Processes of policy making and theories of public policy: Relating power, policy and professional knowledge in literacy agendas

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AIM

In this paper I will argue that policy is itself a kind of literacy that literacy educators and researchers need to deploy to participate in, critique and understand the "policy moment". The policy process is the main vehicle in democratic societies for determining resource allocation. When the trajectory of government policy is towards overall reductions in the size of government activity and a shift towards the private sector, informed kinds of policy activism are needed to minimize the negative impacts on disadvantaged communities. An enhanced and critical understanding of the process, history and dilemmas of the overall practice of public policy making can help us contribute towards a more reflective and full participation in its processes.

DILEMMAS AND ISSUES

Policy is a distinctive category of activity, located just short of overt and formal politics, and just beyond professional practice. We all know about policy in various ways. We encounter the notorious policy promise in the run up to elections. We protest against policies we dislike and applaud those we prefer. In our professional lives, and as citizens, we engage in processes and debates that aim to shape and influence policy.

However, and this is especially true for language and literacy educators in recent years, we often consider "policy" an almost endless sequence of intrusions into the field of educational practice. I feel that a negative view of policy abounds among language and literacy educators, and that this view is tied to recent processes that commodify learning, and to the intrusion of market and human capital theories into most educational practice.

Reading education policy literature from different countries, especially in relation to adult education and community based, non-formal settings, highlights dilemmas and issues more than confident engagement with the processes for change that democratic societies make available. Even when policy makers smile towards adult literacy education, as indeed has been the case in recent years, it is consistently traceable to the celebration of International Literacy Year in 1990, and, more powerfully, to the adoption by the OECD in the 1990s of the ideas that developed national economies had lost competitiveness in international markets, and that this loss was partly due to literacy deficiencies.

An ideological shift occurred between 1990 and 1996. During 1990, International Literacy Year, adult literacy thinking was still characterized by reformist social ambition, and agendas in adult literacy were influenced by lingering Freirean ideologies, or by second-chance rights thinking, or by ideals about overcoming disparities between developing and rich countries' education. Significantly, however, 1990 had the kind of impact most International Years tend to have -- specialist and fleeting and therefore marginal. By the time the International Adult Literacy Survey was conducted by the OECD and its Canadian partners, the various participating countries engaged with substantially more commitment, and more mainstream policy attention. They typically replaced social transformation ideologies with prevailing ideas about labour market reforms, efficiency, and enhanced competitiveness in globalizing markets.

In recent years many governments, especially among western post-industrial democracies, have implemented competitive free-market oriented regimes to deploy resources. This has often involved reductions in direct finance to public education. For many teachers and researchers in the literacy field these policies have led to "policy" being identified as code for "cutback". Policy is also associated with intrusion into the domain of educational practice, via assessment regimes that teachers and academics often consider overly rigid. National governments increasingly impose more

stringent kinds of external accountability for the outcomes of literacy programs. Such measures are sometimes seen by teachers and many researchers as moves to constrain the autonomy of teachers and their professionalism and to transfer to external "judges" assessments of what constitutes appropriate outcomes from literacy teaching. In response, governments have been motivated to institute a kind of contract, in which the elevated importance of literacy within public policy is conditioned by restrictions on the professional judgment and autonomy of teachers.

The increased attention to literacy by developed-country governments is directly associated with a revival of human capital asset thinking within economics in the context of the emergence of the "knowledge economy" or post-industrialism. This thinking among national governments is reinforced by a strong move towards international comparative studies on the relative literacy performance of national economies, especially deriving from the OECD (1992; 1995; 1996; 1997).

POLICY PATTERNS

In recent decades among OECD member countries government policy discourse on literacy has tended to focus almost exclusively on areas that are presumed to have a strong human capital effect in relation to the labour market (Lo Bianco 1999a; OECD 1996). These have included adult literacy "campaigns" to "solve" literacy difficulties at the interface of education and the labour market, rather than in the community settings where literacy policy intervention is also warranted. Another typical government response has been a kind of "vaccination" approach. These have targeted early years and primary schooling for intense language skills approaches to literacy rather than the approach favoured by many researchers and teachers which would concurrently address literacy needs systematically across all subject areas and at all levels of social and educational practice while acknowledging the greater complexity of contemporary literacy demands (Lo Bianco and Freebody, 1997).

Typically, government policy preferences address attainment levels of learners in what are defined as key skills as well as seek indicators of overall and group-specific performance standards in an international comparative framework. From these preoccupations it follows that the development of 'techniques' to efficiently monitor skills-based literacy and the modes to report test results in publicly accessible ways are key aims of policy. The policy advocacy that emerges from such research topics tends to be evaluative commentary on literacy performance as statistically represented, and on measures to "improve" the results of school-to-school, or country-to-country comparisons. Public ranking of schools or national economies is one manifestation of this. Another key outcome has been partisan promotion of preferred literacy teaching methods.

By contrast, research on literacy addresses a much wider array of social and educational contexts in a discourse sensitive to variation, context, and social meaning. The policy advocacy that emerges from these research priorities and understandings has argued for greater attention to the located and culturally variable dimensions of literacy in social practice, and understanding literacy as having personal and social meanings over the economic ones.

There is nothing unique in this disparity between knowledge generated for explicit political action (policy knowledge) and knowledge generated for teaching, research and "scholarly understanding"'. Both classes of knowledge argue for their own legitimacy. Politicians-bureaucrats hold that political agency rests asymmetrically with them based on the wider political or democratic compact. To this end they commission and produce knowledge stocks and representations of the 'literacy field' appropriate to the kinds of action that political agency requires. On the other hand literacy researchers and many teachers hold that 'professionalism' accords them the legitimacy for some autonomous intervention, or influence, in literacy education practices. The claim to a legitimate role in debate about resources and public policy derives from or is conferred by executive responsibility in one case, and by professionalism and deep field knowledge in the other case.

