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Hope Pius Nudzor

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Hope Pius Nudzor*

Department of Childhood and Primary Studies, University of Strathclyde, Glasgow, UK

A review of education policy and practice indicates a paradox in policy implementation. Policy outcomes most often differ significantly from intended purposes and provisions enacted. This paper re-conceptualises this policy phenomenon, drawing on the post-modernist conception of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' as an approach for understanding and unmasking the messiness and contested nature of education policy processes. The choice of approach is based on three factors. First, the choice is grounded in its efficacy in explicating and legitimatising the issues of power within the policy arena. Second, the choice is based on the potential of the approach in integrating social and political theories of discourse with more linguistically oriented approaches to the study of policy. Third, the preference of approach follows from its potential to draw on language as a resource for reading into and/or analysing complex social issues.

Keywords: policy paradox; change management; post-modern; policy as 'text' and 'discourse'

Introduction

A review of current education policy and practice endorses the view of an apparent paradox in education policy implementation.[1] Although a tremendous investment is made in enacting policies, there is ample evidence to suggest that policy actors are impervious to policy information. Change agents and implementers are often seen as pursuing different agendas when it comes to the task of implementation. As aptly asserted by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith (quoted by Shulock, 1999, p. 228), 'the policy makers and implementers' core beliefs are unaffected by policy information, major policy change results rather from external factors such as inflation and elections'.

This paper re-conceptualises this policy phenomenon. It first juxtaposes both change management and democratic/participatory perspectives advanced in the policy literature to explain the disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice. Following this, the paper makes a case for the post-modernist conceptualisation of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' as a suitable approach for understanding the contested nature of policy processes.

The paper adopts a narrative approach. The rationale for this stems from the need to narrate the views of researchers on the policy paradox as a story while pausing intermittently to reflect upon what is being said, its interpretations and the implications therein. This thus falls in line with the view of critical review as a story, a

situated account (Jephcote & Davies, 2004), and an outcome of the application of one's self assiduously to authors' stories and experience of events. The methodological approach adopted also concurs with Nixon's (2008, p. 149) view of the role of a researcher as an archaeologist and an astrologist: a digger and a seer.

Change management and democratic perspectives juxtaposed

Those who subscribe to the change management perspective hold the view that the policy implementation paradox exists because policy makers, implementers and change agents are unable to, or fail to put in place operational plans to ensure efficient and effective implementation of policies enacted. For this school of thought, policy implementation is not just a question of defining an end and letting others get on with it. It is a process of interaction, dialogue, feedback, modifying objectives, recycling plans, coping with mixed feelings and values, pragmatism, micropolitics, frustration, and muddle.

Everard, Morris, and Wilson (2004), for example, point out the short sightedness or rationality of policy actors as one fundamental factor which explains why attempts to implement policy fail. They write:

> The first reason why those who initiate change often fail to secure successful conclusion to their dreams is that they tend to be too rational. They develop in their minds a clear, coherent vision of where they want to be at, and they assume that all they have to do is to spell out the logic to the world in words of one syllable, and everyone will be immediately motivated to follow the lead. The more vivid their mental picture of the goal ... the more likely they are to stir opposition and the less successful they are likely to be in managing a process of change. (pp. 239–240)

These words echo the apparent dissonances between the perceptions of policy makers and those on whom policies impinge. The words explicate the fact that more often, policy makers (and perhaps implementers) make assumptions about the causes of things which differ from what pertains in the world of those on whom such policies impinge. Hence the need for them to address themselves not just to the world they see, but also to the world other people see however misguided, perverse and distorted they may think the outlooks of others are.

