RESEARCHING EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND CHANGE IN 'NEW TIMES': USING CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Sandra Taylor

School of Cultural and Language Studies

Queensland University of Technology

Abstract

A number of writers have drawn attention to the increasing importance of language in social life in 'new times' and Fairclough (2001b) has referred to 'discourse driven' social change. These conditions have led to an increase in the use of various forms of discourse analysis in policy analysis. This paper explores the possibilities of using Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) in critical policy research in education, drawing on a larger research project which is investigating the equity implications of Education Queensland's reform agenda. It is argued that in the context of new times, CDA is of particular value in documenting multiple and competing discourses in policy texts, in highlighting marginalised and hybrid discourses, and in documenting discursive shifts in policy implementation processes. The last part of the paper discusses how such research might be used by policy activists inside and outside education department bureaucracies to further social democratic goals.

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Introduction

A number of writers have drawn attention to the increasing importance of language in social life in late modernity or late capitalism – often also referred to as 'new times' (Hall 1996). For example, Fairclough (2001a) argues that language has become more important in a range of social processes related in particular to the emergence of the 'knowledge based economy' and new communication technologies, and he refers (2001b) to 'discourse driven' social change. As a result, he explains (2001a: 231), such changes have restructured orders of discourse 'and the relative salience of semiosis in relation to other elements within the network of social practices'. Also associated with the increasing importance of language in social life, there have been 'more conscious attempts to shape it and control it to meet institutional or organisational objectives', which Fairclough (2001a: 231) refers to as 'the increased technologization of discourse'.

Edwards and Nicoll (2001) write that such practices are sometimes referred to as 'spin-doctoring', and argue (p. 106) that, while they are not new, through 'a proliferation of texts, discourses, and signs … there is an incitement to rhetorical practices in the contemporary period, which itself is reflected in the growth of discourse analysis as a way of investigating their significance'.

Similarly, Luke (2002: 97) observes that 'New forms of social life in advanced capitalist societies turn on text and discourse' … and that 'the conditions of globalised capitalism are enabled by discourse-saturated technology and environments.' He continues (p.98):

> We might term these semiotic economies, where language, text and discourse become the principal modes of social relations, civic and political life, economic behaviour and activity, where means of production and modes of information become intertwined in analytically complex ways.

Further, economic and cultural aspects of globalisation have led to the increasing fragmentation and plurality – and complexity - of social life. Associated with these changes in networks of social practices is a 'discursive multiplicity' (Kress 1985: 11, in Yeatman 1990: 163) of new forms of hybrid texts, discourses and identities.

These developments associated with 'new times' have implications for policy analysis. As mentioned above, the importance of language in social life has led to increasing use of various forms of discourse analysis, including Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Luke (2002) argues that in these new conditions – characterised by new textual formations, new configurations of discourse and new forms of identity - CDA research is likely to require 'new, hybrid blends of analytic techniques and social theories' (p. 98). He suggests (p. 98) that it is important for CDA 'to move beyond a focus on ideology critique and to document "other" forms of text and discourse … that may mark the productive use of power in the face of economic and cultural globalisation'. He continues (p. 107): 'If CDA is avowedly normative and explicitly political, then it must have the courage to say what is to be done with texts and discourse'.

This reflects questions about the purpose of undertaking CDA based research; questions previously raised by Luke (1997b), for example, in his analysis of Australian Prime Minister John Howard's speech about the Stolen Generations (referring to the Aboriginal children removed from their families by Commonwealth and State authorities). In this context, Luke (1997b: 345) refers to the relationship between public speech and material effects as 'a relationship that is central to any political analysis of education'. Here he is advocating the use of CDA as a 'situated political practice' (p. 349), as well as an analytical strategy: as a research practice which has some force and which can 'make a difference'.

This paper takes up these issues raised by Luke in relation to the use of CDA in critical policy research in education. The paper draws on a larger research project which is exploring the equity implications of a major educational reform agenda being implemented in Queensland, Australia, Queensland State Education 2010 (Education Queensland 2000).[1]
More specifically the paper aims to:

- demonstrate the value of CDA in investigating policy processes and change in 'new times'; and
- suggest how such research might be used to further social democratic goals.

Using CDA in critical policy analysis

There are many different versions of discourse analysis, drawing on a wide range of theoretical traditions in social theory (van Dijk 1997, Titscher, Meyer, Wodak and Vetter 2000). Fairclough (2003) distinguishes between those approaches which pay close attention to the linguistic features of texts - which he refers to as 'textually oriented discourse analysis' - and those which do not. The latter approaches, often influenced by Foucault, generally focus on the

historical and social context of texts and usually give little close attention to the linguistic features of texts. Norman Fairclough's work draws on theories and techniques from a wide range of disciplines to bring together these different approaches and different levels of analysis. He emphasises (2001a: 229) that his approach to CDA is interdisciplinary, and that 'it opens a dialogue between disciplines concerned with linguistic and semiotic analysis … and disciplines concerned with theorizing and researching social processes and social change'.

