

Recontextualising policy discourses: a Bernsteinian perspective on policy interpretation, translation, enactment

Author

Singh, Parlo, Thomas, Sue, Harris, Jessica

Published

2013

Journal Title

Journal of Education Policy

DOI

<https://doi.org/10.1080/02680939.2013.770554>

Copyright Statement

© 2013 Taylor and Francis. This is an electronic version of an article published in Journal of Education Policy, Volume 28, Issue 4, 2013, Pages 465-480. Journal of Education Policy is available online at: <http://www.tandfonline.com> with the open URL of your article.

Downloaded from

<http://hdl.handle.net/10072/55862>

Griffith Research Online

<https://research-repository.griffith.edu.au>

This is the authors' version of the paper prior to publication. It was later published as:

Singh, P. & Harris, J., Thomas, S. (2013) . Recontextualising Policy Discourses: A Bernsteinian Perspective on Policy Interpretation, Translation, Enactment, *Journal of Education Policy*. 28:4, pages 465-480. DOI:10.1080/02680939.2013.770554
<http://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/Mrbka8hNRFZTZZ935RXq/full>

**Recontextualising Policy Discourses:
A Bernsteinian Perspective on Policy Interpretation, Translation, Enactment**

Parlo Singh^a, Sue Thomas^a, Jessica Harris^b

(a)Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University,
Brisbane, Australia.

(b)School of Education, University of Queensland, Brisbane,
Australia.

Contact: parlo.singh@griffith.edu.au

Abstract

This paper contributes to critical policy research by theorising one aspect of policy enactment, the meaning making work of a cohort of mid-level policy actors. Specifically, we propose that Basil Bernstein's work on the structuring of pedagogic discourse, in particular, the concept of recontextualisation, may add to understandings of the policy work of interpretation and translation. Recontextualisation refers to the relational processes of selecting and moving knowledge from one context to another, as well as to the distinctive re-organisation of knowledge as an instructional and regulative or moral discourse. Processes of recontextualisation necessitate an analysis of power and control relations, and therefore add to the Foucauldian theorisations of power that currently dominate the critical policy literature. A process of code elaboration (decoding and recoding) takes place in various recontextualising agencies responsible for the production of professional development materials, teaching guidelines and curriculum resources. We propose that mid-level policy actors are crucial to the work of policy interpretation and translation because they are engaged in elaborating the condensed codes of policy texts to an imagined logic of teachers' practical work. To illustrate our theoretical points we draw on data collected for an Australian research project on the accounts of mid-level policy actors responsible for the interpretation of child protection and safety policies for staff in Queensland schools.

Recontextualising Policy Discourses: A Bernsteinian Perspective on Policy Interpretation, Translation, Enactment

Parlo Singh^a, Sue Thomas^a, Jessica Harris^b

(a)Griffith Institute for Educational Research, Griffith University,
Brisbane, Australia.

(b)School of Education, University of Queensland, Brisbane,
Australia.

Contact: parlo.singh@griffith.edu.au

Introduction

Public policies are understood to be policies ‘made on behalf of the state by its various instrumentalities to order the conduct of individuals, such as teachers or students, or organizations such as schools or universities’ (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry 1997, 1-2). The policy process, however, is not one of simply developing rules to which these individuals or organizations adhere. Rather, the policy process is ‘a multidimensional and value-laden state activity that exists in context’ (Fitz, Davies and Evans 2006, 34). Policies originate, operate and are made effective by ensembles of institutions or agencies and the actors working within them. Specific policy texts are thus,

the product of compromises at various stages (at points of initial influence, in the micropolitics of legislative formulation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micropolitics of interest group articulation). There is ad hocery, negotiation and serendipity within the state, within the policy formation process. (Ball 1993, 11)

Therefore, policy cannot be understood as a text or a document alone, but rather as a process that is a complex, shifting meld of values, contingency and context (Maguire, Ball and Braun 2010), through which policy texts construct discourses that ‘organise their own specific rationalities, making particular sets of ideas, obvious, common sense and ‘true’’ (Ball 2008, 5). Policy as textual object ‘requires future actors to respond to it “as if” it were an agent requiring particular responses’ (Koyama & Varenne, 2012: 157).

Furthermore, policy is shaped by interpretations in a range of different contexts of practice within the education system (cf. Cibulka 1994; Taylor et al. 1997). Education policy,

even when centrally mandated, is interpreted, translated, adjusted and worked on differently by diverse sets of policy actors in processes of enactment in specific contexts. Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010) use the term ‘enactment’ to reflect an understanding that policies are interpreted and translated by diverse policy actors as they engage in making meaning of official texts for specific contexts and practices. According to Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins (2011) the work of making meaning in the policy process involves both interpretation and translation. These processes work together, and are at times ‘closely interwoven and overlapping’ to ‘hail subjects and inscribe discourses into practices’ (Ball et al. 2011, 621). Interpretation is seen as ‘an initial reading, a making sense of policy – what does this text mean to us? What do we have to do? Do we have to do anything? It is a political and substantive reading – a ‘decoding’ (Ball et al. 2011, 619). Interpretation is regulated by the particularities of specific contexts, such as school official reports, staff meetings and so forth. The discursive communities of these specific contexts regulate which aspects of policy texts are privileged and/or ‘filtered out’. The second process, translation, according to Ball et al. (2011), is the process of ‘recoding’ policy. Thus, translation involves

an iterative process of making texts and putting those texts into action, literally ‘enacting’ policy, using tactics, talk, meetings, plans, events, ‘learning walks’, producing artefacts and borrowing from other schools, from commercial materials and official websites, and being supported by local authority advisers (Ball et al. 2011, 620)

Similarly, the concept of translation in Actor Network Theory refers to ‘the (trans)formation of the common sense in setting A to the common sense in the linked setting B’ (Koyama & Varenne, 2012: 159).

