

Reforming education and
changing schools

Case studies in policy sociology

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Introduction

After more than a decade of furious debate over educational policies and ideas, major institutional changes are being imposed. Under the 1988 Education Act, the powers and procedures of local education authorities (LEAs) are being reordered. Balances between 'partners' (the Department of Education and Science [DES], LEAs, teachers) tilted powerfully towards the State. New types of school are artificially implanted (invented? restored) by 'philanthropic' alliances, where there is little desire for them. In existing institutions we face layer after layer of imposed tasks, novel drudgeries and imperative demands to account for ourselves. Whatever the outcome of the first election of the 1990s, the 1988 Act and the National Curriculum have set many conditions for the new phase, rather as the 1944 Act constrained the postwar reforms, though in a different direction. The 1944 Act could be turned into a charter for 'universal' public provision and local experimentation; the 1988 Act, though complex and ambiguous, as we shall see, sets the scene for split provision and central curriculum control. If 1944 was informed by a heavily qualified universalism, 1988 is animated by the spirit of Education Ltd, Education-as-a-Business-Corporation: commercial in outlook, hierarchical in organisation, 'limited' in liberality or extent - unless you pay for more.

(Cultural Studies, Birmingham 1991, p.ix)

This is the terrain of our research: the changes in purpose, values, structure, control, relationships and organization brought about in schools by the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERA). (See Maclure 1989 for a detailed account of and commentary on the full

provisions of the Act.) We are also concerned with the ways in which change is being achieved. The ERA requires a whole variety of substantive changes; it also brings into being new ways of bringing about change. The case studies reported here are of two kinds. The primary data are drawn from case study research in four secondary comprehensive schools and two LEAs (although little of the LEA data are reported here). These also provide the basis for the second sort of case study: a focus upon two specific but major aspects of the ERA as it relates to schools – the National Curriculum (NC) and the Local Management of Schools (LMS). Our concern here is not to judge or evaluate the schools we studied, rather we aim to analyse and evaluate the policies and the impact of those policies. The book is about the 'effects' of policy rather than with policy 'implementation' in any simple sense. Indeed we are uncomfortable with the political and epistemological assumptions of 'implementation' research and attempt to establish an alternative, rival framework for our analysis of change (in Chapter 1). As you read this book some of the requirements and ramifications of these policies will still be in train. Thus, our account and our analyses cannot be definitive or final. This is a 'first look' at the ERA in practice and some of its effects, there will be many other views appearing in the coming months and years. But we would reject any argument which suggested that the data reported here merely identify some teething troubles or transitional difficulties. It is our contention that many of the problems and conflicts that we present here are inherent in the ERA itself. They will not go away. They derive from incoherence, contradictions and inconsistencies within the ERA policies themselves – 'the quality and practicality of the change project' (Fullan 1991, p.72). As Fullan goes on to say: 'Ambitious projects are nearly always politically driven. As a result the time line between the initiation decision and startup is typically too short to attend to matters of quality' (p.72). Unfortunately, both politicians and many researchers and commentators ignore this and take a narrow view and assume that any problems arising from change are indications of the weaknesses or resistance of those burdened with the tasks of changing. This is convenient but it is also sloppy and misguided. However, as we shall see, it is not unusual to find schools struggling to come to grips with multiple, disparate and incoherent reforms and blaming themselves for 'not getting things right'. We are not

suggesting that schools never make mistakes and neither are we trying to defend some kind of golden age of education which the ERA is destroying. Indeed there are significant elements of goodwill towards some aspects of reform in the schools studied (as well as grave suspicion about other aspects). But we do contend that there are political expectations and ideological projects embedded in the ERA which are destructive of values and relationships which are fundamental to the 'qualified universalism' of the 1944 Act and which impose on schools 'drudgeries and demands' which both undermine and divert from their ability and capacity to cope. In important respects the ERA fails to pass 'the test of the "practicality ethic" of teachers' (Doyle and Ponder 1977-78). Fullan argues: 'Good change is hard work; on the other hand, engaging in a bad change or avoiding needed changes may be even harder on us' (1991, p.73). We also argue that some of the intended and unintended consequences of the ERA policies actually have deleterious effects on educational provision and 'standards'. And that while some students and parents may truly benefit from these policies others certainly lose out.