This is a substantial difference. One difference is that policy-makers hold that formal power confers the right to recruit knowledge appropriate to action; while researchers believe that intimate

knowledge of the field confers a legitimate role and the right to act in policy. These differences are part of wider divergent rationalizations. In reality the practices of policy implementation and of scholarly research overlap to a considerable degree, and mutual negotiation is common. While there is ample room for professional conversation and debate between the practices and divergent rationales it would be naïve to neglect the considerable underlying differences of perspective and purpose. These are sufficiently stable and recurring to suggest that they are two underlying cultures; one an executive policy-oriented action culture and the other whose focus is professional and intimate. One imagines intermittent and infrequent involvement to correct failure while the other imagines enduring involvement with the field. The intermittent attention seeks to solve problems decisively, fully and therefore is oriented towards eradicating "problems", generalizing from localized context towards identifying points of entry, strategic intervention (often with timeframes shaped by electoral parameters). The other is more attentive to detail, to patient observation, identifying complex relations, localized conditions, exceptions and patterns.

When policy-makers call on researchers to collaborate in determining policy processes what results is as much an inter-cultural encounter as it is a political dialogue.

However, there are dilemmas aplenty involved in scholarly knowledge production regardless of whether or not it has been specifically recruited for a policy purpose. The endurance of a skills-based focus on literacy in most government policy discourse, and especially the construction of recurrent "literacy crises" as a device to sustain wider political agendas (Freebody 1997; 1998) constitute an unavoidable policy-tinged environment for literacy scholarship. Any literacy research or teaching practice undertaken in contexts where there is so much prior framing of the issue makes 'politicization' highly likely. More deeply, the impact of understanding all scholarly work in Foucauldian ways make it always and everywhere the case that "policy" (power) and "information" (knowledge) are mutually shaped and shaping. There is by this understanding no place to begin that is without history and effects.

Human capital and social capital

The dilemmas created by national governments using rigidly normalized measures of literacy as the basis for policy interventions are made much more acute by the absorption in recent years of literacy within human capital accounting ideologies and cross-national comparisons by international organizations. Human capital is the theoretical framework that dominates thinking about education in many societies. Both conservatives and social democrats speak of education largely in terms of its connection with economy.

The OECD defines human capital as: "*The knowledge that individuals acquire during their life and use to produce goods and services or ideas in market and non-market circumstances"* (OECD 1997: 17).

One of the main exponents of this approach to knowledge, i.e. knowledge as an economic category, is Fritz Machlup, through his 1984 three-volume work: K*nowledge: Its Creation, Distribution, and Economic Significance*. Machlup's definition of human capital identifies knowledge as both skill and information:

" The connection between knowledge and human capital is easily understood if one realizes that capital is formed by investment, that investment in human resources is designed to increase their capacity (to produce, to earn, to enjoy life etc), and that improvements of capacity, as a rule, result from the acquisition of 'knowing what' and 'knowing how'' (1984: 8)

Combining "skills" (knowing **how**) and "knowledge" (knowing **what**) in human capital has meant that the location of human capital in a society goes well beyond its embodiment in people. Knowledge as an economic category is measurable within three recurring forms, or "stocks of knowledge". These are:

- Knowledge embodied in individual physical tools and machines specially built according to specifications in research and development programs
- Knowledge embodied in individual persons; specially schooled and trained as 'knowledge carriers' and qualified workers with acquired skills
- Non-embodied knowledge**;** created and disseminated at a cost but not inseparably embodied in products or knowledge carriers (Machlup 1984).

Adding the overall value of these knowledge stocks yields a measure of the human capital resources available to a national economy, but to handle the inevitable differences in conceptualization of these measures across national systems requires the use of some proxy measures. Assessed literacy levels serve this function. Aggregated performance on tasks designed for wider application is used in some of the international literature as a kind of code for "average education levels" or more widely still for educational investment in general.

The focus on the economic role of knowledge seeks to make "invisible" capital visible to the gaze of accountants and economists. The emergence of the post-industrial economy (services, high technology products, value-added processes, tourism, etc.) has been critical in reinvigorating the notion of human capital which had lain dormant since its initial formulation in the 1950s (OECD 1997; Reich 1991). Alongside moves for unfettered markets for the "exchange of competence", individuals are seen to operate like mini-economies, investing in their skills and knowledge and "trading themselves".

This is a classical economics vision; an interconnected network of rational individuals making cost-benefit calculations of the returns they expect for cost of investment in all areas of their lives; including the languages they speak, the cultures they can competently function in, and the literacies they have available to them.

"Social capital" is a contesting notion that locates individuals within social, cultural and other collectivities. The term is increasingly used to express literacy as a phenomenon of human relationships rather than an individual's skills. Social capital deals with the trust, goodwill and networks of human collectivities, rather than with isolated individuals. Social capital approaches are perhaps less well developed than human capital theorizing which is a longstanding branch of economics. Policies inspired by principles and understandings of social capital would emphasize community- based settings, the networks of relationships and social cohesion in which learning takes place and what is learned is practiced (Putnam 1995; Coleman 1988). With its stress on effective and valuable relationships, social capital is an appropriate notion for inclusion in literacy since recent academic work has stressed the culturally variable and located character of literacy. It represents literacy as embedded in contexts of relationships and social values; literacy acts and literacy events that take place within networks of social life.