Critical discourse analysis, then, aims to explore the relationships between discursive practices, events and texts; and wider social and cultural structures, relations and processes. CDA explores how texts construct representations of the world, social relationships and social identities, and there is an emphasis on highlighting how such practices and texts are ideologically shaped by relations of power. (See Fairclough 1992, 1993, 2001a, 2001b, 2003; Chouliaraki and Fairclough 1999.)

Recent approaches to policy analysis in education have been influenced more generally by discourse theory perspectives (Ball 1990; Yeatman 1990; Taylor 1997; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard and Henry 1997). From such a perspective, policy making is seen as an arena of struggle over meaning, or as 'the politics of discourse'(Yeatman 1990), and policies are seen as the outcomes of struggles 'between contenders of competing objectives, where language - or more specifically discourse - is used tactically' (Fulcher 1989: 7). This kind of approach has been valuable in illuminating the politics of discourse in policy arenas and in exploring the relationship between policy texts and their historical, political, social and cultural contexts. However, while these approaches are able to suggest 'preferred readings' and likely effects of policy texts, most of this education policy analysis using discourse theory has not augmented social analysis with fine grained linguistic analysis. Consequently, there has been relatively little published work on policy analysis in education which specifically uses CDA. Fairclough himself has analysed policy documents (1993) and political speeches (2001a, 2003) – and there are a few Australian examples of the use of CDA in educational policy analysis by Ian Falk (1994), Allan Luke (1997a) and Sue Thomas (2002, 2003).

CDA is particularly appropriate for critical policy analysis because it allows a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relations. CDA provides a framework for a systematic analysis – researchers can go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts work. As Fairclough (2001a: 240) puts it, '… the interdiscursive work of the text materialises in its linguistic and other semiotic features'. He also emphasises (p. 234) that the role of discourse in social practices cannot be taken for granted, 'it has to be established through analysis'. It is the

combination of linguistic analysis with social analysis, which makes CDA a particularly useful tool for policy analysis in comparison with other approaches. It is also valuable because it is explicitly critical: firstly, in relation to its concern to reveal the discursive construction of power relations; secondly in its commitment to progressive social change (Fairclough 2001a: 230). As Janks (1997: 329) puts it, CDA 'seeks to understand how discourse is implicated in relations of power'.

As mentioned earlier, Luke (2002) has suggested that CDA may need new tools to describe the new textual formations associated with New Times. I would contend that CDA is well suited to document these new formations – at least as they are manifested in policy texts. In fact, Fairclough (2001a) suggests that CDA is 'a resource which can be used in combination with others for researching change in contemporary social life' (p. 229), and his work on the language of New Labour in Britain is concerned with investigating new textual formations associated, for example, with 'globalisation, social exclusion, and shifts in governance'.

In this paper I use examples from my own research on Queensland's educational reforms to show how CDA can be used to analyse policy processes and social change in 'new times'. The focus is on how equity issues are being addressed in the policy implementation process. Selected extracts of education policy documents will be analysed to document new textual formations (in the form of hybrid genres and discourses) in policy texts, and to indicate possibilities for highlighting marginal discourses and 'silences' in the texts, and for tracing discursive shifts in policy implementation processes. I then suggest how such research may be used to further social democratic goals.

A framework for analysing policy processes and change

Fairclough emphasises that his framework for CDA is not a blueprint – rather it needs to be drawn on selectively for the particular research task at hand and combined with other forms of social analysis. Within the constraints of this paper it is not appropriate to discuss Fairclough's framework in any detail, and in any case the details of his framework have changed in various ways through the 1990s. However, I will briefly define relevant concepts and outline my conceptual and analytic approach to CDA which will allow attention to the 'discursive multiplicity' discussed above. This framework is drawn mainly from Fairclough's recent work (2001a, 2003).

In terms of the social aspects of the framework, there are concepts relevant to theorising the context of the research problem to be investigated, in particular social practices. Social

practices networked in a particular way constitute, and in turn are shaped by, the social order. For the purposes of this analysis of state education policy in 'new times' the particular local version of the global context is the most relevant feature of the social order. The networks of social practices relevant to this study are located in Education Queensland – the state's education bureaucracy – the site for the production of the specific policy texts to be analysed.