The school and LEA case studies reported here were begun in the spring of 1989 and in a slightly different form are still continuing. All of the schools were LMS pilots in 1989-90 and took on the full responsibilities of LMS in April 1990. All the extracts from data quoted in the text are dated so that they can be located back into the change process. Data collection in the schools concentrated on senior teachers and school governors and those teachers (and advisers) involved in introducing National Curriculum mathematics, science, English and technology (we are grateful for Robin Murray's help with interviewing technology teachers) as well as those teachers involved in Special Educational Needs work in two of the schools (this was Anne Gold's main responsibility) and some teacher 'bystanders' who we asked to comment on the general process and effects of change in their school. Several department heads and senior teachers were interviewed on more than one occasion, some on several occasions. This provides a sense of change over time and allows us to comment on the dynamics, the pace and the increasing complexity of change (Chapter 6). In the LEAs we interviewed directors, subject advisers and inspectors, and LMS officers. In all 90 interviews were recorded. In addition some

governors' meetings were observed, as well as some senior management team meetings, some in-service activities and some department meetings. We aimed to get to know the schools well. We were given free access to all staff, meetings and to the documents we requested, although the degree of our involvement is uneven across the four schools. This is because we became particularly interested in particular things at certain points in time. The research strategy was regularly reviewed and like good ethnographers we tried to feed analysis back into data collection. Interviews and observations were analysed by coding and constant comparison (Strauss 1987).

The two LEAs in the study are referred to as Westway and Riverway. Both are small; Westway has 14 secondary schools, Riverway eight and a tertiary college. Westway is controlled by a Labour council and Riverway by a Liberal Democrat council. The two case-study schools in Westway – Flightpath and Parkside – are mixed 11–18 comprehensives. The Riverway schools are both 11–16, Overbury is mixed and Pankhurst is single-sex girls, it is the only single sex school in the LEA. The headteachers of Flightpath and Parkside are male, those of Overbury and Pankhurst female.

The chapters in this volume can be read as a set of interrelated essays. Each chapter has a different focus but Chapter 1 provides a conceptual basis for the whole analysis. The range of data employed in each chapter varies; the management, National Curriculum and market chapters (Chapters 6, 4 and 2) use material from all four schools, the LMS chapter (Chapter 3) concentrates on one school and the SEN chapter (Chapter 5) on two. We were unable to present all the themes and issues to arise from the data nor can we present all the data relevant to those which are covered. But we do err on the side of more data rather than less. This is because of the complexity of the issues and the immediacy which can be conveyed by direct speech. We have tried to avoid major overlaps but there are some points where bits of data or points of analysis are repeated. This we think is inevitable because of the interrelated and inter-affecting nature of the policies examined. LMS has implications for the curriculum, management is closely related to the market, SEN decisions have implications for the budget etc., etc. Thus, in a way, this should not be read as a neat, single narrative, it is rather a set of overlaid and overlapping analyses. The themes in each chapter are one set

of cuts through the data, and ways of seeing the ERA. To reiterate, the themes are not exhaustive.

If we can anticipate and underline two messages that emerge strongly in our data and therefore in our commentary and analysis (and there are several others) they are: first the immense complexity of the changes facing schools in the wake of the Education Reform Act of 1988; and second, what is being lost or jeopardized by these changes – trust, commitment, co-operation and common purpose.

The policy process and the processes of policy

INTRODUCTION

In the field of educational policy studies the 'placing' of schools, teachers and students in the policy process, has been largely achieved by theoretical fiat. On the one hand there has been extensive work on the generation of policy. This has remained, for the most part, within the province of macro-based theoretical analyses of policy documents and the activities and organization of groups of policy makers. Concern here has been with the representation or exclusion of interests in the political process and the struggles of activists, pressure groups and social classes within that arena (Kogan 1975, Ball 1990a). In these conceptualizations schools remain either marginal to the policy process or they are 'represented' via the teaching unions. The voices of the heads, senior managers, classroom teachers or the students remain, for the most part, strangely silent. On the other hand, there has been a growing body of literature investigating the 'implementation' of policy. This has often taken the form of detailed analyses (micro-based ethnographies for example) of how the 'intentions' behind policy texts become embedded in schooling or, more frequently, of how aspects of the schooling situation 'reflect' wider developments in the political and economic arena. There has also been a somewhat smaller body of literature that has celebrated the potential power of teachers and/or students to subvert the heavy hands of the economy or the State. Here the silent voices are heard, but they speak either as theoretically overdetermined mouthpieces of a world beyond their control or as potentially free and autonomous resisters or subverters of the status quo.

This separation between investigations of the generation and the implementation of policy, has tended to reinforce the 'managerial perspective' on the policy process, in the sense that the two are seen as distinctive and separate 'moments'; generation followed by implementation (Alford and Friedland 1988). This distortion produces accounts of the policy process as linear in form; whether top-down, bottom-up or allowing for a 'relative autonomy' of the bottom from the top. Thus, state control theories (Dale 1989) portray policy generation as remote and detached from implementation. Policy then 'gets done' to people by a chain of implementors whose roles are clearly defined by legislation. In policy studies generally this sort of 'linear' conception of policy has been further encouraged, post-1979, by what has been increasingly referred to as the Thatcher 'style' of government and its avowed intention to break down the corporatism of the 'social democratic' consensus (CCCS 1981). The lack of wide consultation prior to legislation on the trade unions, the health service and in education was seen as evidence of a new, non-corporatist style in action. Thus, for example, Lawton has talked of the pulling apart of the old 'partnership' between the DES (Department of Education and Science), the LEAs (local education authorities) and the teachers and its substitution by a fragmented policy process in which the new policy makers appear remote from the educational scene; a scene which, nonetheless, the policy makers are trying to control more tightly (Lawton 1984). Thus, he considers the politicians (ministers, political advisers, etc.), the bureaucrats (DES officials) and the professionals, HMI (Her Majesty's Inspectorate) to have become increasingly 'disconnected' from the policy receivers (LEAs, schools and teachers) (Lawton 1984). If we take this 'tightening grip' (Lawton 1984) thesis further then the shift appears to have been taking place for some time. The growth of centrally administered policies, TVEI (the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative) run by the MSC (Manpower Services Commission, later to become the Training Agency), ESGs (Educational Support Grants) run by the DES, both on a 'bid and deliver' basis, would be examples of the State's growing control of education. The culmination being the Educational Reform Act 1988 with its centrally 'determined' policy prescription that gives the DES and the Secretary of State extensive new powers to direct the work of LEAs and schools. In this analysis the changing language of the

