable.

Conversely to the other two cases presented, participants made no reference to a post-interview relationship, to the desire to be sent any findings, reports or publications, nor did they express any concern over the ways that the research might benefit them. The research relationship seemed to be based on the notion of how Pearson might convince the researcher, and the potential audience for the study, that it is doing the right thing for education policy and practice. Pearson's willingness to be involved in this study was their appreciation of 'the rules of the game' (Foucault, 1979) and their recognition that continuing success and power in education policy networks are dependent on social relations between the company and the critical public. As Schoenberger (1992, p. 217) reminds us, 'These are, recall, very powerful and self-assured people, talking, moreover, to an obscure [young female, doctoral!] academic who poses, as far as they are concerned, absolutely no threat'.

The interviews were used by Pearson to provide accounts and justifications of their education work. As we have already noted, and as Grek (2011) has argued in relation to her interviews as a young researcher with education policy elites in Scotland, the researcher provided an 'audience' for the explication of official public representations of Pearson's position, as was the case with the OECD example above. In this case, interviewing corporate policy elites was complex given, as Alvesson (2011) argues, that most researchers hold a romanticised view of the interviewing process, whereby 'interviewing is grounded in an image of a potentially honest, unselfish subject, eager or at least willing to share his or her experiences and knowledge for the benefit of the interviewer and the research project' (p. 29). Alvesson observes further that interviewees 'may be politically aware and politically motivated actors' (p. 29). We would suggest that Pearson interviewees were both. In Pearson's quest to become an influential policy actor in education, it has adopted a business strategy focused on proving its legitimacy and increasing its authority in

education and in education policy. We have written about these business strategies elsewhere (Hogan et al., 2015, 2016), but it is worth noting that many of these strategies are about shaping the discourses around private involvement in public education.

In summary, the relative ease of access to interviewing policy elites within Pearson cannot be explained fully by the positionality of the researcher or what Pearson could gain from the research or interviewing experience, but rather how Pearson could use the process as an opportunity to promote their brand and their positionality within the field of education as *legitimate*. It suggests that researchers wanting to conduct interviews with corporate policy elites need to carefully consider the motives behind the representations collected from interviewees as data. If we were to accept the dominant view of the interview as a tool in which a knowledge-transmitting logic prevails, then we have to accept that the interviewees were motivated by a desire to assist science where 'true' and 'authentic' answers were provided and, that the data could be mobilised as a 'competent source of meaning, knowledge and intentionality' (Alvesson, 2011, p. 107). However, theorising the interviewees as political actors rather than as 'truth tellers' helped to focus on particular details in interview texts, and challenge the data in terms of its political motivations (Alvesson, 2011). It is thus necessary to recognise the interview process as an ambiguous and complicated encounter that should not be idealised, and where researcher reflexivity is critically important for data interpretation and representation in education policy sociology.

Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter, we have discussed three cases of interviewing policy elites in education, albeit policy elites of different kinds that are situated in different locations, namely: an idiosyncratic nation-state; an influential international organisation in the global governance of education through its testing regimes, data based policy work and national reviews; and a powerful edu-business that is a significant policy actor in education globally in the context of network governance and privatisation and commercialisation of education. Researcher positionality is an important issue that cuts across these cases. In the Omani and Pearson cases, the status of the studies as doctoral research affected access to policy elites, making it difficult in the case of Oman, while also reflecting its political structure as a hierarchical Sultanate; and making it relatively easy in the case of Pearson, as the interviewees sought to present the case for Pearson and positioned the researcher as audience. The situation was different in terms of researcher positionality in relation to the OECD study. More experienced researchers with a long research involvement at the organisation had ready access, but in the visit discussed here were required to present research-in-progress findings to OECD staff as the *quid pro quo* for continuing research

and interview access. As shown, this presentation opened up further insights into developments in the Directorate for Education and Skills. Indeed, it might be said that the requirement to present a paper at the OECD enabled better understanding of internal complexities and contestation inside the Organisation. This also raised awareness of the ways senior policy actors, sitting at the interface with the political work of the Organisation, also seemed to regard the research interview as part of their policy work and the need to proselytise the OECD's position on education matters, sometimes leading to a kind of filibustering in the research interviews. Recognition of the variant ways differently positioned interviewees responded in research interviews was important for understanding the internal workings of the OECD and the different policy habituses of those focused on policy and those more focused on research.