In relation to the semiotic aspects of the framework: the key semiotic concepts associated with networks of social practices are genres, discourses and styles. These are understood as follows:

- Genres - ways of (inter)acting or relating, interactions
- Discourses - ways of representing, representations
- Styles - ways of being, identities

It is important to note that these concepts are dialectally related (Fairclough 2003: 19-20): 'discourses are enacted in genres, discourses are inculcated in styles, actions and identities are represented in discourses'. The semiotic aspect of the social order is an order of discourse, which Fairclough (2001a: 235) describes as 'the way in which diverse genres and discourses are networked together'.

In terms of the approach to analysis, CDA aims 'to show how the semiotic, including linguistic, properties of a text connect with what is going on socially in the interaction' (Fairclough 2001a: 240). In CDA, social analysis (the external relations of the text) is combined with semiotic/ linguistic analysis (the internal relations of the text). Mediating between these two levels of analysis the interdiscursive analysis focuses on identifying which genres and discourses are drawn on in the text, and analysing how they are worked together in the text.

In the analyses which follow there is an emphasis on the linguistic and semiotic choices which have been made in the writing and layout of the policy texts. As Edwards and Nicoll (2001) remind us, policy texts use rhetoric and metaphor to persuade and influence the reader. There is also an emphasis in CDA on the ideological work of the policy texts in representing, relating and identifying. How policy texts construct and sustain power relations ideologically is of particular interest in critical policy research, as also are the values which are articulated in policy texts. This is done through an examination of the following aspects of the texts:

- whole text organisation (structure eg narrative, argumentative etc),
- clause combination,
- grammatical and semantic features (transitivity, action, voice, mood, modality)
- words (eg vocabulary, collocations, use of metaphors etc)

(Fairclough, 2001a: 241-242)

The analyses which follow in the next section are not comprehensive; rather they are intended to be illustrative of the possible uses of CDA for critical policy analysis based on social democratic values. For this task the emphasis will be on the domains of genres and discourses as they relate to policy texts, rather than on styles.

Education Queensland's reform agenda: a genre chain

The extracts from policy texts to be used in this paper are taken from documents associated with Education Queensland's 2010 Strategy – an ambitious reform agenda for state education in Queensland, produced in 2000 after extensive consultations with relevant interest groups. This paper builds on earlier research that explored the way equity issues were being addressed in the new agenda (Taylor and Henry 2003). The 2010 Strategy exemplified the interweaving of global and local elements which characterise contemporary policy making, and we concluded (Taylor and Henry 2003: 350) that:

> In its distinctive response to rapid global pressures for change QSE 2010 has interwoven economic priorities with social goals. There is an emphasis on building social capital as well as human capital, and a strong commitment to public schooling. State schools are viewed as having an important role in building social capital in communities. There is recognition of the need for differentiated schools and teaching approaches to meet the needs of diverse communities; and the proposed approach to learning, New Basics, is a framework designed for all students.

In addition, we concluded that the strategy promoted a reasonably strong social justice agenda, but that it was still too early to see how the ambitious agenda would play out.

The strategy and its associated documents – in print and available electronically on Education Queensland's website - can be referred to as a genre chain. Brief extracts of text from three key policy documents from this genre chain have been selected for analysis in this paper. The documents are as follows:

- Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE 2010) (Education Queensland 2000) (the original document)
- Destination 2010 The action plan to implement QSE 2010 (Education Queensland 2002) (implementation guidelines)
- Queensland the Smart State. Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF) (Queensland Government 2002) (a consultation document related to selected reforms)

The particular extracts which have been selected for analysis are sections of each of the documents which have been highlighted in some way within the document, by the use of colour, blocking or headings. The extracts serve as summary statements within the documents, and as such they summarise the 'flavour' of each document.

Queensland State Education 2010 (QSE 2010)

This document is apparently directed at the wider public as well as to teachers: its genre is hybrid, with elements of policy genre interwoven with party political, even promotional, material. Although much of the document is characteristic of the policy genre, the presentation is directed to a wider readership: the document is a glossy publication with eye catching use of colour, headings and layout. The use of a jigsaw puzzle motif on the cover symbolically identifies the document as part of the genre chain (Weir 2003). It seems that public informational elements and party political elements are interwoven with the more conventional policy genre in this policy document for 'new times'. As Fairclough (2001a) has observed, in relation to his work on policy processes in Britain under new Labour, governments are increasingly using what are 'essentially promotional genres' to bring about change. He explained that communication has become increasingly important in contemporary life, and often for governments this means 'communicating with', or 'to', the public in a one-sided way – 'even when the process is ostensibly public 'consultation'. He (2001a: 254) argues that through promotional genres public perceptions are 'managed', new discourses are articulated and become institutionalised.