policy process would be illustrative of deeper structural changes in the relationship of the State to educational institutions. Thus from the TVEI and ESGs, which introduced the 'delivery' of educational change, external 'monitoring', 'management' and 'evaluation' (Dale *et al.* 1990), we go through to NCC (National Curriculum Council) documents which pick up that language and also talk about the 'implementation by headteachers... of the National Curriculum', 'absorption by individual teachers of the National Curriculum', 'delivery of his or her (student's) entitlement' etc., etc. (See for example, *National Curriculum: From Policy to Practice*, DES, 1989a.)

There seems little doubt that there has been a State control element in the Government's approach to policy construction and a strong desire to exclude practitioners (or their 'representatives', the trade unions) (see Ball 1990a). Furthermore, we would accept that in the legislation the Government's promotion of parents and the market over the claims of the 'educational lobby', and its language of 'implementation' are all attempts to continue to exclude certain voices from the policy process. Nonetheless we want to suggest that it would be politically naive and analytically suspect to begin from the assumption that it has been possible to make that exclusion total, either in terms of policy generation or in terms of implementation. The example of TVEI is itself particularly telling in this respect.

POLICY ANALYSIS AND THE STATE-CONTROL MODEL

As a policy externally imposed upon schools TVEI was initially seen as a classic example of a 'top-down' model of curriculum reform, however, the actual experiences of researchers and teachers told a somewhat different tale. TVEI reached the statute books as an initiative of Margaret Thatcher, Lord Young and Sir Keith Joseph. It was well financed and required schools and LEAs to submit projects for scrutiny prior to finance being made available. Yet many have pointed out that the MSC's need to secure the co-operation of the 'educational lobby' actually produced curriculum development in schools that was far closer to the educationalist (mostly school-based) than the occupational (mostly MSC-based) model of the curriculum (Dale *et al.* 1990). The point is that the transformations that may come about as legislative texts are recontextualized may, in some cases, be

dramatic. McCulloch (1986) argues, for example, that the utilitarian rhetoric and objectives that accompanied the launching of the initiative have been *subverted* via their incorporation into mainstream education. Although TVEI was successfully established in the context of Thatcherite politics at the national level, at the local level it gave way to a revival of more liberal notions of educational practice (Gleeson 1989 pp.88-9). Saunders (1985), referring to TVEI, has suggested three broad categories to indicate how schools generally responded to this externally initiated change:

1. Adaptive extension: A strong interpretation of TVEI - it has been used to change the whole curriculum.
2. Accommodation: TVEI adapted to fit the general shape of the existing curriculum structure.
3. Containment: TVEI absorbed by the existing school pattern.

While there are many problems with a static and uniform categorization of this kind (schools may shift position over time and different departments may respond differently and financial and staffing constraints may inhibit response) it nonetheless serves to underline the ways in which detailed curricular planning and implementation may be driven by different interpretations of change. In reading the literature on TVEI one is struck by the extent to which an externally 'imposed' policy was appropriated by the teaching profession for very different purposes to those intended by the policy. The implication is that the 'capacity' of the State to reach into the schools has to be judged via the use practitioners make of policy initiatives and, consequently, the extent of state control resulting from the 1988 Act actually remains an empirical question. Indeed we would go further and agree with West's observation about *Learning to Labour* (Willis 1977) and extend it to the sociology of education more generally:

There is a relative lack of serious examination of institutional or organization mediations between capital and the classrooms experienced by the lads. Although other CCCS work does begin to address such issues of educational policy, professional alliances, etc., we still have little idea of how such national policy issues and processes connect to schools and classrooms, and how the latter connect to such groups as the lads.