International contexts of literacy advocacy

Although national governments are principally responsible for literacy policies, the United Nations, through its specialized agencies of UNICEF and UNESCO, has long been interested in literacy policy. In dramatic contrast to the OECD, UNICEF and UNESCO have used a human rights orientation to their elaboration of literacy policies. For decades they have issued declarations, aims, goals, objectives, calls to action and other instruments of persuasion and mobilization in relation to literacy problems in poor and developing countries. These 'calls to action' usually aim to 'eradicate illiteracy' and achieve the 'universalization of primary education' and suggest action at all levels of formal, non-formal and adult education. The discourse usually refers to indigenous or local languages, to local scripts or writing systems, to the special needs and problems of females, of remote or marginalised populations, to nomadic peoples. The UNESCO-UNICEF-UNDP *World Declaration*

of Education for All[1] envelops its aims for universal literacy within national and religious customs regarding indigenous education, rights of first language maintenance, advocacy of literacy in the mother tongue, and the education of girls as well as boys "according to national and cultural values". This approach takes a "development and human rights" perspective and identifies literacy with enhancement of communities, their quality of life, improvements in health and opportunity.

In recent years, the global literacy agenda has, however, been set by international organizations concerned with relative international competitiveness of rich countries with post-industrial knowledge-based economies. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) whose members are the world's most economically advanced democracies has been especially prominent; in their calculations 'relative literacy levels' have been established as part of a discourse of human capital and economic competitiveness (1992; 1995; 1996 and 1997).

OECD research studies can be considered policy-oriented research in that they are commissioned by the OECD member states to guide their national decision-making. The contrastive nature of this research requires substantial decontextualization of literacy practices and literacy-tasks within an ideology that considers adult literacy problems as a kind of social threat (OECD 1992). The sophisticated data sets produced by the OECD have stimulated many calls for ever increasing comparisons, greater statistical refinement, and further evidence of comparative literacy problems in industrialized countries. Having more data, especially more comparable international data (OECD 1995: 13) reinforces the likelihood that discussions of what constitutes literacy, and 'acceptable literacy performance', will be debated within an established model of description of tasks accomplished in measurable, discrete and recurring ways and a vocabulary for comparing such results across cultural-national settings. One influential instance of this work is the 1995 IALS. The connection with policy, at least in the Australian context, was commented on by the national agency, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which participated with the aim "*to provide statistical support for planning and decision making"* (Skinner 1997: vi).

Does evidence lead to action?

Despite this commitment to statistical constructions of information about literacy there is little direct correspondence between empirical demonstrations of literacy need and any kind of public policy response. Any such correspondence would presuppose a direct or rational connection between the generation of knowledge and the resulting policy action. The history of evidence about literacy problems (adult or child, male or female, developed-country to developing) and the connection of such demonstrations of need with policies of provision do not support such confidence. The clearest indications of this have been the regular (largely unheeded) calls by UNESCO for global mobilization to "eradicate" identified disparities in national literacy levels within particular timeframes. With sad frequency since the 1940s, UNESCO has "called" on national governments (its constituents) to deploy resources to school all girls, to make primary education universally available, to teach adults etc by various nominated dates. All calls have passed without producing the hoped-for "mobilizations".

The relationship between *evidence* and *action* is mediated by many intervening factors (Weiss 1983), social values in particular, which make this relationship less than straightforward. Policy does not emerge unproblematically from the demonstration of need. All new information is absorbed within power configurations that combine prevailing ideologies, existing knowledge and the various interests of those involved. One person's problem is often another person's non-issue.

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[1] Issued after the 1990 World Conference on Education for All convened in Jomtien, Thailand by the World Bank, UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation), UNICEF (United Nations Childrens' Program) and UNDP (United Nations Development Program).

Policy advising and rewriting

The main vehicle for bringing representations of literacy teaching that result from policy-oriented research into contact with policy formulation is via the practice of professional advising (Meltsner 1990).

Professional advising has an ancient and illustrious history. The adviser function is essentially concerned with the intersection of knowledge (information) and direct or executive power. In this respect the knowledge that the adviser possesses (and often sells) is "potential" power. The latent force of this power is accumulated and given direction by its application to a context where executive power is held either legitimately (some democratic process of delegation or representation) or by usurpation.

The role and impact of "advising" are evident when fields of practice, known through lived experience (such as literacy teaching), are reframed in a different discourse and lexicon. The adviser re-presents the field in a public policy expression. It emerges constituted as "a problem" or, even, a "crisis" expressed in an arcane register often with the attribution of responsibilities, contrasts with successful practice and the benefits that derive from the field that practitioners "know" differently.

It is sometimes alienating for insiders in a field of practice to encounter reconstruction of their lived encounters and professional practices for purposes that will ultimately impact on their field of activity. In these cases the policy frame is judged to reveal a lack of understanding, or *truthfulness*, in its representation.

When, because of the mediation of advising, literacy policies show little fidelity with "reality" as experienced by literacy teachers and researchers, ambiguous relations between the various players arise. Since practitioners are not simply the source of information about teaching and its effects, but the people who must implement new policies, their alienation constitutes a kind of latent power over implementation. When practitioners reject policy statements they often claim that the policy is "ill informed", "unreal", "out of touch"; expressions that refer essentially to a false representativeness. This focus on the separation that practitioners notice from the demands and circumstances of lived reality is a call to authenticity. Policy texts are seen to be "authentic" if the representation of the activity that they speak about has face value validity. The gap between divergent representations of the world of practice gives life to a kind of contest and politics of representation. Although not inevitable, the reformulation of practice, which practitioners claim is synonymous with 'practitioner reality' into another different, (not always conflicting) reality is emblematic of public policy processes. For policy practitioners, however, "authenticity" is not a key aim; or perhaps a different criterion of authenticity applies. A representation of "reality" that is faithful to its perceived state by practitioners is often judged within government policy circles to be "interested".

