

Educational Policy and Social Reproduction

Class inscription and symbolic control



JOHN FITZ, BRIAN DAVIES
and JOHN EVANS

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This book takes a theoretically informed look at British education policy over the last 60 years when secondary schooling for all children became an established fact for the first time. Comprehensive schools largely replaced a system based on academic selection. Now, under choice and competition policies, all schools are subject to the rigours of local education markets. What impact did each of these successive policy frameworks have ~~on structures of opportunities~~ for families and their children? How and to what extent was the experience of secondary school students shaped and what influenced the qualifications they obtained and their life chances after schooling?

The authors locate their work within two broad strands in the sociology of education. Basil Bernstein's work on the realisation of power and control in and through pedagogic discourse and social reproduction provides a theoretical framework for exploring the character of, and continuities and change in, education and training policies.

This book is an important contribution to debates about the extent to which education is a force for change in class-divided societies. The authors also set out to re-establish social class at the centre of educational analysis at a time when emphasis has been on identity and identity formation, arguing for their interdependence. This book will be an important resource for students, policy analysts and policy-makers wishing to think through and understand the longer term impact of programmes that have shaped secondary schooling in Britain and elsewhere.

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Abbreviations

CACE	Central Advisory Council for Education
CASE	Campaign for the Advancement of State Education
CATE	Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education
CEP	Centre for Economic Performance
CTC	City Technology Colleges
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
EAZ	Education Action Zone
EDP	Education Development Plan
ERA	Education Reform Act
FSM	free school meals
GPSDT	Girls' Public School Day Trust
GM	grant-maintained
HHR	Halsey, Heath and Ridge
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspectorate
HE	higher education
IPPR	Institute of Public Policy Research
KS	Key Stage
LEA	local education authority
LMS	local management of schools
LSE	London School of Economics
MSC	Manpower Services Commission
NCDS	National Child Development Study
NCVQ	National Council for Vocational Qualifications
NC	National Curriculum
NFER	National Foundation for Educational Research
NVQ	National Vocational Qualification
OFSTED	Office for Standards in Education
PFI	private finance initiative
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
SMTs	senior management teams
SENCO	special educational needs coordinator
TGAT	Task Group on Assessment and Testing

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TTA	Teaching Training Agency
TVEI	Technical and Vocational Education Initiative
TPS	totally pedagogised society
TA	Training Agency
YTS	youth training scheme
VA	voluntary aided
WAG	Welsh Assembly Government

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1 Understanding policy, understanding pedagogic discourse

Introduction

Policy studies come in all shapes and sizes. This one arises from our collective experience of being teachers and researchers in British schools and universities over the past 40 years, along the way becoming sociologists under the influence of Basil Bernstein at the Institute of Education, University of London in the 1960s and 1970s. We confess as much upfront because the initial experience was seminal and the influence lasting. It gave us the deepest respect for a number of notions that: theory without research was nothing and vice versa; the ‘isms’ of social science were places where people banded together for company, as much as sources of warmth as light; and that who and what we were emerged from the labyrinthine interactions of class and identity. We were what we knew, how we said it, how we recognised, responded to and exercised knowledge and control. Our common experience was of rising through education and we were passionate about its inequalities.

In recent years we have taught about policy at undergraduate, Masters’ and doctoral levels and researched it in contexts ranging from ability grouping, vocational initiatives, inspection, national testing and changing aspects of diversity and choice in secondary schools, to including PE in the National Curriculum, small and medium enterprise linkage with education and training in Wales and Germany, changing the nursing curriculum and eating disorders. We have lived through the period since 1944 that we make the focus of this book with an increasing urge to understand what part policy making and makers have had in shaping it.