(West, 1983)

Thus, despite the very real sense in which teachers have been excluded from the 'production' of the Reform Act 1988, we still want to argue that a State control model distorts the policy process. Indeed it seems to us that the image implicit in the conception of distinct and disconnected sets of policy makers and policy implementors actually serves the powerful ideological purpose of reinforcing a linear conception of policy in which theory and practice are separate and the former is privileged. The language of 'implementation' strongly implies that there is, within policy, an unequivocal governmental position that will filter down through the quasi-state bodies (presently the NCC and the subject working parties) and into the schools. (The LEAs are placed in a marginal position, but are essentially seen to be supporting schools in their endeavours.) It is clearly in the Government's interest to promote such a view. Consequently, this top-down, linear model is hardly the best starting point for research into the practical effects of the ERA. Who becomes involved in the policy process and how they become involved is a product of a combination of administratively based procedures, historical precedence and political manoeuvring, implicating the State, the State bureaucracy and continual political struggles over access to the policy process; it is not simply a matter of implementors following a fixed policy text and 'putting the Act into practice'. One key task for policy analysis is to grasp the significance of the policy as a text, or series of texts, for the different contexts in which they are used.

POLICY RESEARCH AND THE ANALYSIS OF POLICY

TEXTS

The translation of educational policy into legislation produces a key text (the Act). This, in turn, becomes a 'working document' for politicians, teachers, the unions and the bodies charged with responsibility for 'implementing' the legislation. Although questions about the status and the nature of particular policy texts remain empirical ones, we have found the work of Roland Barthes a useful, conceptual starting point here. He has argued that:

literature may be divided into that which gives the reader a role, a function, a contribution to make, and that which renders

the reader idle or redundant, 'left with no more than the poor freedom to accept or reject the text' and which thereby reduces him to that apt but impotent symbol of the bourgeois world, an inert consumer to the author's role as producer.

(Hawkes 1977, p.113)

This latter sort of text he refers to as 'readerly', and the signifier/signified relationship is clear and inescapable; there is the minimum of opportunity for creative interpretation by the reader. An initial reading of National Curriculum texts, for example, and their technical language of levels, attainment targets, standardized attainment testing and programmes of study, might suggest just such a readerliness. However, the NCC has also published secondary texts, the Non-Statutory Guidelines, which suggest the National Curriculum texts are to be interpreted more like Barthes' alternative 'writerly' texts, which self-consciously invite the reader to join-in to co-operate and co-author. In the language of TVEI, to feel a sense of 'ownership'. But this free play is a matter of degree in the interpretation and reading of these texts rather than any kind of open freedom of action. Barthes has also argued that 'writerly texts require us to look at the nature of language itself, not through it at a preordained "real world" (Hawkes 1977, p.118).

We have been acutely aware that the very invention of a new proposed 'reality' for schooling in terms of attainment targets, etc. draws attention to the language itself, and to its adequacy as a way of thinking about and organizing the way pupils learn. 'Making sense' of new texts leads people into a process of trying to 'translate' and make familiar the language and the attendant embedded logics. In this process they place what they know against the new. Readerly texts, however, presuppose and depend upon presumptions of innocence, upon the belief that the reader will have little to offer by way of an alternative. Teachers may feel battered and coerced, they may have been softened up for change, but they are also suspicious and cynical and professionally committed in ways that hardly form the basis for 'innocence'. Finally, Barthes suggests that the reading of writerly texts involves two kinds of 'pleasure', the straightforward pleasure of reading and the jouissance, the ecstasy or bliss which arise from the sense of breakdown or interruption. The latter coming from the critical and creative response to the text, the

readerly - limiting the possible readings

writerly - more open to multiple readings

Hawkes

secondary texts

readerly?

embodied ?

howls from

seeing through to something beyond. While this might produce for some a sense of discomfort and loss, it also opens up possibilities for 'gaps' and 'moments' of progressive and radical insertion, for example the breakdown of transmission teaching, subject boundaries and formal examining and their replacement with cross-curricular work, investigations and group and process-based assessments. What it is also vital to recognize then is that these readerly and writerly texts are the products of a policy process, a process that we have already indicated emerges from and continually interacts with a variety of interrelated contexts. Consequently texts have clear relationships with the particular contexts in which they are used. This applies as much to national debates as to exchanges in schools between teachers and the individual approaches developed by teachers to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum.

In looking at the 1988 Act a number of authors have already pointed out, it is not a text that is capable of only one interpretation and the various elements that make up the Act (the National Curriculum, LMS, Open Enrolment, Opting Out, etc.) empower different bodies, groups and individuals in different ways (Bash and Coulby 1989, Jones 1989 and Whitty 1989), empowerment depending not only upon the 'tightness' or otherwise of the legislation but also upon the possibilities and the limits of particular contexts and settings. In effect the ERA is being constantly rewritten as different kinds of 'official' texts and utterances are produced by key actors or agencies of government - Programmes of Study, Attainment Targets, Subject Working Party Reports, NCC Reports, etc. Thus a whole variety and criss-cross of meanings and interpretations are put into circulation. Clearly these textual meanings influence and constrain 'implementors' but their own concerns and contextual constraints generate other meanings and interpretations. Thus while textual analysis:

Makes it possible to understand knowledge production as a chain or series of transformative activities which range from the social organization of text industries, to the activities of text producers, through the symbolic transformations of the text itself, and to the transformative interaction between text and reader, or school knowledge and student.