At its most negative this re-framing character of policy texts can be seen as a politics of de-legitimation of teacher practitioners, intended to minimize this voice and experience in shaping assessment, progress measurement and other policies and thereby constrain professionalism as a source of policy-shaping. The conversion of "reality" into the specialized register of policy talk, i.e. statistically demonstrated correlations as evidence of causal links (literacy rates and unemployment rates), literacy rates and other moral, social and economic indicators or correlates, is not the effect of nefarious intention. This language of policy, language understood here as a series of tools adopted to express meanings appropriate to policy-deciding environments (often ministers with little time, no specialist background and pressing claims from constituents) carries with it a particular representation of the reality; a series of choices and slants that reflect the purposes of the policy content. Policy texts may succeed in appealing to power holders, i.e. the executive wings of government, by these kinds of re-presentations largely because the processes of policy making construe practitioners as having "interests" which distort an appropriate representation of needed action.

Policy texts are in this respect rhetorical and persuasive in that they aim not simply to describe field realities but to do so in such a way as to give life to courses of action. Policy texts are essentially

arguments for bolstering particular courses of action, ones that have usually achieved a kind of agreement or consensus prior to their formulation. To this extent the transformation of experienced and felt reality into representations for "consumption" within policy-making contexts does not aim to retain a sense of identity for practitioners as "true" or "real" representations. The extent of the divergence, however, is kept in check by awareness that the prospects for effective implementation of the policy goals invariably depend on the cooperation of affected practitioners. This dynamic is a critical factor in making policy texts "tractable"'.

In this sliver of agitational space between a prevalent representational message or premise (*THERE IS A LITERACY CRISIS*) and the propositional or action claim (*DRASTIC ACTION IS REQUIRED*) the cooperation of practitioners functions as a kind of power withheld by the field.

Policy texts undergo a further process of distancing. The conversions of reality into the representations of policy are then inserted into a policy conversation -- policy arguments (Majone 1989; Tannen 1998) that occur in environments where multiple competing policies claim attention. At cabinet meetings, for example, the policy conversation about a literacy proposal from an Education Minister competes for attention with claims from many other and totally incommensurable fields. A terminology of common reference emerges to enable resolution of the evident difficulty; this is a kind of monetisation of the policy claims and their insertion within the ideological or interest parameters of the governing jurisdiction.

The translations of lived experience are therefore re-workings of practitioners' knowledge into the representations of other professional classes prior incorporating these representations into policy processes; here, the language of currency is the arcane register in which the policy text has already been framed. These are processes of ruling, discussed in more detail in the next section.

Policy making as ruling

Decision-making, or ruling, depends on the marshalling of knowledge. This involves the collection of information. Information becomes knowledge when it is absorbed into a discourse, a framework of texts about a subject. Written texts are a kind of historical residue of speech, things that have been said and are retained within memory, if spoken, in hard form if written.

Information is converted into knowledge through the discursive application of professional disciplines, a "disciplining" in which particular orders of understanding and representation are effected (Foucault 1979). Discourses therefore are intimately connected with power: *"There is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time, power relations"* (Foucault 1979: 27).

Ideology conventionally has two kinds of meaning: systematic linkages of ideas and defective/deformed kinds of thinking. The first sees ideology in a neutral and descriptive way; the latter, associated more with Marxist and neo-Marxist thought, sees ideology as a negative camouflage of 'underlying realities'.

Foucault tends to use the term "discourse" in place of ideology; discourse understood as linked to "power"' and constituting "truths"'. In this conceptualization 'truthfulness' (of representation, and therefore of constitution of fields for action) comes about within given discourse formulations that are sustained and linked to power. Ideology in Foucauldian thinking, therefore, makes truth, but this ideology is discourse overlapped with power.

"Policy", both texts and discourses of policy, (Ball 1993) embody notions of power-saturated discourse. The Foucauldian analysis of how truths are constituted in response to ideology-power connections sustains an older tradition that studied domains of ruling (policy-making; power) as intimately connected with knowledge and its functions as power.

The identification of problems and claims about what ought to be done to "solve problems" (e.g., to "eradicate illiteracy") are converted from the often anecdotal, interactive, experiential, grounded and concrete expressions of participants into abstract, distant and generalized expressions of policy-making texts. The dilemmas inherent in this practice of policy have ancient antecedents.

In the following sections I will provide a brief historical review of some key moments in theory about the relation between executive power and power that is wielded through expertise. I have found these historical theorizations of public policy and the practice of advising useful in thinking about a possible "policy literacy" today. This is because retrospection often permits a sharper identification of the broad elements that comprise policy encounters. These elements are dynamic mixes of professional information/knowledge, the formal exercise of executive power, various and changing interests and how all these elements are welded into overarching systems, or ideologies, that are relatively resistant to change.

Knowledge and undemocratic power

In 367 BC in the Sicilian town of Syracuse the tyrant Dionysius II came to power. Wanting to secure his position he recruited the speculative philosopher Plato to give him tips on staying in power. Plato implemented a program of rigorous education, especially mathematical learning, intending this to bring about "rational" rule. The experiment was unsuccessful but the lessons Plato drew from this attempt to mould a tyrant into a legitimate ruler formed part of his great tract of political philosophy, *The Republic*. For Plato the ideal political system unifies *in a single person* analysis and policy-making by crowning a *Philosopher-King*. In this way wisdom and knowledge are combined with power. Every utterance of a Philosopher King would be a policy text. Plato's vision of the ideal form of government extended to an entire social system in which to remove personal corruption rulers live ascetic lives and govern a kind of technocracy where those who *know* have *power* and rule as Guardians, over the other classes: the Workers and Soldiers.