While we have set out to produce a text that is accessible to undergraduates, postgraduates and practitioners this is not a textbook in the sense of setting out to be deliberately compendious. We will attempt to locate what we offer (and do not) in a brief depiction of what studies of educational policy conventionally range over before elaborating the themes that we intend to explore. First, we want to remind you that education is not the only field of policy studies and that looking at the best work in others, such as health and housing is extremely worthwhile and can throw all sorts of light on controversies in our field. Second, those of you who are already familiar with policy analyses will need no reminding

2 *Understanding policy and pedagogic discourse*

and those of you who are not deserve warning that this is a field characterised by many approaches and vocabularies. All of the social sciences, like economics, sociology and psychology and their hybrids, such as politics and management, as well as disciplines like history, law and philosophy have valid contributions to make to policy studies. Many of these contributions are not easily reconciled, let alone synthesised. Third, there is the question of what we are referring to when we talk of 'policy'. The term is used in all sorts of ways, for example to refer to everyday behaviour where, of course, honesty continues to be generally the best policy, the deliberated behaviour of business organisations to give us what we want at a profit and the activity of the state and its various agencies in determining what will be provided through the public sector, from defence to welfare. We are concerned with the latter with particular respect of education. But we are conscious that it is a long way from Ministers, civil servants, advisers, lobbyists and legislatures in central government to the sites where teachers and students do the things (or not) that policymakers appear to require of them and that the loop that connects them (or not) goes through a number of state-created other agencies, as well as the 'local state'. Indeed, in federal systems, like the USA, the latter is directly responsible for education while in unitary states, like Britain, a changing balance of responsibility has been shared between central state and local authorities, mainly counties. The 'machinery' of government through which education policy and provision is framed and delivered everywhere differs (even between the parts of Britain – England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland) and has changed over time.

While this sets us all the task of grasping the terminologies and institutional practices of any given system (try, for example, the British 'White Paper', a discussion document published by government in advance of intended legislation that outlines its likely content, or US Supreme Court judgements, that arise out of conflict and litigation over specific events and generally constrain state practices) they remain mere mechanics without a sense of their histories and the dynamics of the power and control hierarchies that they represent. Such problems and choices that arise in acquiring insight on the nature of policy studies are reflected in the emphases found in the literature, not least in sociological analyses of educational policy. Approaching them in Goldilocks' spirit of gastronomy can be useful. For some tastes and purposes some are too global or too national or too local; others insufficiently detailed, some immured in technical detail; many lose individual actors in the structural wood and vice versa; and 'bricolage' is everywhere, turning explanation of the apparent randomness of some policy processes into 'flailing around for anything that looks as if it might work' (Ball, 1998: 126). Everyone who wishes to avoid being mistaken for an officially sponsored jobber adopts the label 'critical'. It is well to recognise at the outset that there is no 'just nice', no definitive account of educational policy and its effects, there are more or less adequate ones from some perspectives, for given purposes. While lots of honest, rational endeavour is poured in to policy making it would be a mistake to picture it simply as the domain of wise people seeking clear and just goals. Partiality, ideology and self-seeking are mixed with altruism

and pursuit of 'public interest'. Moreover, there is a rich and dynamic interior to processes and the sites where they take place. Many ideologically accented voices clamour for attention to their own causes. Institutions, whether departments of state, 'think tanks', official agencies, publishers, teachers' associations, local education committees or school staffrooms all have 'lives of their own'. To borrow Lee Shulman's marvellous observation on classrooms, 'stuff happens', everywhere there is play and contingency at the lived end of the forces of power and control. As Evans' account of making the national curriculum in PE makes clear, even the most carefully picked teams evolve their own game plan (Evans, 1990; Penney and Evans, 1999)

We make two suggestions, the first in the spirit of improving discrimination of different styles of work, based on the 'general observations' made by Taylor *et al.* (1997: 14–17) about the scope and complexity of educational policy which structure their book. For them, policy making is a multidimensional and value-laden state activity that exists in context. Policy is always more than the text and in education it interacts with those in other fields. Their 'implementation' is never straightforward and they 'result in unintended as well as intended consequences'. While we share their view that the 'policy sciences' were long dominated by rational and technicist 'best way' approaches we do not accept their root and branch castigation of 'the positivist assumption that social scientific knowledge can be value-neutral'. Real worries and reservations about objectivity in social science are not to be mended by its complete rejection and finding the problems or pretensions of encompassing theories or 'modernism' difficult is not solved, for us, by leaps into relativism or postmodernist turns. To believe that well theorised empirical work can lead to reliable knowledge is not to abandon being 'critical' or to become 'underlabourers' to the powerful who tend to initiate policy.