(Wexler 1982, p.286)

As Wexler goes on to point out, it is crucial that such analysis is critically informed by a political and social analysis that seeks to uncover some of the processes whereby such texts are generated. Texts, structures and agencies of control need to be attended to. The state control model actually tends to freeze policy texts and exclude the contextual slippages that occur throughout the policy cycle. Instead we would want to approach legislation as but one aspect of a *continual* process in which the loci of power are constantly shifting as the various resources implicit and explicit in texts are recontextualized and employed in the struggle to maintain or change views of schooling.

This leads us to approach policy as a discourse, constituted of possibilities and impossibilities, tied to knowledge on the one hand (the analysis of problems and identification of remedies and goals) and practice on the other (specification of methods for achieving goals and implementation). We see it as a set of claims about how the world should and might be, a matter of the 'authoritative allocation of values'. Policies are thus the operational statements of values, statements of 'prescriptive intent' (Kogan 1975, p.55). They are also, as we conceive it, essentially contested in and between the arenas of formation and 'implementation'. While the construction of the policy text may well involve different parties and processes to the 'implementing' process, the opportunity for re-forming and re-interpreting the text mean policy formation does not end with the legislative 'moment'; for any text a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings' (Codd 1988, p.239).

In our ethnographically-based study of policy our concern has been to explore policy-making, in terms of the processes of value dispute and material influence which underlie and invest the formation of policy discourses, as well as to portray and analyse the processes of active interpretation and meaning-making which relate policy texts to practice. In part this involves the identification of resistance, accommodation, subterfuge and conformity within and between arenas of practice and the plotting of clashes and mismatches between contending discourses at work in these arenas, e.g. professionalism vs. conformity, autonomy vs. constraint, specification vs. latitude, the managerial vs. the educational. Furthermore it is important to acknowledge that policy intentions may contain ambiguities, contradictions and omissions that provide particular opportunities for parties to the

'implementation' process, what we might term 'space' for manoeuvre (Wallace 1990). We want, briefly, to illustrate this approach by looking at the National Curriculum.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM AS TEXT AND THE POLITICAL CONTEXT

In a very real sense generation and implementation are continuous features of the policy process, with generation of policy (or recreation, Knip and Van der Vegt 1991) still taking place after the legislation has been effected; both within the central state and within the LEAs and the schools. What is more these different contexts of policy recreation are connected directly by their varying capacities to affect the work of each other. In our research on the ERA we have been constantly aware of the extent to which people in schools and LEAs discuss the alternative 'readings' of the broader political picture and the pronouncements of politicians, the policy 'implementing' bodies such as the NCC and SEAC (Secondary Examinations and Assessment Council) and the officials of the DES. These discussions provided varying interpretations of what 'they' (the legislators and the 'implementing bodies') wanted and varying views of what possibilities or limits these might create for the LEAs or the schools.

Well when the first document came out, about '87, the red book I think, people immediately saw that as a very much back-to-basics, back to single subject definitions, especially percentages of each one. But now that the programmes of study are beginning to evolve, or at least the attainment targets and so on have shown they're not, and attainment targets emphasize cross-curricular links, people are moving now away from this subject definition again, towards the concept of cross-co-operation, and cross-curricular links and in fact I'm quite hopeful that the National Curriculum will be a stimulus for curriculum development, not a hindrance for it.

(Deputy Head, Flightpath, 6 March 1990)

Thus the National Curriculum text enters into, as a new element, the *bricolage* of teaching, the cobbling together of bits and pieces into a 'pedagogic discourse' (Bernstein 1985). As a text it is decontextualized from its original location and then recontextualized into a new assemblage. The pedagogic discourse so constructed

consists of 'the rules regulating the production, distribution, reproduction, inter-relation and change of what counts as legitimate pedagogic texts' (Atkinson 1985, p.171). In the generation and 'implementation' of policy the nature of policy contexts (classrooms, departments, schools, LEAs, NCC, SEAC, DES, 'think tanks', working parties, etc., etc.) and the relations between them become crucial to our understanding of how texts operate; although we must also remain aware of the ways in which texts change contexts and the relations between contexts. As Shilling points out, education policy is a dialectical process; 'policy outcomes are reliant upon the cooperation of the state, and an array of non-state organizations and individuals' (Shilling 1988, p.11), and importantly, in the case of TVEL, he argues that the outcomes 'are constrained not only by the potential power schools are able to exercise as "front-line" organizations (Shilling 1986), but by fiscal and other institutional constraints (Offe 1985, p.306)' (Shilling 1988, p.11) (see Chapter 3).