The Republic represents one possible way to reconcile the two facets that those with power and those who desire to attain power need to combine. Ruling always involves knowing, not in a banal sense, but particular kinds of knowledge constructed for the special task of ruling (policy knowledge).

Among the many reasons why Plato's vision is impractical today is the gap between knowledge and power, a gap commonly filled not simply by advice, but by highly professional classes of knowledge purveyers.

Advice and advising

Advice and advising took a professional turn from the 16th century (Meltsner 1990). In Florence Macchiavelli's *The Prince*, a treatise on ruling, changed forever political theory and policy thinking. *The Prince* is a kind of manual on how power is captured and kept. To gain and remain in power Macchiavelli advised extreme pragmatism, amoral pragmatism, allowing the morality of the state to prevail over private or religious morality. To rule successfully a prince needs to gather and utilize knowledge in a systematic way as a deliberate part of the practice of ruling. The most efficient way to do this is to employ knowledgeable advisers. What Plato combined, Macchiavelli separated. Macchiavelli imagined a whole professional class of advisers to rulers. The knowledge component of ruling has been transformed from an aspect of the ruler to become a trained class of professionals, and ultimately combinations of these in committees, think-tanks and commissions of inquiry.

Macchiavelli's originality (Berlin 1979) was in his theorization of advice as an adjunct of power and his description of a class of people as professional peddlers in information, shaping power through strategic knowledge. The representations of information that these knowledge-makers produce resonate with today's opinion polls and the paraphernalia of contemporary government.

We know today that Plato's solution is impossible. A diversified and complex nation is not a city-state, a small place with a non-literate population and a tradition of tyrannical rule. Plato's Republic

is also unappealing to us because it is rigidly class based, hierarchical and technocratic. Macchiavelli's extreme and amoral pragmatism is also unappealing.

However, from both Plato and Macchiavelli, we learn how pervasively the collection of information and the fashioning of knowledge are implicated in ruling. Knowledge (information enveloped in argumentative language, in field-specific texts) is never separate from the purposes for which it is produced, being always complicit with some broad or narrow purpose of governance and decision-making. Foucault's addition to these understandings is to identify systems of ideas as the constituters of "truth"; as power-linked discourse. Thus the knowledge produced in academic literacy research can be examined for the ways that it explicitly or implicitly supports/enables the formulation of a particular policy position.

INCREMENTALISM

Modern policy analysis in English speaking countries draws directly on another tradition. Jeremy Bentham (1748-1832) and English philosophical schools such as *Utilitarianism* are especially relevant, as is the thinking of the American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952) and his famous *Pragmatism*.

For Bentham, individuals should be motivated by "the greatest good for the greatest number"; a utilitarian maxim that in seeking one's own happiness and good others' entitlement should not be impaired. Although in Bentham's hands, when applied to government, utilitarianism aimed to produce positive social reform, it also came to bolster *laissez faire* beliefs, especially in economic policy. *Laissez-faire* essentially holds that the "invisible hand" of the market and market processes are the best arbiters of the allocation of resources in society and human intervention (the visible hand) merely serves to distort "natural" processes. It is better therefore not to intervene, to allow the "natural" processes of the market to direct social goods according to the rules and patterns it determines.

From Dewey, American policy theorists derived a commitment to incremental and practical goals, to modest ambitions in response to uncertainty, to small steps, to doing what is conservatively feasible. Taken together these principles constitute *incrementalism*. In practice, incrementalism is a conservative philosophy that tends to entrench the status quo by making the objective of any intervention only small or marginal improvement, rather than radical challenge. Incrementalism is perhaps more a disposition than a clear program or approach in policy. We can identify incrementalist thinking in Anglo-American policy with its stress on practicality, its low level of explicit ideology, its eschewing of abstraction and wider framing.

In my own experience of ten years serving on the Australian National Commission for UNESCO recurring and dramatically divergent national policy styles were often on display in UNESCO's literacy planning efforts. Literacy policy texts were often derived from the French administrative cast that dominated the organization. The aims and style of the texts were replete with broad mission, wide remit, a developed sense of consequence and the connection between practical measures with abstract entities and claims. These were often dismissed as "unhelpful grand aspiration" by critics from English-speaking member states. The reaction of Australian, UK and US delegates (prior to the withdrawal of the UK and US from UNESCO) often insisted on an utterly different literacy policy style that would stress "achievable goals", be shaped by "practical aims", and characterized by "staged and strategic thinking" with "milestones" and "indicators" and "benchmarks". The practical effect of these different national policy styles (Howlett 1991) can be very different, with radically different notions of what is appropriate teachers' work, what is curriculum, what constitutes literacy and why is it important. The very existence of "national policy styles" is itself indicative that the claims to "science" (a claim of universality) of the policy field cannot accommodate variation according to national administrative cultures, let alone notions of the interestedness of the field itself.

I now discuss the "scientific" era of policy theory.

Rational policy making and the literacy "problem"

In the 1950s, under the direction of its main American proponent Harold Lasswell, emerging practices of "rational" policy making were codified and given the name "policy science". Drawing on incremental thinking, and pragmatism, the policy sciences aimed to bring knowledge to ruling in a systematic way.