Translation involves a local entity facing the problems produced as it attends to a statement made by another entity that cannot be ignored. It involves enrolling actors to attend to the statement or mandate, mobilizing actors and forging new connections between entities, and then negotiating the frictions in the emerging assemblage ... as well as dealing with the rising evidence of play through-out the activities of the newly linked entities and actors (Koyama & Varenne, 2012: 159).

Moreover, policy processes of interpretation and translation (decoding and recoding) are ongoing in different arenas of an education bureaucracy, and as official policy texts move from sites of legislative formulation to contexts of enactment within schools and classrooms. As Ball (1993, 11) has argued '[a]t all stages in the policy process we are confronted with different interpretations of policy, and with what Rizvi and Kemmis (1987) call "interpretations of interpretations"'. Thus, the term policy enactment refers to 'the creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is, the translation of texts into action and the abstractions of policy ideas into contextualised practices' (Ball, Maguire and Braun 2012, 3).

In Australia, as in other federal systems, official state education policy is developed or formulated at either a federal or state level, in this instance Queensland. It is then distributed through the relevant regional authorities and related interest groups and, in so doing, is interpreted and translated in a process of policy enactment by 'street level bureaucrats' (Lipsky 1980). Policy processes are, therefore, complicated and sophisticated processes (Ball et al. 2011), through which policy discourses mediate influence through a network of hierarchies and asymmetrical power relations. Policy discourses exert power 'in a capillary form, establishing disciplinary micro-technologies penetrating vast areas of social life' (Grimaldi 2012, 452). However, as Grimaldi (2012) then goes on to argue, such a Foucauldian notion of power does not fully address the question of who controls and who does not control the technologies of production and domination and so cannot explain the constitution and the transformation of social codes.

This paper draws on Bernstein's (1990, 2000) theoretical work on the principles of recontextualisation to contribute to the theorisation of power and control relations in the policy process through an examination of policy interpretation and translation by mid-level policy actors. Such an investigation furthers understandings of how an ensemble of mandated

official state policy texts is shaped by multiple recontextualising agencies for enactment by teachers in schools. In so doing, we aim to contribute to the growing body of recent policy studies which aspire to a more nuanced understanding of the enactment of policy, which we see as the delocation and relocation of discourses through selective ‘meaning making’ processes (decoding and recoding) across multiple institutional hierarchies (see Ball et al. 2012, Braun et al. 2010, Cameron, 2009, Grimaldi, 2012, Reeves & Drew 2012 and Webb & Gulson, 2012).

Theorising Policy Interpretation and Translation as Recontextualisation.

Bernstein (1990) describes the underpinning rules or set of principles of the policy process as the pedagogic device, a device that shares relative similarity in the structuring of educational systems across historical time and geographic space. The pedagogic device is the ensemble of rules or procedures by which policy knowledge is selectively translated into what is taught to who, when, where, why, and how it is evaluated or deemed as acquired (Bernstein, 1990, 1996, 2000). In other words, the state produces official or mandated policies, including those on child protection (Braun et al. 2010). These policies are then subjected to ‘complex processes of fleshing out, being given substance, or recontextualised, by specialised agencies created by or linked to the state or who thrive by doing its business’ (Fitz et al. 2006, 18). It is at the level of schools, classrooms and specific practices of pedagogic communication that state mandated educational policies are re-produced or enacted, ‘very often after complex processes of pressure, advice seeking and consultation’ (Fitz et al. 2006, 18). As Ball et al. (2011, 614) note these ‘kinds of policies generate ‘pressure’’, which is often associated with ‘a concomitant set of negative emotions’ such as ‘anxiety, worry, stress, nervousness and panic’.

In terms of public education policy, the recontextualisation may occur at the level of district offices of the education department, the education union and other departments or statutory bodies, as well as at the level of the school and classroom. In the non-government or private school sector, the policy process may be further shaped by decisions made at a systemic level by administrative bodies, such as the Catholic Education Offices. For Bernstein (1990), the formation of specific pedagogic texts and practices is regulated by the recontextualising rule. This rule, or generative principle, creates recontextualising fields/arenas with agents. Two such fields are of particular interest to this paper. The first field, the Official Recontextualising Field (ORF), refers to the field created and dominated by the state and its selected agents and ministries. The ORF is the site of policy production and the source of policy documents, such as the Child Protection Act discussed in this paper and the related Department of Education policies. The second field, the Pedagogic Recontextualising Field (PRF), consists of agencies at multiple levels, including professional development units responsible for translating policy into manuals, procedures, handbooks for teachers, and offering other forms of support to schools and teachers in enacting the policy. Schools are part of the pedagogic recontextualising field and are responsible for generating school policies, enacting these policies, and ensuring constant evaluation to monitor policy acquisition. The recontextualising rule is particularly relevant to an analysis of the enactment of policy in practice, that is, to an analysis of the interpretation and translation work that occurs when policy texts move from the site of policy-making (the ORF) to local sites in which the policy is enacted (PRFs). Autonomy and struggles over pedagogic texts and practices occur within the PRFs, and between this field and the ORF.