Texts carry with them both possibilities and constraints, contradictions and spaces. The reality of policy in practice depends upon the compromises and accommodations to these in particular settings. Thus our conception of policy has to be set against the idea that policy is something that is simply done to people; although we accept that particular policy texts will differ in their degree of explicit recognition of the active (rather than passive) relationship between intended, actual and policy-in-use. One example is to be found in the recent statements, related to the National Curriculum, that are giving particular emphasis to the active participation of teachers. In various quarters teachers are being encouraged to 'make the National Curriculum their own'. There is an interesting and difficult double paradox in this in terms of education policy and politics. On the one hand the ERA and the NC are the outcome of a now typical process of macho, Thatcherite policy-making which rides roughshod over the interests and sensibilities of the teachers. In addition, years of strident critique from Government has sapped public confidence in, and the morale of, teachers. On the other hand, the implementation of the NC relies heavily upon the goodwill, commitment and energy of teachers. They must make it work. Since the Act came on to the statute books a number of senior Tory politicians have been engaged in a propaganda exercise to 'talk-up' teachers and praise their efforts and talents. Kenneth Baker, then

Secretary of State for Education, in the 1989 inaugural IBM Education Lecture at the Royal Society, asserted: 'I doubt that any country starts with a better or more effective teacher force than we have in Britain. Our teachers stand comparison anywhere in professionalism, dedication and imagination.' He then went on to say: 'The achievement in schools in the last three years in bringing in the new GCSE examination to a successful introduction is witness to that. The professional work now going on in schools all over the country to prepare the way for introducing the national curriculum inspires confidence that that too will be a job well done' (TES 1989). And the then Prime Minister herself, in a widely reported interview with the *Sunday Telegraph* on 15 April 1990, stated:

Going on to the other things in the curriculum, when we first started on this, I do not think I ever thought they would do the syllabus in such detail as they are doing now. Because I believe there are thousands of teachers who are teaching extremely well. And I always felt that when we had done the core curriculum, the core syllabus, there must always be scope for each teacher to use her own methods, her own experience, the things which she has learned and he or she really knows how to teach.

A report of this was headlined in the following Friday's *Times Educational Supplement*, 'Mrs. Thatcher signals "U-turn" on curriculum'. In the article the reporters suggested the Prime Minister was concerned about the National Curriculum becoming too prescriptive. What was remarkable was her frequently repeated reference to the teaching force,

So I did not really feel that the core curriculum or any subject should take up all the time devoted to that subject, because otherwise you are going to lose the enthusiasm and the devotion and all of the extras that a really good teacher can give out of her own experience.

(TES 1990)

The point is of course, as Shilling notes, that the State must rely upon teachers to 'deliver' the curriculum. Consequently, to sustain a singular, National Curriculum requires either teacher acceptance and understanding, 'lock, stock and barrel' or a system for effectively policing teachers. A question of either

'winning the hearts and minds' of the workers at the chalkface - 'The commitment of individual teachers will be crucial in "making it happen"' (DES 1989, Secn. 9.14) - or creating the means whereby the State has the capacity to control and discipline the workforce specifically and directly. While there are clearly many elements of the latter embedded in the ERA, with 'implementation' at the forefront of governmental concern it is now strategically necessary, or perhaps inevitable, that proactive readings of the NC text be encouraged (what might be described as developing a degree of tolerance without fostering a sense of latitude). Thus, Duncan Graham, Chairman of the NCC until the summer of 1991, has said that, 'getting the National Curriculum off the ground will involve the talents of universities, colleges, LEAs and schools', and added, referring to the NCC itself, 'we have a highly professional Council which covers the main interests in the education service, with two exceptions all educationalists, people with practical hard-line experience of education, and it's turning out to have a gratifying mind of its own' (Talk at King's College, 18 January 1989).

However, the dilemma, tolerance without latitude, which the NCC as an organization represents and embodies, is never far from the surface. In the same talk Duncan Graham spoke of teachers as 'far more worried about their own position than the children passing through'. Teachers cannot be but must be trusted. This dilemma is increasingly evident in the official and semi-official texts which 'speak' the National Curriculum to schools. The recontextualization of policy in this case takes place in two stages, from Government, to agencies of sub-government (HMI, NCC, in-service and initial teacher education) and thence to the arenas of practice. The openness/doseness of text and the reactivity/proactivity of readings is a problem in both transitions. Thus the politics surrounding the work of the Subject Working Groups and the contradictory pressures on the NCC, alongside the emergent compromises in the ERA (Ball 1990a, Whitty 1989) mean the work of the DES and the NCC has two very different audiences. On one side there are the hawkish factions in the Conservative Party, on the other side are the teachers and the educational establishment. The first group must remain convinced that the National Curriculum will discipline teachers, raise standards and not pander to 'entrenched orthodoxies' (CPS 1988, p.6). The second must be reassured that the

National Curriculum will not become a vehicle for the 'loony Right' and will achieve a level of educational respectability. There have already been difficulties on both sides particularly in relation to the constitution and work of the NC Subject Working Parties. The Right have been disappointed with the work of the Science, Mathematics and English Groups (and the Kingman Report 1988) and the permanent members of the educational establishment are severely disgruntled with the reports of the English, Geography and History Working Parties. As regards the former, the Centre for Policy Studies have offered their own alternative *Correct Core* and comment:

The CPS Core Curriculum sets out curricula for English, Maths and Science. In order to ensure that pupils leave school literate, numerate and with a modicum of scientific knowledge, it should not extend beyond these three core subjects, nor attempt more than set minimum standards in basic knowledge and technique.