Our second suggestion follows, we hope understandably, from taking this position and it is to look, above all, for a way of conceptualising policy origins, processes and destinations sociologically that allows us to stay in touch with the insightful view of Taylor *et al.* of their complexity and scope while also retaining the view that appropriate languages of description are possible that connect empirical and theoretical work. We believe that this no more precludes holding strong and critical views of social arrangements and processes than it guarantees to shape the behaviour of the powerful in directions of which we would approve. We would suggest that one exists in terms of Basil Bernstein's ideas formed over almost fifty years of writing and researching pedagogic relations in families and schools in interaction with others whose active work on them continues. We will briefly delineate them in the next section, having first attempted to show what wider aspects of our concerns that they attend to.

Bernstein's sociology: a language for policy

In the first place, we recognise having lived through a lifetime of what might be called the internecine sociological wars Bernstein's (1975: Chapter 7; 1999) long

standing concern with the character of sociological knowledge led him to argue that it belonged to the category of horizontal knowledge structures – flat, segmented, non-cumulative and weakly theorised – in strong contrast to vertical structures, such as physics that were strongly hierarchical, theoretical and strove to unity. He characterised sociologists, not least in education, as being concerned with ‘commitment to a language’ rather than ‘dedication to a problem and its vicissitudes’. The ‘array of specialist languages’ that we rather tacitly acquired, whose diversity allows us to image ‘the potential of the social in its different modes of realisation’ stood in need of ‘challenge by the dynamic interactional process of research’, not so much displaced as repositioned (Bernstein, 1999: 170).

The concepts with which he worked were shaped by a wide range of others, though predominantly Durkheimian (Davies, 1994; Muller, 2000) and always stood in intimate and open relation with work in progress or its possibility. They are an important antidote both to ‘isms’ that exclude others and that substitute commitment for testing. In the first instance they derived from what for most individuals would have been a lifetime of sociolinguistic work on the concept of ‘code’ and the reproduction of class relationships ‘as they shaped the structure of communication, and its social basis in the family’. From the 1970s they shifted in focus to analyses of schools ‘against a broader canvas of changes in forms of social control’ without losing sight on the analysis of ‘the grim consequences of class relationships’ (Bernstein, 1975: 1). By 1996 (p. 12) he represented this work as having been empirically mainly about ‘class inscription’ and theoretically ‘increasingly concerned with general questions of pedagogic communication as a crucial medium of symbolic control’ and prospectively about ‘understanding the social processes whereby consciousness and desire are given specific forms, evaluated, distributed, challenged and changed’. In such quests ‘policy’ takes its place as one mode of attempting control of the ‘pedagogic device’ and we have a framework that encompasses it.

The term ‘pedagogic device’ is one that readers often find most puzzling in Bernstein until realising that, like all else in his analysis of education, it stands in direct line to his earlier sociolinguistic work. In linguistics the term ‘language device’ is used, not without controversy, to refer to a system of formal rules that governs the combinations made when we speak or write, in Chomskyan terms based on two facilities, a built-in sensitivity to their acquisition and an interactional one that makes acquisition possible. For him, its rules, acquisition and possibilities are stable and independent of culture. For Bernstein (1996: 41) and Halliday (1978), the rules of the language device, the ‘carrier’ of our language relays, while stable, ‘may well have their origin in the concerns of dominant groups’ so that they are not neutral, have ‘some very fundamental classifications, in particular gender classifications’ built in. What is ‘carried’ or relayed relies on contextual rules that depend, for example, on whether we are talking to teacher or soulmate. The pedagogic device is similar, like the language device having internal rules which regulate the pedagogic communication that it makes possible, acting selectively on potential pedagogic meanings. Its forms of realisation also

vary with context and, while also stable, are not ideologically free. Both provide rulers for consciousness.