Extract One - 'The challenge in summary'

'The challenge in summary' (Education Queensland 2000: 8) (see Appendix for full extract) follows a discussion in the first section of the document on recent economic and social changes that have implications for education. The summary statement is visually eye catching: it takes up three quarters of the page, is printed in a block of text, and the text is printed in white against a blue background.

Interdiscursive analysis:

Change is a major theme of the extract:

> Education needs something other than popular metaphors of decay, disaster and erosion as driving forces of change. Children are the starting point for a strategy about the future of schooling. …

> … As we move into an era where knowledge supersedes information and technology transforms longstanding relationships of time and space.

As a result of these forces of change the document argues for educational change:

> …Queensland state schools should be reconceptualised …
>
> … This will transform the means and ends of teaching and learning in schools – those involved, the way it occurs and the principles on which the curriculum is constructed.

Teachers will also change - from being gate keepers of information to becoming managers of learning experiences. Though the agency for change in schools is elided, teachers are the objects of the process of transformation rather than the subjects.

However, as well as the discourse of change, a discourse of uncertainty runs through the extract:

> … popular metaphors of decay, disaster and erosion …
>
> There is a challenge facing education …
>
> …the complex, diverse and uncertain economic and social environments described here.
>
> The existing disparities… will get worse …

The rhetoric of globalisation is dominant:

> There is a challenge facing education in Queensland as we move into an era where knowledge supersedes information and technology transforms longstanding relationships of time and space. It is to become a learning society – the Smart State – in which global forces favour the adaptable, and the key resources will be human and social capital rather than just physical and material resources.
>
> … a globalised knowledge economy and society.

Evident in this extract is what Fairclough (2003: 100) refers to as: 'The neo-liberal discourse of economic change which represents "globalisation" as a fact which demands "adjustments" and "reforms" to enhance "efficiency and adaptability" in order to compete …'. The discourse of the learning society is also often linked with economic globalisation (Edwards and Nicoll 2001), as is the discourse of flexibility (Edwards, Tait and Nicoll 1999). Indeed, Edwards, Tait and Nicoll (1999: 620) refer to flexibility, with its valuing of change and adaptability, along with 'lifelong learning' and 'a learning society', as an 'important metaphorical resource in current policies'.

However, a social democratic discourse is also evident:

> The existing disparities in opportunities for students arising from the distribution of wealth, different cultures and location will get worse unless there is an equity principle that gives everyone a chance at the same outcomes. This is an obligation for government.

This is characteristic of the way social justice issues are expressed in contemporary times, described by Fairclough (2003: 100) as 'a political discourse which represents societies in terms of the goal of 'social cohesion' and threats to 'social cohesion'.

It is also mentioned that schools should become embedded in communities. Linked to this social democratic discourse is a strong commitment to public education in the final sentence of the summary statement but this is redefined in terms of globalisation:

> Above all there is a need for a redefinition of the purpose of public education that meets the unique challenge posed by the transition to a globalised knowledge economy and society.

Linguistic analysis:

The extract is structured in the form of 'problem → solution'. More specifically, the problem is 'the challenge of globalisation', and the 'solution' is that the challenge can be met through educational change. This is an aspect of the promotional character of the document – the government's solution to the problem is the one presented, and the document is a good example of what Edwards and Nicoll (2001) refer to as a 'persuasive text'. Related to this, rather than being dialogical, the text is presented as a series of declarative statements/ assertions:

> There is a challenge facing education …
>
> Children are the starting point …

There is a sense of urgency demanding a response set up by the use of should (expressing obligation) and must *(*expressing necessity).

> A constructive and optimistic vision of [children's] futures and needs should inform the structure and processes of education at every level in education Queensland.
>
> … Queensland state schools should be reconceptualised as part of that learning society …
>
> Achievements of students … must ensure that they have the foundation for life after school …

The sense of urgency is perhaps a response to a lack of confidence in public education expressed in the popular media which was part of the background to the development of QSE 2010 (Taylor and Henry 2003)

Globalisation is represented as inevitable, and it is interesting that agency in relation to the reforms is not clear. The text is extremely directive and it is not clear who it is addressing, and who is responsible for making the changes. This is a common feature of policy documents where sources of power and authority are often difficult to detect (Yeatman 1990). Criticism of current teachers and the system is implied, given the assertion that there is an urgent need for improvement, and only at one point is the government's responsibility clearly stated: This is an obligation for government.