The policy actors that are the focus of this paper form a link between the two recontextualising fields and, as such, an investigation of their accounts of the enactment of child protection and safety policies can illuminate the process of policy interpretation and

translation in processes of policy enactment. As pedagogising agents, mid-level policy actors are responsible for interpreting and translating official policies for schools and classroom teachers, thereby giving classroom teachers and school principals access to the condensed codes of state official policies (see also Braun 2010, Ball et al., 2012). That is, one of their key tasks is to mediate the processes of policy enactment, by explicating and elaborating the condensed code of official policy texts through an ‘imagining’ of teachers’ everyday work practices.¹

For Bernstein, codes are the structuring principles of power and control that generate orientations to ‘certain practices of meaning’ (Hasan, 1999:10). Power relations refer to the strength of insulation demarcating symbolic boundaries, and therefore refer to what can be set together and kept apart. Control relations refer to the strength of framing of communication principles. Strong power relations are realised in strong insulation boundaries generating specialised discourses, agencies and the identities and work of agents. Power relations are contested in and through the control relations of social interaction, that is, the flows of communication within and between agencies, and within and between actors. Control relations refer to who controls what, where, when and how in relation to policy texts. Bernstein (1996: 19) puts it thus:

... power always operates on the relations *between* categories. The focus of power ... is on the relations *between* and, in this way, power establishes legitimate relations of order. Control, on the other hand, ... establishes legitimate forms of communication appropriate to different categories. Control carries the boundary relations of power and socializes individuals into these relationships ... To summarize ... control establishes legitimate communications, and power establishes legitimate relations between categories.

Official state policy documents, such as child protection and safety policies, are generated by strong principles of power and control that construct symbolically condensed

¹ Here we draw on Appadurai’s (1996, 31) notion of the imagination as a field of social practices, comprised of social groups and individual agents engaged in struggles over meaning production and consumption.

knowledge coded in legalistic discourses. Access to the condensed meanings of these policies is by way of the activity of explication and elaboration conducted by agents in the pedagogic recontextualising field. It is their task to make explicit through processes of decoding and recoding the practices of meaning of these symbolically condensed abstract texts. The pedagogic process of decoding and recoding entails various forms of interactional engagement between mid-level policy actors with teachers to interpret the abstract, generalised meanings in terms of the particulars of specific contexts. It is the pedagogic process of decoding and recoding policy texts that we seek to understand in this paper because as Ball (1993, 12) argues some policy texts are ‘never even read first hand’.

According to Bernstein (1990), processes of decoding and recoding (recontextualisation) are constituted by power and control relations, which limit or constrain what texts are selected and how they are re-organised and packaged for specific contexts. He describes these power and control relations as the recontextualising rules of pedagogic discourse, a specialised discourse governing relations within education bureaucracies, and between these bureaucracies and other agencies. Our aim in this paper is to examine the generative principles of recontextualisation, that is, the power and control relations underpinning the policy processes of interpretation and translation. The paper unpacks the complexity of this meaning making work, often entailing backward and forward relational movements from the condensed code of policy speak to the imagined particularistic codes of everyday school and classroom talk.

We adopt Bernstein’s (1996) suggestion to interrogate pedagogic discourses on two levels: first, in terms of the instructional discourses and, second, in terms of the regulative discourses. The principles of power and control regulate the instructional discourse - what knowledge is selected and how it is organized in specific pedagogic contexts. The ‘what’ of knowledge recontextualisation is strongly regulated by moral or regulative discourses, that is,

the imagined model of the teacher, learner and pedagogic context discursively constructed by policy actors. This is a crucial point. Policy texts are comprised of both instructional (technical) and regulative (moral) discourses. Moreover, moral discourses regulate what knowledge is selected and how it is organised to produce selective orientations to meaning. Policy texts may include sets of professional guidelines, development videos, scenarios of practice, and phrases such as 'reasonable care'. Bernstein (1990) notes that when a text is moved from its original site to a pedagogic site, the movement creates a gap or space where interruption, disruption and change can take place. Similarly, Ball (1993, 11) argues that 'attempts to represent or re-present policy sediment and build up over time spread confusion and allow for play in the playing-off of meanings.'

There is a significant point of difference however between the theory of power outlined by Bernstein and that underpinning Ball et al.'s (2012) theorisations about policy as discourse, text and enactment. For example, Ball et al. (2011, 624) argue that 'actors are positioned differently and take up different positions in relation to policy'. Ball et al. (2011: 624) then move to discuss the policy work of 'seven types of policy actor or policy positions which are involved in making meaning of and constructing responses to policy through the processes of interpretation and translation' (see also Ball et al., 2012). However, the descriptions provided of narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators, and critics do not offer insights into the generative principles of power and control that structure either policy positions (what can be said) and the policy talk (what is spoken).

Ball et al., (2012: 8) write of the complexity of the policy process, and argue that 'there is a lot of agency or 'interpretation' in ... our conceptualisation of the policy process but also there is a good deal of discourse and power.' However, as Bacchi (2000, 54) warned, 'the desire to insist upon recognizing the 'lived effects' of discourse might limit the theorisation of 'possibilities for challenge and change'. Power, in the Foucauldian sense, as

‘relational and situated’, as bringing ‘forth active subjects’ who better ‘understand’ their own subjectivity yet who in this very process subject themselves to forms of power’ remains under-theorised (Ball et al., 2012: 9).