It is regrettable that these aims appear recently to have been abandoned by those in charge of producing and implementing education policy. As the following pages show, the official committees, the DES and Her Majesty's Inspectorate no longer adhere to the belief that teachers should teach and pupils should learn a simple body of knowledge and a simple set of techniques.

(CPS 1988, p.59)

This perhaps serves to underline our view that policy, as knowledge and practices, as a discourse, is contested. It also points up the significance of influence in and control over critical sites of text production and recontextualization in the policy process. In this case the Subject Working Parties themselves and the NCC are prime examples of such crucial sites. To an extent the New Right have found themselves excluded until recently and thus limited in the effect they might have upon the production of 'official discourse' in these arenas. (They are, however, influential elsewhere in the whole policy process in education and they have gained some representation in SEAC, most recently with the replacement of the SEAC chair, Philip Halsey, by former No. 10 Policy Unit Head, Brian (Lord) Griffiths and also on the NCC, following the resignation of Duncan Graham, with the appointment of David Pascall, member of Margaret Thatcher's policy unit in the

mid-1980s.) Consequently, even with a highly detailed piece of legislation on the statute books, educational policy is still being generated and implemented both within and around the educational system in ways that have intended and unintended consequences for both education and its surrounding social milieu. As a result the ERA and its attendant texts are in one respect an expression of sets of political 'intentions' and a political resource for continuing national debates, and in another a micro-political resource for teachers, LEAs and parents to interpret, re-interpret and apply to their particular social contexts.

CHARACTERIZING THE POLICY PROCESS

We want to end this chapter by indicating how we might move away *analytically* from a State control model, while still recognizing that the State, LEAs and schools are, differentially empowered, over time, within the policy process. By introducing the notion of a continuous policy cycle we have tried to draw attention towards the work of policy recontextualization that goes on in the schools. However, researching the school setting actually requires us to consider not only the National Curriculum but also how the various elements that make up the ERA, LMS, Open Enrolment, opting out, etc, empower different bodies, groups and individuals in different ways. An heuristic representation of the policy process is represented in Figure 1.1. (This is the development of an earlier formulation in which, reading from the top and anti-clockwise, the contexts were labelled intended, actual and policy-in-use. We have broken away from this formulation because the language introduced a rigidity we did not want to imply, e.g. there are many competing intentions that struggle for influence, not only one 'intention' and 'actual' seemed to us to signal a frozen text, quite the opposite to how we wanted to characterize this aspect of the policy process.)

We envisage three primary policy contexts, each context consisting of a number of arenas of action, some public, some private (see Fig. 1.1). The first context, the *context of influence*, is where public policy is normally initiated. It is here that policy discourses are constructed. It is here that interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education, what it means to be educated. The private arenas of influence are based upon social networks in and around the political parties, in and

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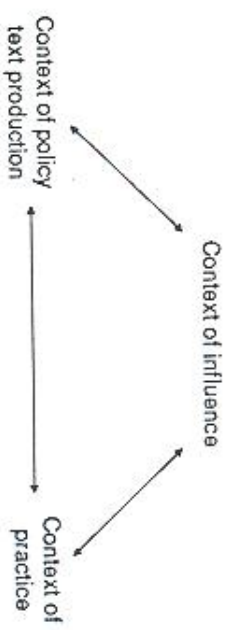


Figure 1.1 Contexts of policy making

around Government and in and around the legislative process. Here key policy concepts are established (e.g. market forces, National Curriculum, opting out, budgetary devolution), they acquire currency and credence and provide a discourse and lexicon for policy initiation. This kind of discourse forming is sometimes given support, sometimes challenged by wider claims to influence in the public arenas of action, particularly in and through the mass media. ^{view market} In addition there are a set of more formal public arenas; committees, national bodies, representative groups which can be sites for the articulation of influence. Clearly in trying to understand the education policy-making of the last three Conservative Governments it is important to be aware of the considerable 'capture' of influence by the New Right think tanks that operate in and around the Conservative Party (see Ball 1990a, Knight 1990). But it is also vital to appreciate the ebb and flow in the fortunes of and the changes in personnel of the DES, and to recognize the increasing 'ministerialization' of policy initiation (see Ball 1990a). As we noted earlier, this contrasts starkly with the virtual exclusion of union and local authority representatives from arenas of influence and the much diminished and discredited contribution from the educational establishment.