The use of both the present and the future tense in the extract, works with the 'problem → solution' structure of the text. For example, moving from the present, There is a challenge facing education, to the future tense, This will transform ... Related, the explicit reference to popular metaphors of decay, disaster and erosion associated with globalisation (at present), contrast with the government's …constructive and optimistic vision (in the future).

In terms of vocabulary used, there are examples of new hybrid terms which have become 'buzz words' such as knowledge economy, learning society, Smart State, managers of learning experiences. Such terms act symbolically and metaphorically in policy texts as 'condensation symbols' (Troyna 1994). Many words used in the extract draw on the discourse of change: change, future, driving force, transition, adapt, move, transform, redefinition, reconceptualised. There is also a link here with the discourse of flexibility mentioned earlier.

Extract Two – 'The purpose of schooling'

Another block of text (black on lime green) in the QSE 2010 document outlines the purpose of schooling (p.12).

> Over the next decade, the central purpose of schooling in Queensland should be to create a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment within which young people prepare to be active and reflective Australian citizens with a disposition to lifelong learning. They will be able to participate in and shape community, economic and political life in Queensland and the nation. They will be able to engage confidently with other cultures at home and abroad.

Social democratic concerns are dominant in this extract, with references to active citizenship and shaping community. However, in linking a disciplined environment, to a safe and tolerant environment, there seems also to be a concern about restoring confidence in public education. There are also some interesting references to difference – a tolerant environment and other cultures at home and abroad – characteristic of the discourse of 'new times'. There is also a mention of 'lifelong learning', often associated with economic globalisation, as mentioned earlier. Once again the text is declarative and future directed.

Destination 2010 The action plan to implement QSE 2010

This document is directed to Education Queensland teachers and administrators and, in contrast to the more promotional genre evident in QSE 2010, it clearly exemplifies the policy genre. It contains detailed objectives and guidelines related to the implementation of QSE 2010, and it lacks the glossy presentation of the original document. However, on the cover and within the document a dotted arrow pointing from left to right is used to indicate movement towards 2010, and the document also features the jigsaw puzzle motif mentioned previously which links the document with the original QSE 2010 document and the rest of the genre chain.

This document is ostensibly more dialogic than QSE 2010; questions are apparently directed to teachers, for example, Is what I'm doing promoting the best interests of students? However, although these questions appear to represent the voice of teachers, they are part of a strategy often used in policy documents to persuade the readers to take up the ideas (discourses) being advanced.

Extract Three – 'Vision statement'

A brief vision statement is included at the beginning of Destination 2010:

> What is our destination?
>
> Vision
>
> > The vision for Education Queensland is for all Queensland students to become active citizens in a learning society – the Smart State. (p. 4)

Here neo-liberal and social democratic discourses are combined in the vision statement and linked to the notion of 'the Smart State'. The reference to all Queensland students makes it clear that the vision is an inclusive one – for everyone.

Following the vision statement there is a statement of 'Purpose' which is substantively the same as the purposes statement in QSE 2010 quoted above (see Extract Two). However, here it is formatted using bullet points.

> The purpose of state education is to meet the needs of different students pursuing high levels of educational attainment.
>
> This will be achieved by:
>
> - creating a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment for students
> - preparing young people to be active and reflective Australian citizens

- developing the skills and desire for lifelong learning in students
- supporting students to become active in community, economic and political life
- building students confidence in their relationships with other cultures at home and abroad.

Bullet points are often used in this way in official policy documents; they may be seen as 'reader friendly', but they also tend to be more 'reader directive' than discursive text (Fairclough 2001a).

Queensland the Smart State. Education and Training Reforms for the Future (ETRF)

The third document in the genre chain which I have selected for analysis is a consultation document following QSE 2010 released around the same time as Destination 2010. It focuses on selected reforms in education and training included in QSE 2010, and provides a good example of a promotional genre. Its apparent purpose is to provide public information about the new policy directions the government is taking, but has the character of a political statement as well. It is a glossy publication – this time produced by the Department of Premier and Cabinet, not Education Queensland - and includes a message from the Premier (with a photo) as a preface. The document is linked prominently to the 'Smart State initiative', which is located within the Premier's Department, rather than to QSE 2010, and is not symbolically linked to the other QSE 2010 documents through the cover design. Full colour photos are used in the document and questions are posed in relation to the proposed reforms. The document is ostensibly more dialogic than the other two – though basically the document presents the case for the new reforms and seeks questions relating to the specific proposals.

Extract 4 - 'A message from the Premier'

The selected extract is the introductory message from Premier Peter Beattie in the ETRF document (see Appendix for full extract). The genre is informational and political - the main purpose of the document seems to be to make the case for – or 'sell' - the reforms to parents and the wider community. The Premier writes persuasively as a parent wanting the best for his children; he then shifts into an explanation of the government's vision for the reforms.