In this paper, we propose that the Bernsteinian work on recontextualization offers tools to analyse the relation between constraint (power) and agency (control) in terms of policy processes. Thus, pedagogic discourses may constrain what is thinkable, doable, and speakable within specific contexts in that they constitute which texts may be selected and how they may be packaged. However, actors are often simultaneously positioned within overlapping, intertwining, conflicting and contradictory moral frameworks, and often their work in a specific agency is pressured by the conflicting demands of different stakeholders. It is in these sites/spaces that power relations are challenged, changed, and distorted through the control relations of communication so that official policy texts are morphed and mutated in diverse ways. Mid-level policy actors negotiate the moral discourses of policy enactment (interpretation and translation) through complex communication processes within their own agencies, with other agencies in the recontextualising field, and with ‘imagined’ projections/scenarios of teachers, students and schooling contexts (see also Arnot and Reay, 2004).

An Empirical Case of Pedagogising Policy – Child Protection and Safety

We illustrate the argument outlined above through an empirical case study that theorises the interpretation and translation work undertaken by mid-level policy actors. We believe that this data set is useful to illustrate our theoretical points for two reasons. First, child protection and safety policies are written in condensed, abstract, legalistic language and have generated a whole assemblage of agencies and agents tasked with the policy work of decoding and recoding. Second, these policies provide general statements about the roles and responsibilities of teachers in relation to the protection and safety of children. Consequently,

they require interpretation and translation within specific school-based policy frameworks and pedagogic codes of practice. In what follows, we first give an overview of research on the enactment of Child Protection and Safety policies and provide details of the Australian research project described in this paper. Next we identify the official discourses in the state-mandated policies before moving to an analysis of the interview data from mid-level policy actors.

Child Protection and Safety in the Australian and New Zealand Context

A number of papers, reporting on teacher interview focus group data, have explored the enactment of Child Protection and Safety policies in the Australian and New Zealand context. Specifically, Jones (2004a, 2004b) and McWilliam (2001) have focussed on teachers' anxieties about enacting child protection and safety policies in the everyday context of schooling. They suggest that teacher anxieties may be producing such pedagogic practices as 'no touch' in relation to dealing with young children. Moreover, these scholars have proposed that policies on child protection and safety have been formulated in a macro context of 'moral panic' and 'sensationalist media coverage' about the potential dangers facing children (see also Bitá 2012; Sachs & Mellor 2005).

Other research studies have focused on the complex process of professional judgement and action that reporting child abuse involves (Walsh, Farrell, Bridgestock & Schweitzer 2006). Studies of teachers' detecting and reporting of child abuse have found that teachers accept their moral responsibility to report suspected instances of abuse but remain unsure of the processes and outcomes that may be involved (Walsh, Farrell, Schweitzer, & Bridgestock 2005). They recommend that additional support is needed to build teachers' resilience when making the decision to report abuse. Nixon, Tutty, Weaver-Dunlop and Walsh (2007) back this recommendation, noting that the increased services needed to support policy change in this area are often not there.

While we acknowledge the previous work on child protection and safety policies, our purpose in this paper is distinctly different. By contrast, we theorise the interpretational work undertaken by mid-level policy actors which involves a selective appropriation, decoding and recoding of official policy texts in meaning making process. This policy work involves mediating between official policy texts and schooling/classroom practices, including mediating the feelings and emotions, including ‘anxieties’ of practitioners evoked by policy discourses.

The Study

The paper draws on data collected in a wider study of the enactment of Child Protection and Safety policies across two Australian states. The original study had a particular focus on the ways risk management policies and practices impact on teachers’ professional identities and pedagogic practices. Of particular interest in this paper is a subset of interview data from mid-level policy actors, local authority advisers, who report on processes of policy enactment.

In the discussion that follows, we analyse data collected from nine policy actors working across five separate agencies in Queensland, Australia, namely, (i) an organisation set up to care for abused children (Policy Actor 1); (ii) a Catholic Education department oriented to student protection (Policy Actor 2, 3); (iii) the Teachers’ Union (Policy Actor 4); (iv) a non-state school sector department concerned with staff professional development about child care/protection (Policy Actor 5, 6); (v) and the human resources section of the state education department (Policy Actor 7, 8, 9). A total of five interviews were undertaken, one in each agency with each interview approximately one hour in duration. While the interviews were loosely structured, they were at the same time guided by the following set of questions:

- What are the roles and responsibilities for teachers in implementing new policies about child protection and safety?
- What are teachers’ responses to the implied changes to schooling practices and pedagogic relations instigated by these policies? What advice do you give teachers?

- What training/education strategies are currently being used to manage and negotiate teachers' responses to child protection and safety policies?

The responses to these questions shed light on the interpretation and translation work that these mid-level policy actors do as they form a bridge between the official discourse of the state mandated policies on Child Protection and teachers' practices. The following section traces the official policy discourses on child protection that were current at the time of the study.

Official State Mandated Discourses on Child Protection

The official discourses on child protection were evident in the *Child Protection Act 1999* and in several related policy statements issued by the Department of Education. An earlier Act, the *Children's Services Act 1965*, had focused primarily on child neglect (Department of Communities (Child Safety) Queensland 2006), but the purpose of the 1999 revision was 'to provide for the protection of children' (The State of Queensland 1996, 22). The main principle underpinning the administration of the Act was 'the safety, wellbeing and best interests of the child' (The State of Queensland 1996, 22), which was seen to be paramount. Linked closely to this main principle and the guide for ensuring the safety and wellbeing of a child was a general principle that stated that 'a child has a right to be protected from harm or risk of harm' (The State of Queensland 1996, 22). The Act provided an extensive legal definition of potential harms that children might face, including abuse, bullying, harassment and intimidation. In addition, the child protection legislation established the roles, responsibilities and accountabilities of departments, agencies and individuals employed by the state of Queensland, including school teachers.