In each case, we see the positioning of 'researcher as audience' for the views of the policy elites. Power differentials and relations, as well as asymmetry and gendered relations, in the interviews make it difficult to interrupt such functioning of the interview and the control exercised by interviewees over their representation of policy. Importantly, reflections on the nature of the interview also provide useful data in respect of the nature of policy work and the culture of the organisations being researched. This worked differently in relation to each of the three cases, but in all cases provided further insights and data. We thus suggest that researcher/policy elite relationships can be seen as a source of data and stress the value of structured reflections on interview situations immediately following their completion. Insights from the research interview relationships provided insights into the character of policy and policymaking in each of the three cases and of the habitus of elite policy actors.

The issues traversed in this chapter also raise questions about the representations of research findings derived from interviews with policy elites. It is the case, particularly when interviewing policy elites in education, 'that one cannot trust simply to one's own good faith, and this is true because all kinds of distortions are embedded in the very structure of the research relationship' (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 608). We thus argue for the necessity of ongoing researcher reflexivity regarding interview data collected from policy elites and the need to use various practices of triangulation of interview data with other data sets, so as to provide defensible accounts of what is going on in policymaking in education and the role of elites in this work. This also means we need to critically engage in (and reflect on) the interview process itself, understanding the rationales of those elites consenting to be interviewed and how this might frame their responses to questions in the interview situation. We need to be ever vigilant in our research interviews, and in our representations and analyses of interview data, so as not to be captured by the views extant in the organisations we are researching, yet at the same time, we need to be open-minded and practise a 'reflex reflexivity' (Bourdieu et al., 1999, p. 608). Our stance is thus one that rejects 'epistemological innocence' (Bourdieu et al., 1999) in all

research endeavours, but particularly when interviewing policy elites and utilising the data so gained to understand education policy and policy processes.

Notes

1 Author names are listed in alphabetical order.
2 Word limits have meant we have not dealt with the ways different types of questions also function in the elite interview and also have effects on the data collected.

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Conclusion

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17

ANALYSING EDUCATION POLICY

Now and into the future

Meghan Stacey and Nicole Mockler

Introduction

This book has presented a collection of distinct, critical approaches to the analysis of education policy. We have divided this book into two sections – the first, exploring approaches to text and document analysis; and the second, exploring approaches to the analysis of human, and other, participants. In this final, short chapter, we bring together the methodological and theoretical considerations canvased in this book to make some concluding comments regarding the future of critical education policy analysis research. We begin by briefly summarising the chapters of this book, leading us to a discussion of key themes that have arisen across these chapters: the text/actor divide; the ethics of education policy research, which draws on the work, lives and perspectives of busy policymakers, teachers and young people; and finally, some considerations about what it means to research 'education policy' specifically and the peculiarities such an endeavour engenders. We then conclude this chapter, and this book, with a set of critical questions for critical education policy researchers – questions which have arisen from this book and which suggest future directions for the field more broadly.

Analysing education policy

Part 1 of this book focused on approaches to policy research using documents or other text-based sources as the target of their analysis. This included chapters on the use of critical discourse analysis; thinking with (and against) Foucault; Indigenist Policy Analysis drawing on the 'What's the Problem Represented to Be?' approach; media analysis – both broad and specific; the

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analysis of promotional texts such as websites and school prospectuses; and finally, the use of social media, internet archives and other forms of online record keeping as sources of data. Part 2 of this book then moved to an exploration of 'participant analysis', broadly construed. This included chapters on network ethnography; actor-network theory; materiality in education policy research; Institutional Ethnography; decolonising approaches to curriculum policy research; working with children and young people; and researching policy elites. Some common concerns emerged across these chapters, ranging across both Part 1 and Part 2. Next, we highlight a selection of these, which in our view deserve some synthesis and commentary.