Some policy scientists believed that their craft would lead to virtually perfect forms of government. The systematic investigations of professional policy scientists using techniques of objective and rational comparison would yield knowledge that was not interested, or partial, or motivated. Ruling would be tempered, and power tamed, by attaching scientifically accumulated knowledge to power. Such knowledge would rise above ideology. Perhaps the exemplary statement of this sentiment about policy as science was Aaron Wildavsky's notion of policy as "*Speaking Truth to Power*" (1979). This was perhaps the epitome of the modernist dichotomy of knowledge as truth, and power as non-truth (raw expediency, naked politics, potential tyranny).

A core assumption of scientific policy-making concerns the nature of problems. Problems are the focus of policy work. Policy problems are either self-evident or at least identifiable and demonstrable. Problems are not constructions. In response to the existence of "out there" problems policymaking processes can be restricted to the application of a neutral set of protocols of analysis of the character of the policy problem. *"The field of policy studies can be broadly defined as the study of the nature, causes, and effects of alternative public policies for dealing with specific social problems....."* (Nagel: 1994:pxi). Often the policy problem is seen to be defined by "political classes" and therefore has a kind of "face validity".

Under such a scenario, a "literacy problem" would be established as existing by some process independent of the policy-making. The policy process would follow in a kind of linear trajectory. The literacy problem would be "demonstrated" as existing; its consequences revealed. Statistical correlation between assessed literacy levels and unemployment is a recurring example. The appropriate authorities would respond to the established problem by commissioning professional advisers to scrutinize it and to assess the effectiveness of alternative courses of remediation. Policy analysts (trained scientists of the policy process) would set to work to impartially apply perfect professional methodologies and implement techniques of description. Their working methods would be transparently appropriate so that stakeholders would accept the policy alternatives. Democracy demands that elected officials choose from among the recommended alternatives but the operating assumption of policy science was that the manifestly preferable alternative will have been discovered by cost-benefit contrastive methodology. Decisions would follow and implementation would proceed.

The stages are broadly a systematic demonstration of need, objective description of problem and rational assessment of the effectiveness of available options for intervention. In other words, there would be a correspondence between *reality as described by method* (technique) and the courses of action that would result. The two would be closely correlated. Just as geo-morphology is presumed to be beyond reproach for ideological bias so too would the selection of a course of policy action be in the realm of governance.

Rational policy-making techniques anticipate that the cost-benefit analyses, the rational choice matrices, the risk assessment regimes, the options papers, the opinion or attitude survey, the standardization of different realms of life into the common language of cost (monetization) yield objective, value-free, and scientific advice. The power of expertise resides to a considerable degree in its capacity to label dissent from its methods as bias, partiality, factionalism, value-laden, interested, unscientific (emotional). The dominant rationality of such processes is the principle of resource and effort efficiency. Professional administration and management become mediating activities (between rulers and ruled) via the power of information, its collection, assembly and presentation.

The techniques of policy science are a management and administrative vocabulary for standardizing comparison. These techniques reduce the specificities of different fields of information to a transferable and overarching entity of description: monetary rank. The formal method of computing cost to benefit (CBA) comparisons gives rise to an adjudicating principle which is that of efficiency.

Out of such formalism has come the progressive domination of policy-making by economics principles; market assessment (purchaser sovereignty as expressed in demand via price indicators of value) standardization, bounded and distinct products for exchange, universalism and calculations of relative efficiency (rates of return on inputs). The growth of statistics has had a very close and mutually reinforcing relationship with policy analysis.

Skepticism

In recent times the scientific revolution in policy has been subjected to severe and relentless criticism (Hawkesworth 1988; Formaini 1990; Deleon 1994). As a union of political science and economics (Nagel 1994: viii) the policy sciences were inaugurated in the expectation that incremental improvement rather than radical change would characterize government and public administration in Western liberal democracies.

In place of this optimism the field of policy-making analysis is now full of pessimism, at least about the science part of the policy sciences. A prominent American policy analyst, Lindblom (1990: 131) has stated he could identify very few success stories in three decades of public policy analysis. For Lindblom it is preferable to use the "ordinary knowledge" of those affected or most closely involved with the consequences of policy choices in framing decisions rather than the specialized, arcane register of technical-bureaucratic operations.

Out of this disillusionment has grown what Hawkesworth (1988) refers to as the 1980s embrace of some policy scholars with post-positivistic alternatives; what she calls a neo-positivism. While claims of what counts as policy analysis have widened considerably to include *"..multiple methods of inquiry and argument …"* (Dunn 1981:35) the majority of the policy making in existence is strongly resistant to change.

There are many instances of the effects of classical rationalist approaches to policy-making in the literacy field. The implementation of the National Curriculum in England and Wales in the early 1990s, and recent moves in literacy policy and programming at a national level in Australia are two stand out examples. Others include the moves to officialize English in many US states. In these examples the voice and experience of practitioners, and the perspectives of pluralist and variationist kinds of applied linguistics have been distanced from the policy process. Claims for attention within literacy policy might be made by multicultural, multilingual and multi-literate populations, and the technology saturated and culturally variable realities of literacy in contemporary societies; in fact, most depictions of literacy practices in policy texts are very narrow and located within a skills-based psychological and individualistic understanding. The claim that 'multiple methods' of inquiry should be adopted in policy appropriate to these times would insist that the voices of literacy students, teachers, parents, academic researchers would be included within policies that would seek to fashion a kind of life-long learning and multiple settings approach for provision of funded literacy teaching. If such thinking were the norm, responsibility for addressing the ever more complex demands for literacy functioning in society would be shared among all levels of schooling, post-schooling, community based and institutional settings, and driven by a wide range of perceptions about need, modes of provision, assessment, and learning pathways. Instead policies are rigidly located within frameworks that seek to erase "the problem", or to ensure against adult literacy difficulties by focussing attention on remediation in early schooling, or by implementing short duration adult "illiteracy eradication" campaigns. In addition, if the policy making process were post-positivist, the images of people with literacy difficulties that are portrayed in many policy texts would eschew moral judgment and stop characterizing adults with literacy difficulties as always dependent and helpless, or as a threat to national economic competitiveness, or even to the moral order.