Subsequently, the Department of Education and Training, formerly known as Education Queensland, produced a number of policy statements on child protection. One such policy

statement, the Health and Safety HS-17: Child Protection Statement in the Department of Education Manual reflected the emphasis on rights and harm found in the 1999 Act. That policy statement began by stating that ‘all students have a *right* to protection from *harm*’ [italics added] (Education Queensland 2000, 2) and noted that ‘Education Queensland has a responsibility to ensure that the *rights* of its students are safeguarded’ [italics added] (Education Queensland 2000, 8). The policy defined possible harm and outlined implications for teachers:

Children must be protected from all forms of harm, including bullying, harassment and intimidation which is based on gender, culture or ethnicity, or on any impairment the person may have ... Employees must ensure their behaviour towards and relationships with children reflect the highest standards of care for children, are not unlawful, and comply with the conduct requirements prescribed in the Code of Conduct and Guidelines for Ethical Behaviour applicable to Education Queensland employees. (Education Queensland, 2000, 2)

In the context of these policy statements, we recognise that the official child protection policies were based on understandings of the rights of the child and their protection from harm. The policy text moved from the ORF, where the policy was made, to the PRF, where the policy was enacted, through recontextualisation processes involving the interpretation of the suite of policies by a number of actors, working in various agencies, who were responsible for the design of professional development materials; the delivery of training; and/or the provision of advice or professional support.

Recontextualising the official discourse: Policy Interpretation/Translation

In this section, we explore the policy actors’ accounts, which discussed not only how they interpreted the official policy texts but also their descriptions of some teachers’ responses to the child protection policies as they attempted to recontextualise the policies into pedagogic practices in local sites. The accounts show how discursive gaps were created through a process of policy recontextualisation that highlighted the need to manage teachers’ imagined

feelings of anxiety, worry and stress (Ball et al. 2011) as they engaged with another suite of policies and were expected to acquire a new set of professional judgement strategies.

The accounts of policy actors working for the human resources section of the state department of education interpreted the policy as requiring decoding at multiple levels. As noted above, the policy discourse within the ORF focused in detail on the ‘responsibility to ensure that the *rights* of its students are safeguarded’ [italics added] (Education Queensland, 2000, 8) and the requirement for teachers to protect children from ‘all forms of *harm*’ [italics added] (Education Queensland 2000, 2). However, the interviews indicated that some policy actors were aware of the breadth of interpretations that were possible in response to the policy discourse. As Policy Actor 7 recounted,

I mean it is one broad statement about having a policy about how you deal with a kid who makes a complaint about inappropriate behaviour and it doesn't try to define inappropriate. Inappropriate is anything the student finds inappropriate. Then there is a system or there should be a system within the school of how you would assess that. And whether it is a spurious claim or a malicious one or it raises real questions. So from a state-wide policy point of view, given that you have got schooling authorities who have to manage this themselves. All we have done is say you have to have a policy that does these things. And the same with harm, I think there is plenty of scope, we could go easily down the track of trying to articulate all the different dimensions of that. But it simply says this is the definition of harm, which is very broad, you have got to have a policy to deal with any observance of harm, whether it is familial, it is in the home, it doesn't matter. And I suppose it started off as the simple one, the teacher observes the battered child. (Policy Actor 7, Human Resources, Department of Education)

As Ball (1994, 19) argues, policies ‘do not normally tell you what to do, they create circumstances in which the range of options available in deciding what to do are narrowed or changed, or particular goals or outcomes are set’. The Child Protection and Safety policies did not come with an explicit set of instructions of what teachers should or should not do. It fell to the policy actors working in the Human Resource section of the Education Department to interpret the policy in terms of providing broad guidelines in relation to what schooling authorities and teachers should do. That is, these policy actors elaborated specific policy concepts such as ‘inappropriate behaviour’ and ‘harm’ and worked with principals and

teachers as they translated these interpretations into pedagogic practices, including developing school policy processes to investigate allegations of such behaviour, and to recognize and report 'abuse'. As such, the policy actors in the Education Department and schooling authorities recontextualised these broad legalistic notions of 'inappropriate behaviour' and 'harm' into a specialised discourse, which was then interpreted and translated into school based policies and practices. In the context of the child safety and protection policies, the set of 'words' which are the site of the selective reconfiguration of certain practices of meanings include 'inappropriate behaviour', 'harm', and 'reasonable care'. This set of words are mediational devices, they regulate or constitute the moral framework for what can and cannot be spoken, acted, done by teachers. Power relations work through the symbolic boundaries of what is held together and kept apart. These phrases work to position teachers in particularistic ways by constructing specific orientations about 'caring' and 'protecting' children. However, the positioning of teachers as subjects of these discursive regimes is complex, contradictory and negotiated. Terms such as 'reasonable care' and 'inappropriate behaviour' are vague, diffuse, and mid-level policy actors are expected to assist teachers in interpreting and translating the meanings of these terms, to assist in constructing particular types of 'professional judgement' or 'professional gaze'. Meaning making is thus an iterative fluid process which challenges the work of mid-level policy actors, as well as the language of the official policy texts. It is certainly not a linear, top-down, positioning of teachers within deterministic discursive regimes. Meanings are constantly negotiated within and between different recontextualising agencies and shift and change over time within specific contexts, thereby changing the shape and form of these contexts (see also Koyama & Varenne, 2012). At the same time, however, the ensemble of texts, words, phrases of these new policy regimes aim to generate new modes of professional conduct/judgement (Bernstein, 1996: 84).