The first theme, important to how we have structured this book, is the apparent 'text–actor divide' in critical education policy research. Although we have separated this book into 'text-based' and 'participant-based' approaches to the analysis of education policy, we readily acknowledge that this is not a discrete separation; nor are the boundaries of these categories easily defined. Some approaches frequently combined attention to texts and lived experience, for instance as experience *of*, *subject to*, *or in contestation of* a text. In Institutional Ethnography, for example (see Chapter 13), this relationship becomes a core point of focus, beginning with the participant and mapping backwards towards key policy texts. However, identifying a particular text as the location of policy is not necessarily always important; as Clutterbuck argues in Chapter 15, a policy does not need to be named as such for it to have influence, or for school actors to be able to explain their own experiences. This argument is in accordance with the broad definition of policy that we have adopted in this book, as the 'authoritative allocation of values' (Easton, 1953), and with the range of text types that have been considered within it. Some of these, such as news media and school promotional texts, do not constitute 'formal' policy texts in and of themselves, but can operate to establish and communicate institutional and social 'values' in particular ways for particular audiences. Thus, it is important to maintain a broad definition of policy so that these platforms, and the work done via them, are brought into view in the critical analysis of education policy. As such, we would argue that recognising that the 'text actor divide' is not discrete is important, and we support commentary in this book, and elsewhere, which seeks to 'decentre the traditional central placement of policy texts' (Gulson et al., 2015, p. 5). At the same time, recognising that neither of these categories of text and participant studies is monolithic or unitary also is important because it enables us to be attuned to the particular roles and functions of different data sources within each.

The second theme we would like to briefly discuss is that of ethical considerations pertinent to education policy studies. There are ethical considerations when working with this range of texts and actors (or non-human 'actants' – see Chapters 11 and 12). As Addey and Piattoeva (2022, p. 2) discuss in the introduction to their book, *Intimate Accounts of Education Policy Research*,

'tensions, doubts and troubles' suffuse critical education policy research, often sidelined but always present. They ask, for example: 'How to analyse data shared off-record? How to self-censor to retain access?' Indeed, ethical questions have arisen in each of the chapters we have included here, especially those concerned with participant-based research on education policy. These include, most obviously: working with children and young people (Chapter 15), which involves a need to devise appropriately accessible and perhaps more creative methods of data collection; and working with policy elites (Chapter 16), where the orientation and motivation of interview 'informants' is sometimes but not always explicit, and the orientation and motivation of researchers themselves may need to be negotiated so as to accommodate the varied contributions and lived experience of those who work in the policy space. Indeed even more generally, one might consider ethical concerns when working with teachers and school staff, along with others for whom the demands of their work make the potential opportunity cost of engaging with researchers disproportionally high (Gavin et al., 2021). But even where policy research is conducted without human participants, there are important ethical considerations – as the chapters in Part 1 show. For example, text-based data which is publicly available can be extremely important to public narratives of education, and how this is analysed and discussed can contribute to debates about the purpose and function of education systems. This is particularly important, we would argue, in the field of education, where policy can have wide-ranging impacts across generations of children and young people, and those who work with them in educational institutions.