Viewed metaphorically 'the pedagogic device provides the intrinsic grammar of pedagogic discourse' (ibid.: 42) through its inter-related distributive, recontextualising and evaluative rules. Distributive rules specialise forms of knowledge, consciousness and practice to social groups and govern the changing line between the esoteric and the mundane. 'Power relations distribute the thinkable and the unthinkable' and regulate the possibilities of alternative order and society while they 'differentiate and stratify groups accomplished by the distributive rules' (ibid.: 45). They also create a specialised field of production of discourse, the rules of entry to and control of which are more and more controlled by the state itself. Recontextualising rules, derived from them, constitute specific pedagogic discourses which always embed instructional rules, which create skills of one kind or another and specify their relationship, in regulative discourse, rules that create social order, relations and identity. Though often researched separately as competence and values they are one and delocate other discourses, like physics or history and recontextualise them as school subjects. The recontextualising field has both official (made up of the state and its selected agents and ministries, the ORF) and pedagogic (including, among others, individuals in school and colleges, teacher educators, private research enterprise, journals and textbook publishers, the PRF) actors. The extent of the scope allowed to pedagogic recontextualisers is the measure of education's autonomy, by no means guaranteed and which, in recent decades, has been shrunk by the greater incursion of governments generally invoking arguments, as if the relationship was one way, about schools' inability to deliver an adequate service to their increasingly globalised economies. Both cooperation and conflict of greater or lesser intensity exists between official and pedagogic agents over exerting influence over all aspects of educational arrangements and practices, not least the rules of order of school subjects concerning content selection, relation, sequence and pace (the expected rate of acquisition), as well as the theory of instruction and its model of the learner.

Bernstein insisted that both these 'what' and 'how' aspects of pedagogic discourse contained ideological elements and were 'never wholly utilitarian' (p. 47). Finally, pedagogic discourse which specialises time, text and space and brings them into special relation, is transformed into pedagogic practice. Time is transformed into arbitrary age categories, text into content and space into specific context. Age is then, in turn, transformed into acquisition, text into evaluation and context into transmission. It is continuous evaluation that is 'the key to pedagogic practice', condensing the meaning of the whole pedagogic device. From the classroom nod-and-wink to the formal examination, evaluation is involved in the reproduction by 'teachers' of chosen content or text that has originated with knowledge producers and has been recontextualised, turned into its 'imaginary' school version, by specialised state and educational agencies for transmission to 'acquirers' categorised in particular ways, particularly age, stage and, sometimes, gender. Our experiences of these specialisations of 'text, time

and and space marks us cognitively, socially and culturally' (pp. 49–50). Nothing is neutral, everything is weighed and valued.

While such ideas appear very general in character they are, in fact, condensations of what we know happens across educational systems and suggest that educational, like language devices, will be essentially the same everywhere. A good deal of the early research that went in to such ideas was carried out by Bernstein's students in education systems, such as those of Portugal and Chile (see particularly, Bernstein, 1996: Chapter 5) and, indeed, there are aspects of systems, across time and societies that show remarkable durability and little variation. Comparative educators, the shell-collectors of the subject everywhere, have made a very good living at laying them out. But this is to miss the point. While everywhere is the same it is also different, as borrowing and attempting to transplant bits of systems, historically mainly one of the perils of underdevelopment, largely attests by regularly 'failing' or ending up appreciably differently. Such failure usually resides in not recognising the primacy of regulative discourse over instructional. Good recent examples would be the attempt to import primary school practices from a country like Taiwan into English classrooms in initiatives, such as the Literacy and Numeracy Hours (Alexander, 1996) or English competence pedagogy into Palestinian primaries (Al-Ramahi and Davies, 2002). Educational identities, the production of one sort or another of which is the object of all pedagogic discourse and practice, differ in distinctive cultural and market conditions. They are the product of complex ensembles of arrangements and resources that Bernstein (1971) initially suggested could be typologised as collection and integrated codes marked, respectively, by strong and weak classification of knowledge boundaries and framing (mainly control over pacing) of contents. The first tended to be characterised by visible and explicit rules. The latter by more hidden and tacit ones. Bernstein later (1996) refined these into a notion of two main models of pedagogic practice, performance and competence, distinguished by time, space and discourse (whether content was presented as subjects or themes), evaluation, control, pedagogic text (whether the learner's output or what teacher sees it as signifying), autonomy and economy. 'Performance' might be taken as the dominant, established model, a comet with a very long historical tail, with specialisation of clearly marked subjects, skills and procedures, explicit recognition and realisation rules for legitimate texts and strong stratification between students. Space and movement were likely to be strongly marked. With the focus upon acquirers' past and future accomplishments, with strong, apparent progression and pacing, evaluation focused on what was missing from their texts in terms of explicit and specific criteria of which they were made aware. Their texts were products of their performance, to be graded and repair systems made available to those who did not meet them. Order was strongly relayed through explicit positional control.