A significant focus of this interpretation work for policy actors within the Department of Education was an increase in professional anxiety, described as the ‘angst of teachers’. They identified the need to interpret the policy in order both to manage these anxieties, especially anxieties about what constitutes ‘reasonable touch’ and ‘reasonable force’, and to advise teachers on how to adjust pedagogic practices in the context of this new policy. Policy Actor 8 talked about

that fine line about what is touch and reasonable touch and reasonable force to direct somebody to ... is an ok thing to do because that's what you have got to do, to what's considered to be a hit and when is a hit a minor incident and when is it an assault that becomes an official misconduct. And those lines there are what have raised the angst of teachers. Because what they are saying is that my touch could be construed by that kid as that I have hit him and they will tell their parents and they will go to the police. And the second point is that parental trend towards a complaint mentality. There are [sic] a whole range of people out in schools now who have had unhappy schooldays themselves and are suddenly empowered by the fact that they can dob in the teacher and they do that and I feel that's a real threat. (Policy Actor 8, Department of Education)

The difficulties associated with this interpretation work was raised by several policy actors who related accounts of how some teachers were concerned about the potential risks that might be incurred because of the lack of clarity about modes of professional conduct outlined in the current policy. ‘The angst of teachers’ was in response to the lack of a strong demarcation of the notions of ‘reasonable touch’ and ‘reasonable force’, which could be differently interpreted by other agents or agencies, including kids, parents and police. The policy actors described how problems arose when teachers’ interpretations of ‘reasonable’ differed significantly from parents’ interpretations, not only because these actors inhabited different discursive communities, but also because they could exercise different relations of power and control in relation to the issue of child protection. The imagined teacher within these discourses is one struggling to make meaning of a shifting professional ethic of care relating to students, and also navigating the competing definitions of care projected by students themselves and parents.

An account offered by one policy actor from the Teachers Union referred to the official policy texts as not being ‘clear’ or ‘particularly helpful’. In the following extract, Policy Actor 4 revealed that the union played a specific role in the interpretation of these policies by offering teachers ‘further guidance’ as to how they might enact these policies in the PRF.

Well, we would say, that, first of all the department has not got a clear policy and there is also a child protection, or student protection policy and has been for a few years that’s not particularly helpful. And we do, at the end of the day, say that generally speaking where people have used their professional judgement over the years, whilst that is not a guarantee that they will not be involved in some sort of investigative process, at the end of the day we haven’t seen teachers lose their job or suffer any sort of financial or any other penalty where they have sought to use their professional judgement... (Policy Actor 4, Teachers Union)

The account above highlights the interpretational work undertaken by policy actors working for the Teachers Union. Rather than taking an oppositional or resistance stance (Ball et al. 2011), these policy actors were concerned with assisting teachers to make sense of the suite of policies. In the first instance, these policy actors were concerned with reducing teacher concerns about any potential threats to work conditions, loss of job, or penalties arising from poor policy enactment.

In addition to reducing concerns about threat, as the following extract shows, the policy actor worked to assist teachers to develop pedagogic practices in the new policy environment.

Over and above that sometimes we will run seminars where we give people further guidance in relation as to how people might interact with students. For example I have got a few points I might use, I like to say to people these are things you won’t use in your daily teaching but it might give you something to think about. One might be, that wherever possible that especially male teachers, should not be in a room with a single student in certain circumstances, and maybe highlight say male teachers and adolescent female students and vice versa at times. ... We have other hints, we don’t publish them as such but we obviously have some suggestions, which generally speaking may not be required by every teacher, so we start from the point of view of, use your professional common sense in terms of approaching students. And beyond that there may be for some people some specific advice we will provide in some specific situations. (Policy Actor 4, Teachers Union)

That is, policy actors from the Teachers Union decoded the condensed policy texts within a moral framework aimed principally at protecting their members. In addition, they translated

official policy texts into a set of ‘hints or strategies’ offered during seminars to reduce members’ anxieties. Policy Actor 4 also indicated that the union offered some guidance via brochures, website materials and so forth for teachers and schools to use their ‘professional judgement’ when enacting these policies at the school level. Teachers were expected to use their professional judgement in protecting the rights of students from harm and engage in ‘reasonable’ interactions with students. In this process, they needed to interpret what these notions might mean in specific pedagogic relations in the different contexts of the classroom and the school.

The account of Policy Actor 4 identified the need for teachers to exercise professional judgement. To assist teachers to do so, several policy actors interpreted the policy as requiring teachers and schools to develop ‘practice frameworks’ that involved not only ‘reflective practice’ but also the development of a philosophical ‘theoretical framework’ as the ideal texts for policy enactment. In the following account, the teacher is imagined as exercising a degree of professional autonomy, capable of contributing to policy interpretation within the specific ‘practice framework’ of the school, and of governing their own professional conduct in relation to this framework.

... by having more of that reflective practice ... What that does, is it makes us think about teachers’ theoretical framework and what’s important in the way they go about doing their teaching and the way they interact with their pupils. If they do something, which is inappropriate, it gives them an opportunity in a structured way to reflect on what they did so they can change it for next time. ... so that the teacher has got, social workers talk about a practice frameworks. Fancy having a practice framework that spells out specifically how one goes about teaching, the theoretical as well as practical ways of doing that would be. So within the context of a school, the school might have a philosophy with a theoretical as well as a practical framework, which says, we believe touching is appropriate and this is the way it is done, these are the occasions it is done etc, etc. So if touching is done in a way that is outside that, that’s when someone can be called to explain, so ok do you realise what you have done, it is outside of the framework, stuff like that. So you have got the positive guidelines framed, what can be done and then at the same time explains what can’t be done. (Policy Actor 1, Organisation for abused children)

The above accounts evidenced a consistency in the messages of these policy actors about the process of recontextualising these policies and about their work in interpreting these policies in this process. The policy actors noted teachers' levels of angst about new policies, particularly those that go to the heart of changing pedagogic relations and forms of classroom and school communication. The policy actors worked to interpret the policies in order to allay these anxieties and to promote the exercising of educators' professional judgement as they translated policies into their own context specific practice frameworks. That is, some of these policy actors interpreted the policies as requiring a change in pedagogic identity that necessitated the linking of reflective practice and theoretical frameworks to practice frameworks that actively intervened in instances of child protection.