This context of influence has a symbiotic but none the less uneasy relation to the second context, the *context of policy text production*. Because while influence is often related to the articulation of narrow interests and dogmatic ideologies, policy texts are normally articulated in the language of general public good. Their appeal is based upon claims to popular (and populist) commonsense and political reason. Policy texts therefore *represent* policy. These representations can take various forms: most obviously 'official' legal texts and policy documents; also

formally and informally produced commentaries which offer to 'make sense of' the 'official' texts, again the media is important here; also the speeches by and public performances of relevant politicians and officials; and 'official' videos are another recently popular medium of representation. Many of those towards whom policy is aimed rely on these secondhand accounts as their main source of information and understanding of policy as intended. But two key points have to be made about these ensembles of texts which represent policy. First, the ensembles and the individual texts are not necessarily internally coherent or clear. The expression of policy is fraught with the possibility of misunderstanding, texts are generalized, written in relation to idealizations of the 'real world', and can never be exhaustive, they cannot cover all eventualities. The texts can often be contradictory (compare National Curriculum statutory guidance with NCC produced Non-Statutory Guidance), they use key terms differently, and they are reactive as well as expository (that is to say, the representation of policy changes in the light of events and circumstances and feedback from arenas of practice). Policy is not done and finished at the legislative moment, it evolves in and through the texts that represent it; texts have to be read in relation to the time and the particular site of their production. They also have to be read with and against one another – intertextuality is important. ^{interference} Second, the texts themselves are the outcome of struggle and compromise. The control of the representation of policy is problematic. Control over the timing of the publication of texts is important. A potent and immediate example of struggle in arenas of text production is that which goes on (as noted already) in relation to National Curriculum working party reports (Ball 1990a). The interchange of documents between the NCC, SEAC and the DES is also a case in point. Groups of actors working within different sites of text production are in competition for control of the representation of policy. Most of these struggles go on behind closed doors but occasional glimpses of the dynamics of conflict are possible. What is at stake are attempts to control the meaning of policy through its representation.

Policies then are textual interventions but they also carry with them material constraints and possibilities. The responses to these texts have 'real' consequences. These consequences are experienced within the third main context, the *context of practice*, the arena of practice to which policy refers, to which it is addressed.

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The key point is that policy is not simply received and implemented within this arena rather it is subject to interpretation and then 'recreated'. The exact same point is made by Rizvi and Kemmis (1987, p.21) in their analysis of the Victoria Participation and Equity Programme:

Those who participate in a program at the school level will interpret it in their own terms, in relation to their own understanding, desires, values and purposes, and in relation to the means available to them and the ways of working they prefer. In short, all aspects of a program may be contested by those involved in a program, moreover, a program is formed and reformed throughout its life through a process of contestation.

Practitioners do not confront policy texts as naive readers, they come with histories, with experience, with values and purposes of their own, they have vested interests in the meaning of policy. Policies will be interpreted differently as the histories, experiences, values, purposes and interests which make up any arena differ. The simple point is that policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous, etc. Furthermore, yet again, interpretation is a matter of struggle. Different interpretations will be in contest, as they relate to different interests (Ball 1987), one or other interpretation will predominate, although deviant or minority readings may be important. Rizvi and Kemmis (1987, p.29) again underline this point:

Because the participants in the contests which shape the evolution of a program start from different positions of relative power, the program, as it emerges, is distorted by the exercise of power, and freezes certain dominant ways of thinking into its structure.

But we must not see power in relation to policy as a fixed dimension. In patterns of contestation claims to power will always be tested in process, power is an outcome. Rizvi and Kemmis (1987, p.28) also make the important point that contestation is not a problem as such, it should not be seen as untoward or extraordinary:

Processes of contestation should not be thought to be unusual, and certainly not reprehensible. In fact contestation is a perfectly usual means through which ideas are developed and tested. In social life in general, different ideas, practices and forms of organization all have their advocates, and the evolution of social forms takes place through a struggle between supporters of different positions.

In all this authoritative interpretations may be at a premium. For many practitioners their response to texts will be constructed on the basis of 'interpretations of interpretations' (Rizvi and Kemmis 1987, p.14). In a similar way the evaluation of policy in practice or of practitioner responses will be the outcome of contested interpretations. Evaluation is a way of making sense of practice for particular purposes. The definition of those purposes and the control or the machinery of evaluation are what is important. Thus it seems far more appropriate to talk of policies as having 'effects' rather than 'outcomes'. The policy process is one of complexity, it is one of policy-making and remaking. It is often difficult, if not impossible to control or predict the effects of policy, or indeed to be clear about what those effects are, what they mean, when they happen. Clearly, however interpretations are not infinite, clearly also, as noted already, different material consequences derive from different interpretations in action. Practitioners will be influenced by the discursive context within which policies emerge. Some will have an eye to personal or localized advantage, material or otherwise, which may stem from particular readings of policy texts. But to reiterate, the meanings of texts are rarely unequivocal. Novel or creative readings can sometimes bring their own rewards. New possibilities can arise when 'national' policies intersect with local initiatives. Equally, as we shall see, different aspects of the same policy ensemble may contradict to the extent that certain well established readings of texts may have very different consequences and implications for practice.