Indeed, there are aspects of researching *education policy* that are quite particular – the kinds of ethical considerations discussed earlier being an example of these. For Addey and Piattoeva (Addey & Piattoeva, 2022, p. 5), 'the changing nature of educational policymaking and governance; the increasing pressure on academia to generate external funding and demonstrate measurable impact on policy and practice; and the fast-growing datafication and digitalisation of education' are combining to make the study of education policy research particularly important today. Adding to this, we would argue that 'education' as a field has become of increasing national and international importance in recent years. In a sense, education has long been a high-stakes field, given the wide reach of educational institutions into the vast majority of lives within a modern nation state. Under the varied influences of globalisation (de Sousa Santos, 2016), however, an internationally competitive 'knowledge economy' has taken hold in which education has become an even more central concern. This has been evident in Australia (Stacey & Mockler, 2023), the national context from which we write, but is also evident internationally (Sahlberg, 2016), as exemplified through international large-scale assessments, such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) run by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

This growing emphasis, we would argue, makes education an economically, socially and culturally significant site of research. This is especially so given the documented impacts upon students, parents and teachers of today's often neo-liberalised approaches to educational governance, in which responsibility for the ever-more-important achievement of students in this system is, somewhat paradoxically, shifted down to the level of local actors. We have written about the positioning of teachers in such a regime at length elsewhere (Mockler & Stacey, 2023; Stacey et al., 2022).

Critical questions for critical education policy researchers

The chapters in this book likely raise as many questions as they answer – if not more. This is often the way with critical research – a discomfort that researchers in this space may need to become accustomed to. This book sits alongside other recent explorations of methodological and theoretical concerns with researching education policy, aiming to support both critique and, through critique, positive change (Addey & Piattoeva, 2022; Gulson et al., 2015). Addey and Piattoeva (2022), for example, explore the oft-unexplored 'hinterlands' of education policy research, raising important ethical questions and dilemmas about the 'doing' of research in this field. This book includes chapters which complement those in the present volume, for instance consideration of research with 'elites' and the practice of network ethnography. Gulson et al. (2015), meanwhile, provide a richly theoretically informed collection of chapters that seek to explicitly link theory and method, including discussion of, for example, Foucauldian concepts and actor-network theory. We would encourage readers interested in these areas to follow these books up as sources of further reading.

Addey and Piattoeva (2022) and Gulson et al. (2015) aim, as we do, to provoke new and ongoing conversations about how the analysis of education policy can be done in thoughtful and generative ways. In this book particularly, we hope we have provided helpful guidance for the 'doing' of education policy analysis, across a range of critical approaches in which the details of this 'doing' are not always made explicit. In keeping with the critical tradition to which this book aims to contribute, we conclude this chapter and this book with a series of questions that arose for us in the process of editing. These are questions to which there is no clear, collective, singular answer, but which may provoke future explorations in the field of critical education policy studies. The list is also incomplete – readers will no doubt identify others to add to it. But we leave these questions with you in the hope of stimulating ongoing work in this important field.

- Does the analysis of education policy require text-based or participant-based research, or both? Why?

- What constitutes a policy 'text'? Are there different kinds of policy texts, do these need to be treated differently, and if so – how and why?
- Who has 'expertise' in relation to policy? Those who are impacted by it, those who 'implement' it, those who make it, or those who design it?
- Who 'makes' policy? Bureaucrats? Politicians? Teachers? Students? Data infrastructures?
- How can conversations with elite policymakers be understood as data sources – if at all?
- How are policymakers to be understood – as antagonists, partners, informants?
- What is the role of critical education policy research for education systems and structures?
- How are teachers and young people impacted by, and how do they impact, research in education policy?
- What are the limits of critical theory in education policy research?
- What is the purpose of a critical education policy researcher? To explain, to understand, to map, to critique, to destabilise?
- What is the collective project of critical education policy research? Is there one at all – and if not does there need to be?

Ultimately, the task of critical policy analysis is one of problematising rather than problem-solving. These questions seek, as the chapters in this book have done, to problematise both education policy and education policy analysis. It is our hope that this book will open up new pathways and possibilities for researchers navigating their way through policy-focused research, supporting them to pose their own critical questions to drive their own critical and generative research.

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