Conclusion

In this paper, we offer an analysis of policy work drawn from the accounts of mid-level policy actors. Some of the agencies, such as those specifically set up to care for 'abused' children, and policy actor positions, such as 'Professional Development Officer –Child Protection', came into being or emerged in response to the suite of mandated official policies. Other agencies created additional roles and duties for existing policy actors to deal with official policy dictates. The analysis of the meaning making work of these policy actors illuminates the process of policy interpretation and translation in processes of policy enactment. That is, it shows how an ensemble of mandated official state policy texts is shaped by mid-level policy actors who recontextualise official policy discourses for enactment by teachers in schools. We noted earlier that Ball et al. (2011) identify a heuristic of possible types of policy actor or policy positions in the policy enactment process. These positions include narrators, entrepreneurs, outsiders, transactors, enthusiasts, translators and critics. While a number of these descriptions of policy actors and their policy work align with the accounts that we provide of mid-level policy actors, our study shows that mid-level policy actors may take on

more than one of these positions. For example, Policy Actor 4, a union official, did monitor the work of management but he also interpreted policy and worked to help teachers in their translation of the policy into practice. Consequently, we believe that such heuristics need additional analytic tools, such as those provided by Bernstein's theory of generative power and control relations and instructional and regulative/moral discourses in order to elaborate the specifics of the interpretational and translation work of policy actors and agencies in the recontextualisation of official policy discourses.

In this paper, we argue that while the term recontextualisation has been used to explain policy processes of interpretation and translation, the term lacks an analytic definition and needs to be systematically and coherently related to other concepts employed in critical policy analysis. We propose that Bernstein's (1990, 1996) theorisation of recontextualisation offers a coherent analytic framework for examining processes of policy enactment. We show how the policy actors that are the focus of this study elaborate the condensed codes of policy texts to an imagined logic of teachers' practical work. We also show how what knowledge was selected and how it was organised, that is, the selective production of meaning was regulated by moral frameworks. A particular focus was given to the decoding of 'reasonable', which was then recoded in terms of 'teachers' professional judgement and practice frameworks in a pedagogic process as policy discourses are decoded and recoded as specific policy texts and practices.

In addition, we argue that Bernstein's theorisation of recontextualisation offers a valuable contribution to current debates about power and control relations, and thus adds to theorisations about the relational, emergent aspects of policy discourses. Our analysis of the mid-level policy actors' accounts show how the process of recontextualisation opened up discursive gaps in which the official child protection policy discourse morphed and mutated into practices that became embodied and inscribed in specific translation resources about

reasonable care, inappropriate behavior and harm for enacting ‘professional judgements’ and ‘practice frameworks’ in schools. Our analysis has explicated the constraining power of discourse, the moral frameworks that regulate the selective appropriate and organization of meaning. It has also examined the active, complex, sophisticated forms of control exercised by agencies and agents in policy communication processes which challenge the rules of what is held apart and put together, and thereby refashion specific contexts. The paper attests to the complex process through which policy artefacts constitute an ethic of professional judgement/conduct. The analysis illustrates the ways in which policy objects (professional development materials, guidelines, workshops) produced particular types of social realities and in so doing had material effects on the lives of teachers and students. Mid-level policy actors struggled with anxieties as they negotiated and attempted to make meaning relevant to specific contexts from diverse, incoherent, contradictory and unclear texts. These policy actors brought to the work of policy interpretation and analysis ‘disparate aims, resources and histories’ (Koyama & Varenne, 2012: 157) as they engaged in struggles that simultaneously took account of legislative mandates and the concerns and anxieties of practitioners.

Consequently, we point to the need for policy actors at various levels to be given the space to think about the ways in which meaning making takes place and the ways in which the imagined teachers, students and schooling contexts are evoked and realised through specific policy discourses. Our analysis has demonstrated the uses of Bernstein’s theory of pedagogic discourse, with its analytic language of instructional and regulative discourses, and moral frameworks of imagined pedagogic identities and contexts, to the work of policy analysis. We have proposed that Bernstein’s relational sociology enables an analysis of the legitimate modes of communication (control relations) within and between arenas, agencies, contexts and specific practices through which power relations (what is kept apart and held together) are re-produced, interrupted and mutated. Moreover, we have contributed to the

theorisations of child protection and safety, specifically that literature which addresses notions of ‘moral panic’ and ‘moral professional ethic’. We conclude that it is important to examine the moral discourses that regulate what knowledge is selected and how it is reconfigured by mid-level policy actors as they act as interpreters and translators of official policy for enactment by practitioners in schools.