In contrast, within a competence mode, whose origin he traced to 'a remarkable convergence' in the 1960s in the social sciences around its 'social logic' (Bernstein, 1996: 55), content was presented in terms of themes, projects and ranges of experience with a group base and acquirers had a measure of control

over selection, sequence and pace. Space tended to be constructed and current states emphasised, weak sequencing, lack of apparent progression and implicit pacing rules throwing emphasis on what acquirers were currently revealing. Evaluation focus was on acquirers' texts by the transmitter/facilitator and control tended to the personal rather than positional, focusing upon intentions, dispositions, relations and reflexivity. The text indicated acquirers' cognitive and social development. Teachers and students needed a range of autonomy, more so than in most performance modes, which were also generally less expensive, more subject to the economies of external control. They were less time-consuming than the demands of resource construction, individualising profiling and pacing and teacher liaison, among other things, in performance modes.

Competence modes, while all focusing on 'procedural commonalities shared within a group' (p. 63) could be further distinguished as: liberal/progressive which saw 'similar to' relations located within the individual, 'intra-individual potential that could be revealed by appropriate pedagogic practice' (p. 64), legitimising child development and professional careers for women, sponsored by a new middle class located in the field of symbolic control; a populist mode, locating 'similar to' relations or indigenous competences within a local class, ethnic or regional culture felt to be dominated or ignored; and what might be called the 'Freireian' mode that also located competence within a local, dominated group to be unlocked by exploring the source of their own powerlessness through appropriate pedagogy. While the first has become part of official and pedagogic recontextualising fields, and the second is cautiously recognised as part of a revivification of the 'locality' in a world structured by increasingly global processes (Castells, 1997), the third may only inhabit the fringes of the latter.

Bernstein's claim was that differing performance modes, all based on 'different to' relations, 'are empirically normal across all levels of official education', whereas competence modes 'may be seen as interrupts or resistances to this normality or may be appropriated by official education for specific and local purposes', 'generally found regulating the early life of acquirers or in repair sections' (p. 65). It is particularly important, then, that we grasp the character of these performance modes and the identities that they seek to engender that will have been the focus of struggle for shape and control by policymakers and classroom practitioners alike. Bernstein distinguished three modes in terms of their knowledge base, focus and social organisation, singulars, regions and generic. School discourse has been firmly based on singulars, knowledge structures with unique names, specialised, discrete discourses with their own texts and practices, rules of entry, examinations and licenses to practise. They are generally narcissistic, protected by strong boundaries and hierarchies, they are physics, chemistry, history, etc., the disciplines that figure in the school curriculum. They come and go only at its margins. Regions recontextualise singulars 'into larger units which operate both in the intellectual field of the disciplines and in the field of external practice' (p. 65). Some are well-established and long-standing, like engineering, medicine and architecture, others newer, like cognitive science or communications and media, having grown at pace in higher education as it has

expanded and diversified. New singulars may enter regions, as in sociology to medicine, depending on their recontextualising principle and social base. Open to greater central administrative control and oriented outward to markets, regions tend to weaken the discursive and political base of disciplines.

Regionalisation signals a change from narcissistic, subject-based, introjected identities to more externally dependent, projected ones. Schools have resisted or rejected it very well, though. However, they have come under some pressure to move to the generic, as in Britain when Conservative governments in the 1980s became, at least in part, persuaded by the arguments of their 'industrial trainer' (Ball, 1990) supporters. They called for changes that would enable young people to be better equipped to meet 'the needs of industry'. Combined with the existence of unprecedented levels of youth unemployment, brought about by industry and government inability to control change and recession in labour markets but ideologically transformed into the responsibility of a 'failing' school system, such appeals persuaded policy makers that appropriate change and response could only be achieved by moving altogether outside the influence of the existing agents of the official and pedagogic recontextualising fields.