POLICY AND DEMOCRACY

Two simplifications jostle about the relationship between the policy sciences and democratic process (Jenkins-Smith 1990; Dryzek 1990; Carey 1997).

One claims that policy is a means for *perfecting* democracy. The vast complexity of contemporary post-industrial society means that the alternative courses of action available to decision-makers in any field are endless. The science of policy-making via explicitly evaluated and costed alternatives identifies the optimal or maximally effective option. This efficient and rational practice, systematic, even scientific, approach to choosing among competing claims on the public purse, makes public administration effective, efficiently democratic and smooth; in short, a necessary adjunct in the practice of governance in complex democratic states.

The contesting simplification is that policy-making techniques actually *pervert* democracy. Policy analysis and processes transform issues and problems of society into forms of knowledge that are not neutral. Instead policy technique diminishes the place for the expression of values and the declaration of the preferences of communities and affected groups to shape decisions. In this way formal policy processes raise barriers to entry into debate and disrupt the networks of community and practitioners that actually exist. Debate and argument are 'corrosive' (Tannen 1998) of dialogue. In these ways policy techniques are both alien and alienating to those most closely affected. Power passes from those affected, or citizens in general, to classes of experts able to manipulate information and representation of issues, stifling participatory dialogue and popular involvement in decision making.

A strong proponent of this view, Carey (1997) sees the moves to "scientific policy" making as organised persuasion aiming to "*take the risk out of democracy"*. This association with propagandistic organization of knowledge has become a recurring strain in strong or weak form among policy science critics. Directed forms of research sponsorship and financing raise multiple issues of ethics, tolerable and intolerable levels of "interestedness" and the level of explicitness of the prior or deeper commitments of research and researchers. When these concerns about commissioned research are connected to mass media in the work of "think tanks" and public policy agencies, with their potential to sway public opinion, (Carey 1997) it is not surprising that deep suspicion arises about the complicit, technocratic and manipulative possibilities that come with organized forms of making policy.

Specifically in the field of language planning, scepticism about scientific claims to knowledge that rises above interest goes back a long way. One, possibly extreme, representation of such scepticism is Kedourie's sharp division between policy as politics, ruling, and action, the realm of "statesmen and soldiers" and academic scholarship, which he argues is used by "conflicting interests" and only prevails when pre-existing power makes this possible:

"It is absurd to think that professors of linguistics…can do the work of statesmen and soldiers. What does happen is that academic enquiries are used by conflicting interests to bolster up their claims, and their results prevail only to the extent that somebody has the power to make them prevail…Academic research does not add a jot or a title to the capacity for ruling…" (Kedourie 1961: 125).

Expectations for policy research are embedded in an image of policy, and politics, and how policy decisions are made. The conventional expectation is that research will add 'rationality' to the expedient world of politics, the hurly-burly, seemingly unsystematic world of policy-making. Researchers may see their role as adding information to counteract special pleading, selfish or narrow interests which otherwise shape what is done in the name of policy.

Categories of research that are specifically commissioned to inform policy can encounter an acute tension. Higgins (1980) identifies a technical-political dichotomy in such research. This dichotomy

produces tensions between the technical (scientific) and the political (action-oriented) functions of such research. For Weiss (1983) research knowledge is only taken up in policy and issues are not really tractable unless there is some balance of the interests of participants, the different information base available to them and the ideological filters that impede the utilization of new knowledge.

Within policy analysis there is a vibrant debate about research and the knowledge it generates. The old form of this is the *values-facts* dilemma. Rein (1976; 1986) points out that values and facts either shape each other in given cases or are more complexly related in others, but that they are rarely present alone. "Interpretive filters" inhibit the assimilation by policy development processes of research findings.

The technical function of research assumes a different order of importance in policy contexts (e.g. ambiguity is politically and strategically necessary or unavoidable) from academic or scholarly ones, where precision of definition and objectives are formulated in advance. Policy paradigms, even when they deliberately require and generate new information, and engage classes of knowledge experts do this in ambiguous or ambivalent kinds of ways.

Academic researchers in the literacy field and government-engaged policy experts are just two of the organized groups of knowledge experts involved in literacy policy-making. In a technocracy *"... a political system dominated by experts whose standing is defined by technical skills related to specific bodies of subject matter*" (Rose 1976:119) knowledge experts might mandate their views or research conclusions on the jurisdictional area which has commissioned them, or on society. However, in the literacy field of scholarship, knowledge experts are a diverse and heterogenous entity and have ambiguous and shifting relationships with the policy field.

Both groups, nevertheless, participate in processes that have policy consequences, even if jointly they may only increase barriers against "ordinary knowledge" and direct practitioner experience playing any significant role in the determination of courses of policy action. A sense of alienation pervades many language and literacy discussions in professional associations who see that the intense political interest in literacy learning during the last 15 years in several English speaking countries has, in fact, often resulted more in establishing central prescriptions of what constitutes acceptable literacy teaching than the kinds of policy moves advocated by professional associations. This kind of de-professionalization is connected with technocratic styles of policy-making.