Acknowledgements: Project funded under the Australian Research Council Discovery scheme: DP0211663. Ethics Approval Number: QUT Ref No 2555H

Reference List:

- Arnot, M. and D. Reay. 2004. *Voice Research, Learner Identities and Pedagogic Encounters*. Paper presented at the Third International Basil Bernstein Symposium, July 15-18, at Clare College in Cambridge, United Kingdom.
- Appadurai, A. 1996. *Modernity at Large Cultural Dimensions of Globalisation*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Bacchi, C. 2000. Policy as Discourse: what does it mean? where does it get us? *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 21, no.1: 45-57.
- Ball, S.J. 1993. What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes. *Discourse: studies in the cultural politics of education*, 13, no. 2: 10-17.
- Ball, S.J. 1994. *Education Reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Buckingham: Open University Press.
- Ball, S.J. 2008. *The education debate*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Ball, S.J., M. Maguire, A. Braun, A., and K. Hoskins. 2011. Policy actors: doing policy work in schools. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32, no. 4: 625-639.
- Ball, S.J., M. Maguire, and A. Braun. 2012. *How Schools Do Policy. Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*. London: Routledge.
- Bernstein, B. 1990. *The structuring of pedagogic discourse*. London: Routledge.
- Bernstein, B. 1996. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity. Theory, Research, Critique*. London and New York: Taylor and Francis.
- Bernstein, B. 2000. *Pedagogy, Symbolic Control and Identity Theory, Research and Critique* (second ed.). Lanham, MD: Rowan & Littlefield.
- Bitá, N. 2012. The Parent Trap. Child Safety Laws are Necessary - But at what point do they go too far? *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, August 11-12, 10-14.

- Braun, A., M. Maguire, and S.J. Ball. 2010. Policy enactment in the UK secondary school: examining policy, practice and school positioning. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25, no. 4: 547-560.
- Cameron, D. H. 2009. Implementing a large-scale reform in secondary schools: the role of the consultant within England's Secondary National Strategy. *Journal of Education Policy*, 25, no. 5: 605-624.
- Cibulka, J. G. 1994. Policy analysis and the study of education. *Journal of Education Policy*, 9, no. 5: 105 – 125.
- Department of Communities (Child Safety) Queensland. 2006. *Child Protection Legislation - An Historical Perspective*. Retrieved 31 March 2009, from <http://www.childsafety.gov.gov.au/legislation/child-protection/history.html>
- Education Queensland. 2000. *Health and Safety HS-17: Child Protection*. Department of Education Manual (Released 1998, updated 2000). Brisbane: Government printer.
- Fitz, J., B. Davies, and J. Evans. 2006. *Education Policy and Social Reproduction Class Inscription and symbolic control*. London: Routledge.
- Grimaldi, E. 2012. Analysing policy in the context(s) of practice: a theoretical puzzle. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27, no. 4: 445-465.
- Hasan, R. 1999. Society, language and the mind: the meta-dialogism of Basil Bernstein's theory. In F. Christie (Ed.), *Pedagogy and the Shaping of Consciousness. Linguistic and Social Processes* (pp. 10-30). London, New York: Continuum.
- Hasan, R. 2002. Semiotic Mediation and Mental Development in Pluralistic Societies: Some Implications for Tomorrow's Schooling. In G. Wells & G. Claxton (Eds.), *Learning for Life in the 21st Century. Sociocultural Perspectives on the Future of Education* (pp. 112-126). Oxford: Blackwell Publishers.

- Jones, A. 2004a. Risk Anxiety, Policy and the Spectre of Sexual Abuse In Early Childhood Education. *Discourse*, 25, no. 3: 321-334.
- Jones, A. 2004b. Social anxiety, sex, surveillance, and the 'safe' teacher. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25, no. 1: 53-66.
- Koyama, J., P., & Varenne, H. 2012. Assembling and Disassembling: Policy as Productive Play. *Educational Researcher*, 41(5), 157-162.
- Lipsky, M. 1980. *Street-Level Bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the Individual in Public Services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Maguire, M., S.J. Ball, and A. Braun. 2010. Behaviour, classroom management and student 'control': enacting policy in the English secondary school. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 20, no 2: 153-170.
- McWilliam, E. 2001. Pleasures proper and improper: A genealogy of teacher/student intimacy. In *Touchy subject: Teachers touching children*, ed. A. Jones, 27-38. Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press.
- Moore, R. 2012 forthcoming. *Bernstein and the Sociology Of 'Interruption'*. London: Routledge.
- Nixon, K. L., L.M. Tutty, G. Weaver-Dunlop, and C.A. Walsh. 2007. Do good intentions beget good policy? A review of child protection policies to address intimate partner violence. *Children and Youth Services Review*, 29, 1469-1486.
- Reeves, J. and V. Drew. 2012. Relays and relations: tracking a policy initiative for improving teacher professionalism. *Journal of Education Policy*, iFirst Article, 1-20. doi: 10.1080/02680939.2011.652194
- Sachs, J. and L. Mellor. 2005. 'Child panic', risk and child protection: an examination of policies from New South Wales and Queensland. *Journal of Education Policy*, 20, no. 2: 125-140.

- Taylor, S., F. Rizvi, B. Lingard, and M. Henry. 1997. *Educational Policy and the Politics of Change*. London: Routledge.
- The State of Queensland. 1996. *Child Protection Act*. Retrieved 17 October 2011, from <http://www.legislation.qld.gov.au/LEGISLTN/CURRENT/C/ChildProtectA99.pdf>
- Walsh, K., A. Farrell, R. Bridgestock and R. Schweitzer. 2006. The contested terrain of teachers detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 4, no 1: 65-76.
- Walsh, K., A. Farrell, R. Schweitzer, and R. Bridgestock. 2005. *Critical factors in teachers' detecting and reporting child abuse and neglect: Implications for practice*. Albion, Australia: Abused Child Trust.
- Webb, Taylor. P. and K.N. Gulson. 2012. Policy Prolepsis in education: Encounters, becomings, and phantams. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 33, no. 1: 87-99.