Interdiscursive analysis

In this extract, discourses are again interwoven around the notion of the Smart State, with a focus on the future and change:

> This is a Government with a vision for our State's future. We are transforming Queensland into the Smart State of Australia - a State of prosperity and social justice with a commitment to equality of opportunity. At the very heart of this vision is

> education – the very best education possible for every Queensland child, so that he or she reaches their full potential and helps to build the Smart State. …

Reflecting neo-liberal views of education as central in economic reform, the individual student is placed centrally here. There is an emphasis in this extract on economic matters; on education and training, and on new goals for education, training and employment. Neo-liberal discourses of skills for the knowledge economy and the need for flexibility are prominent:

> We want our system to keep pace with — and capitalise on — the rapid rate of change in our society.

Social democratic discourses are also evident, but they are marginalised, and there is only one mention of citizenship which is so central in the other two documents:

> Along with all young Queenslanders, we want to provide opportunity for those who have slipped through our safety nets. Our systems need to provide these young people with the foundations for social equity, informed citizenship and quality of life.

However, it is not clear if these goals are for all young people – as stated in Destination 2010 - or only those who have 'slipped through the net'.

Included in the vision for the reform are stronger partnerships with parents, teachers, trainers and educators. The discourse of partnership may indicate more democratic relationships, however, as Fairclough (2001a) has pointed out in the context of new Labour in Britain, there is a tension between the loosening of central control by governments and their attempts to manage control via the use of such discourses and 'media spin'. In other words, policy documents can advocate one-way 'partnerships' to serve government purposes.

The Premier states that the government wants to build an exceptional State education and training system, and that: We want a system that not only builds the mind, but also the character, of every student. The reason for the rather curious addition of *character* in the extract is not explained.

Linguistic analysis:

There is an interesting use of pronouns in the extract. There is a shift back and forth from *we* (Queenslanders, parents) to we (the government), and from I (a parent) to I (Premier):

> As a parent of school-age children I, like all other Queensland parents, want my kids ...
>
> As Premier, I want this for all Queensland children and young people.

At times it is not clear whether we refers to parents or the government:

> … But we want more than that - and our children deserve more.

Repetition is used to present an argument for the changes:

> The present …system serves most students well. But we want much more than that …We want …We want … We want … That's why this Government ….

Some statements express obligation, eg This partnership needs to extend ..., Our systems need … Because the purpose of this message from the Premier is to 'sell' the reform package, the agency for change is explicit: agency for change lies with the government and the focus is on system change.

The vocabulary used in the extract indicates change, for example, vision, future, transforming, and keep pace with …the rapid rate of change.

In summary

Using these brief extracts I have shown how CDA can be used to explore how language works in policy texts, and in particular how it can be used to document hybrid genres and discourses, and to highlight competing discourses and marginalised discourses. These discursive and linguistic issues have implications for how policy texts are read, implemented, and how they may be used in emancipatory ways by teachers and policy activists.

By analysing three policy documents from a genre chain I have also been able to draw attention to a subtle discursive shift in the policy implementation process, where social democratic discourses – especially the discourse of active citizenship – have become marginalised. However, though marginalised, it was still possible to trace this discourse through the three documents in the genre chain. An example of a discourse which seems to have disappeared during the implementation process, to become a silence, is the discourse of public education. The significance of such discursive shifts will be discussed further in the next section.

Policy activism and CDA

So what is the point of this kind of research, and how can it be used? Lo Bianco (2001) has emphasised the need for researchers and practitioners to understand the language of policy. Similarly, Edwards and Nicoll (2001: 103) argue that rhetorical analysis 'helps to point to the politics of discourse that is at play in policy making processes' and suggest that this is a politics in which researchers need to engage if their own arguments around policy issues are to be persuasive. In the current context where, as I have argued, language has taken on a new importance, activists also need skills to engage with policy processes at this level.
I would argue that CDA, with its emphasis on the discursive construction of power relations and its commitment to progressive social change, is a particularly useful tool for such a task.

In this context, Anna Yeatman has been interested for some time in 'policy activism', and how social theorists 'might open up the politics of discourse to democratic and dialogic modes of participation' (1990: 159). She continues (p. 159): 'The participant who wants to discursively contest policies as texts must come to understand how discursive practices operate, how they distribute power and constitute power, and how discursive interventions are possible'. Here Yeatman refers to contesting policy. However, she explains (1990: 165) that discursive interventions need not always be reactive: 'because they arise out of discursive difference, they always contain contradictions which can be mobilised by readers who are discursively positioned to do this. She argues that it is possible to overstate the discursive domination of policy and bureaucratic discourse, and discusses the way that the impersonal styles of bureaucratic and policy discourse can lend themselves to democratic features of planning, using an example relating to needs based child care in NSW in the 1980s.