THE PROBLEM WITH PROBLEMS

An alternative notion of policy making should commence prior to the application of the formal policy making itself. This is where the policy agendas are established to address problems and is a field of endeavour sometimes called "problem definition". A common policy position is that problems *precede* policy and that policy arises to solve problems or to address difficulties that are "out there", independent of the policy process itself (Drey 1984 and Majone 1989). Increasingly this rationalist construction of the policy sequence appears naïve (Deleon 1994). The idea that problems are "out there", as "objective entities" of which communities become aware and around which policy is then written separates policy too much from politics. A significant part of the discourse of policy-making is the establishment of problems, even the construction of problems, or the elevation of some problems over others that might also claim attention.

Scholars who see policy-making as intimately connected with politics consider the process of identifying or constituting the problems to be addressed in policy as a central concern. For Yeatman (1990:155) public policy making is itself "discursive politics" i.e. a struggle over what is to be named and therefore constituted or disqualified as subject to "state agency or intervention". Similarly, Edelman (1988) sees problems as ideological constructions particular to certain times and events and characterized by the interests of those engaged in contest over their meaning and claims for intervention in their resolution. *"Problems come into discourse and into existence as reinforcements of ideologies*", (p. l2).

What is not made into a problem is naturalized as being in the normal course of things, "just the way things are". Policy discourse and political argument aim to legitimize already selected courses of action, to define the field and the roles of those in it, to find evidence for a side or argument, to rebut alternatives.

According to Edelman's characterization of the relationship, the solution comes first chronologically and psychologically (1988). The construction of a problem that will be given attention in policy implies or states the origin of the problem, attributes responsibility for the problem's emergence and vests responsibility in some process or institution or value system for its solution.

A policy literacy informed by such critiques can supply a vocabulary for discussing literacy and language policy processes. A dramatic instance concerns the politics surrounding the issue of official English in the United States and especially the impact of this highly organised language policy move (Lo Bianco 2000) in several key states. A core objective of this movement is the removal of federal and state funding from bilingual education and many of the disputes concern what is the "appropriate" language for initial literacy. Seen from a policy literacy perspective this issue constitutes a vigorous contest among irreconcilable kinds of knowledge and contesting research traditions. Exemplifying the frustration and consternation of many expert professionals in relation to the debates about whether first language instruction is an effective and efficient medium for English literacy and spoken English learning Fishman (1988: 127) asks of the official English movement: "*Why are facts so useless in this discussion?"* His answer is that the issue is driven by "ghosts and fears".

The "facts" themselves are a large part of the problem. Everyone has their own facts, and they are sticking to them. Krashen's (1999a; 1999b) analysis shows how the movement against initial literacy instruction in the mother tongue of minority language pupils has assembled a vast knowledge archive. A large part of the aim of this archive of contesting organized knowledge is to weaken and damage the power of expertise and research demonstrating the superiority of bilingual education over monolingual alternatives. This is a case in which Kedourie's withering assessment of the impact of "academic enquiries" on policy action seems close to the mark. Krashen's patient sorting of the relative validity of the research evidence notwithstanding, official English is a kind of policy-making in which what is "the problem" is in fact what the problem really is.

CONCLUSION

The main means to interconnect power-knowledge in policy-making is incorporated in the practice of professional advising (Meltsner 1990). While criticisms of the "pretence to science" of policy practice is widespread, and increasing numbers of policy scholars call for a post-positivist approach, in which there are "many languages" (Bobrow and Dryzek 1987), the majority of policy work is still attached to old paradigms of rationality and technique.

The rival, and emerging, paradigm of policy-making requires a judicious combination of systematic collection of information (technique) with processes of participatory democracy. Such a post-positivist paradigm would be multiple in its sources of knowledge and the kinds of processes for determining what problems constitute cause for action, what kinds of knowledge and representation of experience inform action and what kinds of action are warranted.

A policy literacy can be developed by critical understanding of the processes of making policy and its history. The relative impact of divergent interests, the function and operation of ideological predispositions and the potential role of existing information and knowledge have been identified as elements of when new information is likely to be utilized and have an impact on policy (Weiss 1983). A dynamic interaction among these separate but related fields of information, ideology and interests is always present in policy, and in any specific instance of literacy policy we might usefully apply the insights of policy analysis and research utilization scholars.

More effective participation in shaping policies in the field of literacy education is required. Over the past fifteen years the policy agenda has been far narrower than the sociolinguistic reality of our communities; the policy agenda is dominated in international policy by theorizations of worth that derive from human capital asset ideology in which the social, located, and variable nature of literacy achieves scant recognition. Minority language literacies and notions of the integration of multiple-literacies (Cope and Kalantzis 2000) receive scant attention. The absorption of literacy within discourses of efficient competitive operation of national economies has led adult literacy issues to be constituted as "*a serious threat to economic performance and social cohesion*" (OECD 1992). Related kinds of thinking have produced assessment modes that rigidly normalize performance expectations among school learners which disadvantage language minority learners. There are of course many voices and views among literacy educators and researchers. They are no more homogenous than classes of policy practitioner. However, it is precisely the absence of the diverse, contrasting and contesting voices, the cultural diversity of contemporary society, that are missing from policy conversations. There is little real evidence that the kinds of complexity of perspectives they might be expected to inject into policy considerations about complex and multiple literacies get to shape present policy.

In this kind of environment the practices of public policy determination, and especially its central preoccupation with naming and defining problems for attention within policy, are important fields of interest for literacy educators and researchers.

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