Their locus shifted to the Department of Employment and its Manpower Services Commission (MSC) which devised the school and college based work oriented Technical Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI) which schools rapidly subverted and turned to their performance oriented ends (see Chapter 6). It had more success through its Training Agency (TA) which, in association with the Youth Training Scheme (YTS), developed a 'competence' methodology that underpinned the awards of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ). This focused essentially on work and 'life' and rapidly transformed the Further Education sector, expunging liberal education and craft traditions, privileging functional analyses of 'competences' that were taken to be necessary features of performing skills or tasks and giving 'rise to a jejune concept of trainability' (Bernstein, 1996: 67). NCVQ pedagogic and assessment modes have also gained a foothold in British schools, mainly as alternative post-compulsory routes for students regarded as unsuited to or unwilling in the face of subject modes. Though generic modes rest on the 'similar to' principle that characterises those of competence modes, they point to projected identities, for it is general skills underlying specific performances that constitute the similarity.

In a world where 'flexible' labour rather than long-term jobs or careers are deemed normal, its underlying principle is 'trainability' where individuals are regarded as having 'something' crucial to their own and the economy's survival residing in 'the ability to respond effectively to concurrent, subsequent, intermittent pedagogies', capable of being 'formed and reformed according to technological, organisational and market contingencies'. But, in Bernstein's view, 'to respond to such a future depends upon a capacity, not an ability' that relies upon a preceding, specialised identity. The response must be on the basis of something other than individual psychological boot-strapping, so that the concept of trainability is socially empty and identities shift toward the 'materialities of consumption' (p. 73). The prospect of extension of generic modes is taken up in

Chapter 6. As is widely argued in the literature, postmodern or networked societies are ones where traditionally ascribed categories, such as age, gender and age relations have become weakened as collective bases of stable, unambiguous identities, as have the class and occupational ones that we achieve, creating new possibilities in their construction. A state newly active in such construction work is as likely to get the job out of kilter with what its 'clients', families and students and 'shareholders' (businesses, if the rhetoric is to be believed) want and expect as it is in any other of its undertakings, expending a good deal of specialised resource along the way.

Bernstein suggested that combinations of demographic, social, economic and knowledge change underlaid events in Britain over the period to which we refer when official and pedagogic recontextualising fields permitted or engendered change from performance to competence modes and somewhat back again. The state exercised no direct control, as we shall see, over pedagogic contents or modes of transmission for a considerable period after the 1944 Education Act. The changed arrangements that flowed from it altered practice little. In the ugly phrase of the time, the new, unselective ('modern') secondary schools 'aped' the grammars, the highly prized, socially elite, known world, while primaries struggled for identities beyond the 'standards' or grades in terms of which they had long invited children to perform.

By the 1960s, particularly exercised through their control of teacher training, pedagogic recontextualisers were widely convinced of the emancipatory potential of liberal-progressive competence modes, particularly for the new primary schools. Various degrees of 'child centredness' became institutionalised, puzzling and delighting parents and their children in different degrees. It was believed to be particularly beneficial for the 'have nots', while proceeding from the social basis of the 'haves', a source of some contradiction. At the secondary level, again as we shall see, the 'comprehensivisation' that was becoming increasingly usual constituted a change in organisational form only. Permitted by a rather reluctant central state, however, it 'created an autonomous local space for the construction of curriculum and the manner of its acquisition' through the removal of some or all overt selection. While sociology of education's contribution to such issues amounted to little more than the blindest of gropes up a dead-end alley labelled 'New Directions' (Young, 1971), where all knowledge promised to be equal, more than a few teachers and schools individually innovated more successfully in search of better solutions to the poor fit of singular modes to the plurality of their students. In a period up to the mid-1970s of full employment, relatively high juvenile wages, changing youth cultures and, in some areas, changing ethnic identity, attitudes and responses to schools' regulative discourse, as to other forms of authority, became more conditional. It also marked the end of what was to prove 'a unique set of conditions' of 'autonomy of the PRF and ideological rapport between that field and the ORF' (Bernstein, 1996: 72).

The period that followed from the late 1970s saw a considerable reversal of these trends, as we will show in Chapters 7 and 8. School survival and growth came to depend increasingly 'upon optimising a market niche, upon objective