Yeatman's (1998) edited collection on policy activism extends her work on the politics of discourse and the politics of the state. Her definition of policy activism is 'any and all instances of a strategic commitment to the policy process in the context of a democratic government on behalf of a citizen community' (p. 10). She sees policy activist networks - spanning 'policy insiders' working for government agencies and 'policy outsiders' in the community - as central in policy activism. For example, this kind of policy activist network was seen in Australia in the 1980s when feminists in the women's movement worked closely with 'femocrats' in government bureaucracies to bring about policy changes for women (Eisenstein 1996, Taylor 2001).

Jones, Lee and Poynton (1998), also view policy making and policy activism as discursive and textual practices. They argue that, given the recent proliferation of policy, activists need to engage with discursive aspects of policy, and that this seems to be even more appropriate in the context of rapid social change. Jones et al. (1998: 147) argue, 'To be a policy activist is to be centrally involved in the generation (writing) and interpretation (reading and rewriting) of text'. They view 'policy work' as 'text work' (p. 169) and discourse analysis as a form of policy activism. They discuss the possibilities for 'strategic rewritings' of the dominant narratives of research policy in relation to the research quantum within their own institutional sites, illustrated by a case study of the effects of 'the changing rules of what counts as "research" ' in the creative arts (p. 158).

Networks of relationships may be built between 'insider activists' within government agencies and outsiders who share their cause or activist leanings. In relation to health policy, Dugdale (1998) refers to the importance of insider activists in recognising opportunities to get issues on

to policy agendas, and in charting a course through policy processes. He refers to 'the political art of framing and interpreting policy', and argues that 'knowing how to frame policy statements so that they actually make a positive difference' is an important ' "power tool" wielded by the insider activist' (Dugdale 1998: 115). Using the example of institutional mission statements, he suggests (p. 119) that insider activists can take such statements at face value and work to fulfil the rhetoric of the institution.

Similarly, through an understanding of the language of policy, policy activists can help to keep social democratic discourses and language on policy agendas and ensure that they are not marginalised or silenced during implementation processes. Using CDA as a tool, they can find spaces for strategic discursive interventions, and subvert repressive policies by reading them 'against the grain'.

CDA as a situated political practice

This paper has attempted to show that, in a context of policy proliferation and discourse led social change, CDA is a valuable tool for researching policy and change. It has also discussed how policy activists can use CDA for social democratic ends in explicit ways, by utilising their understandings about language and power in their political and work practices.

In this final section I wish to return to Luke's (2002) call for analyses which 'make a difference'. In his paper on John Howard's speech about the Stolen Generations, Luke (1997: 365) wrote that his intention was:

> … to use critical discourse analysis as an analytic and political strategy for talking back to public discourse, for disrupting its speech acts, breaking its narrative chains and questioning its constructions of power and agency.

However, he commented that he remained unconvinced about the force of his analysis as a public text and its ability to make a difference.

In the end a CDA analysis is still another text, and just as we cannot know the effects of policy texts without empirical research, we cannot know what effects a particular CDA analysis will have without research. But clearly its effects will depend mainly on how and where it is disseminated. An article in an academic journal may not have much of an impact in terms of social change, but publications directed towards a wider readership may have wider effects.

Fairclough (2001a) asks how CDA analyses can contribute to democratic struggle, and how academics can connect their papers and books to political campaigns. He writes (pp. 264-265):

> I think we have to keep rethinking how we research, how and where we publish, and how we write. How we research: … the public sphere is cut off from struggles over the public sphere - why not work with activists in designing and carrying out research, tying it for instance to the campaigns of disabled people over welfare reform? How and where we publish: … why not seek to publish pamphlets, articles in newspapers or magazines, or on the web? How we write: [our] publications are written in academic ways - is it possible to develop ways of writing which are accessible to many people without being superficial?

So it is what we do with our analyses that may 'make a difference'. Educational researchers may be policy activists themselves, or work with policy activists as 'critical friends'. Alternatively, we may (and do) work as researchers with 'insiders' in the bureaucracy, or with teachers in schools, or with unionists and community activists in the public sphere.

Also relevant to the idea of CDA as a situated political practice, Luke (2000: 98) makes a case for CDA moving 'beyond a focus on ideology critique and documenting other forms of text and discourse 'that may mark the productive uses of power in the face of economic and cultural globalization'. While this paper has been restricted to policy issues, I have documented new forms of hybrid policy text and suggested how 'the affirmative character of discourse' (2000: 106) might be kept on policy agendas.

Note

1. The larger research project on which this paper draws, 'Equity implications for Education Queensland's new policy directions: a preliminary investigation', was conducted with Parlo Singh.

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Appendix

Queensland State Education 2010 **(Education Queensland 2000)**
Extract One (p. 8)

The challenge in summary
Education needs something other than popular metaphors of decay, disaster and erosion as driving forces of change. Children are the starting point for a strategy about the future of schooling. A constructive and optimistic vision of their futures and needs
should inform the structure and processes of education at every level in education Queensland.

There is a challenge facing education in Queensland as we move into an era where knowledge supersedes information and technology transforms longstanding relationships of time and space. It is to become a learning society – the Smart State – in which global forces favour the adaptable, and the key resources will be human and social capital rather than just physical and material resources.

Because human and social capital develop within families and through wider networks, Queensland state schools should be re-conceptualised as part of that learning society and become embedded in communities – local and global – in new ways.

This will transform the means and ends of teaching and learning in schools – those involved, the way it occurs, and the principles on which the curriculum is constructed.
It changes what teachers do from teacher-centred learning and gate keepers of information to managers of learning experiences of children.

Completion of school for the large majority is now more important than being there. Achievements of students along the path to completing school must ensure that they have the foundation for life after they leave school in the complex, diverse and uncertain economic and social environments described here. This outcome will be assisted if the emphasis is on achieving personal best rather than passing or failing.

The existing disparities in opportunities for students arising from the distribution of wealth, different cultures and location will get worse unless there is an equity principle that gives everyone a chance at the same outcomes. This is an obligation for government.

Above all there is a need for a redefinition of the purpose of public education that meets the unique challenge posed by the transition to a globalised knowledge economy and society.

Extract Two (p. 12)

Over the next decade, the central purpose of schooling in Queensland should be to create a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment within which young people prepare to be active and reflective Australian citizens with a disposition to lifelong learning. They will be able to participate in and shape community, economic and political life in Queensland and the nation. They will be able to engage confidently with other cultures at home and abroad.

Extract Three

Destination 2010 The action plan to implement QSE 2010 **(Education Queensland 2002, p. 4)**

What is our destination?

Vision

The vision for Education Queensland is for all Queensland students to become active citizens in a learning society – the Smart State.

Purpose

The purpose of state education is to meet the needs of different students pursuing high levels of educational attainment.

This will be achieved by:

- creating a safe, tolerant and disciplined environment for students
- preparing young people to be active and reflective Australian citizens
- developing the skills and desire for lifelong learning in students
- supporting students to become active in community, economic and political life
- building students confidence in their relationships with other cultures at home and abroad.

Extract Four

Queensland the Smart State. Education and Training Reforms for the Future **(Queensland Government, 2002) (Preface, p. i)**

Queensland's most precious resource is its children. When we nurture our children, we nurture our future.

This is a Government with a vision for our State's future. We are transforming Queensland into the Smart State of Australia - a State of prosperity and social justice with a commitment to equality of opportunity. At the very heart of this vision is education - the very best education possible for every Queensland child, so that he or she reaches their full potential and helps to build the Smart State.

As a parent of school-age children I, like all other Queensland parents, want my kids to have the best education possible so they are ready for a lifetime of learning and earning. As Premier, I want this for all Queensland children and young people. I know the Minister for Education, Anna Bligh, and the Minister for Employment, Training and Youth, Matt Foley, share this goal.

" … This is a Government with a **vision** for our State's future …"

The present State education and training system serves most students well. But we want much more than that — and our children deserve more. We want to build an exceptional State education and training system. We want a system that not only builds the mind, but also the character, of every student. We want stronger partnerships with parents, so they know our schools are helping them make important decisions about their children's schooling and providing an education of excellence. This partnership needs to extend to teachers, trainers, and educators. We want our system to keep pace with — and capitalise on — the rapid rate of change in our society.

That's why this Government has set new goals for education, training and employment through:

- Queensland State Education — 2010 (QSE – 2010)
- Skilling Queensland 2001 — 2004, Queensland's vocational education and training strategy
- jobs for young people through the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle Initiative.

……..

Along with all young Queenslanders, we want to provide opportunity for those who have slipped through our safety nets. Our systems need to provide these young people with the foundations for social equity, informed citizenship and quality of life.

"…Along with all young Queenslanders, we want to **provide opportunity** for those who have slipped through our safety nets …"