Fullan (1988, 2001) on his part problematizes implementation processes. According to him, one of the initial sources of the problem is the commitment of reformers to see a particular desired policy implemented, irrespective of the fact that commitment to what should be changed often varies inversely with knowledge about how to work through a process of change. For him, understanding the meaning of implementation and its associated problems is not as straightforward and rational as it seems at first glance. He identifies implementation as a 'variable', in other words 'changing practice', and goes further to explain that it is the process of altering existing practice in order to achieve more effectively certain desired learning outcomes. Rist (2000) echoes Fullan's words. He illustrates the multi-dimensional structure of implementation processes which many change agents and policy implementers fail to acknowledge and adhere to and are therefore not able to implement and manage educational policies successfully. He cites Pressman and Wildavsky's (1984) words to summarize the complexities involved with the task of implementation:

> Policies imply theories. Whether stated explicitly or not, policies point to a chain of causation between initial conditions and future consequences ... Implementation, then, is the ability to forge subsequent links in the causal chain so as to obtain the desired results. (cited in Rist, 2000, p. 1007)

Huczynski and Buchanan (2001) pitch the causes of the disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice, among other things, to resistance to change. They cite Bedian's (1980) four reasons, namely: parochial self-interest of individuals or groups in the organisation; misunderstanding and lack of trust of the change process; contradictory assessment of change; and low tolerance for change: to exemplify why change in organisations and institutions is strongly resisted (2001, pp. 599–601). They then go on from there to project that as long as these conditions exist in organisations, change and/or policy outcomes will forever remain partially met or totally neglected.

Viewed through a change management lens, this perspective does exemplify the kind of operational and strategic work – for example, educating and actively involving people on whom policies impinge in the implementation process; meeting the training and developmental needs of implementers; taking steps to reduce resistance to change; building collegiate culture; and effective monitoring and evaluation of the policy process among others – that need doing in order to bring about the desired policy outcomes. That notwithstanding, the major weakness of the perspective lies in the fact that it appears limited in scope and rationality as it fails to recognize and exemplify the socio-cultural and political dynamism of the policy process. Equally, the perspective arguably is over-deterministic in that it reduces the policy-making process to change management routines. It pre-presupposes, for instance, that once these change management routines are well conceptualized, put in place and judiciously pursued, policy implementation is bound to succeed, thus a positivist presupposition of 'objective reality' waiting to be explored (Denscombe, 2002; Gephart, 1999; Neuman, 2004). As Trowler and Knight (2002) succinctly put it, the technical-rational approach to policy assumes that if sufficient energy can be elicited from those involved by enthusiastic leaders with clear vision of change then large-scale transformations can be accomplished relatively quickly and economically (p. 144).

The democratic/participatory perspective, on the other hand, is a counter-criticism of the change management perspective. It registers the claim that the perceived disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice can be traced to the way policy is conceptualised and positioned to serve solely 'technicist' purposes. Proponents of this perspective argue that the globalisation of capitalism in recent years has exerted considerable influence on the educational systems of countries worldwide, leading to a paradigm shift in leadership. This phenomenon, they argued, has resulted in decision-making becoming a participative activity shared among various local school constituents, namely teachers, parents and members of the school management committees. As such, in their view, the perceived disjuncture between policy intentions in theory and outcomes in practice is due considerably to the fact that the traditionalist/rationalist approach fails to take account of significant democratic roles performed by policy.

One of the researchers whose work has been most influential in offering this theoretical basis in support of the democratic/participatory perspective is Shulock

(1999). She uses data on policy analysis use by Congregational Committees from 1985 to 1994 in the USA to test the theoretical claim that analysis is neither used by policy makers to solve problems nor to choose alternatives in the design of public policies. Although Shulock's study appears a bit removed from the issue in contention, it does however have serious implications for education. The findings from her study led her to critique the traditional and rational view of policy process in favour of a more interpretive/participatory approach. She argues that the rationalist foundation of the traditional policy process unduly limits our understanding of policy analysis and its role in the policy-making and implementation processes. She claims that policy analysis (and in this context policy implementation), is used in three ways not validated by the traditional view. For her, policy analysis is used: (1) as a language for framing political discourse; (2) as a legitimate rationalization for legislative action where prospective rationality is inhibited by 'garbage can' decision environments; and (3) as a symbol of legitimate decision processes that can increase support for governance processes in a society that values rationality (Shulock, 1999, p. 229). Stressing the importance of this alternative view of policy derived from contemporary literature on policy processes, she writes:

> policy analysis is more a tool of the democratic process than the problem-solving process. Its value lies in its contribution to the understanding that citizens have of issues and the political process. These understandings can profoundly affect policy outcomes and popular support for those outcomes. Analysis can lead to better policies if by 'better' we mean more responsive to, and supported by, the public. (Shulock, 1999, p. 227)

Thus, the democratic/participatory perspective provides an alternative democratic/participatory role of policy based on a more contemporary set of theoretical premises which identify the implementation process as an effective instrument of the democratic process rather than a problem-solving one typified by the stages approach. However, intrinsic to this perspective is the criticism that although the interpretive and participatory use of policy (as Shulock herself concedes) is neither a trivial nor illegitimate use of information resource, this kind of use is not what policy makers and implementers hope to achieve. In other words, the perspective appears to duplicate the issue in contention without providing any tangible reasons for its possible root cause(s).

Re-conceptualising the policy paradox: a post-modernist conceptual approach

What in the context of this paper is referred to as the post-modernist conceptual approach to policy is basically a call for a fundamental re-conceptualisation and re-definition of policy and its role in the decision-making and implementation processes. Such a call draws on post-modernist understanding of contemporary society which stresses the existence of different 'life-worlds' (Trowler, 1998, p. 75) and the realisation of small communities within larger society with their own understanding of the nature of reality and how to move on in life. Researchers in this tradition contend that although we do invest heavily in policy-making processes, there is lack of credible evidence to suggest that these policies make any difference in solving our myriad of problems. They emphasize that if information has an impact on policy outcomes at all, it does so over the long term because 'the meaning of

policy is taken for granted and a theoretical and epistemological dry rot is built into the analytical structures constructed' (Ball, 1994, p. 15), making it difficult, if not impossible, for policy provisions and intentions to be implemented and outcomes attained.

From this stand point, adherents to this perspective inhabit and propose two very different conceptualisations of policy: policy as 'text' and 'discourse': based on what they see as a post-modernist understanding of social issues where 'two theories are probably better than one'[2] (Ball, 1994, p. 14) and on that premise, they argue for what Olssen, Codd, and O'Neil (2004) call a 'materialist theory of language' – a theory which sees policy as being made of language and therefore a social practice – as a basis for understanding policy processes. Typically, the approach identifies the policy implementation milieu at the heart of this paper with or as due to:

> the challenge of relating together analytically the ad hocery of the macro and the ad hocery of the micro without losing sight of the systematic bases and effects of the ad hoc social actions: to look for the iterations embedded within chaos. (Ball, 1994, p. 15)

As 'text', the conception of policy goes beyond both written and spoken texts to include all artefacts of human communication. However, for the purposes of this paper, policy as 'text' is taken to refer exclusively to written text, and implies the end-product of the contestations, struggles, negotiations, compromises and dialogues involved in making policies. Policy as 'text' draws upon the insights of literary theory and recognises the complex ways in which textual representations are encoded as a result of compromises and struggles. Policy documents and statements as Trowler (1998), for instance, contends are always a result of struggles and compromises between the different individuals, groups and interests involved in the policy process. The contested and disputed character of policy, according to him, is evident at two main levels of the policy process: the points of 'encoding' and 'decoding'. He refers to the 'encoding' level as the initial stage of formal policy making where the ideas, values and aspirations of both the key actors involved in the policy process and the people and the interests they represent are elicited and enlisted via struggles, compromises, authoritative public interpretations and reinterpretations. The 'decoding' stage, according to Trowler (1998), is marked by the disputed and complex ways by which the policy messages and outcomes are interpreted by the policy actors and implementers in the contexts of their own culture, ideology, history, resources and expertise (p. 78).

Seen in this light, the conception of 'policy as text' appears to reject the 'technical-empirical' approach to understanding policy implementation where there is a quest for what Walford (2000, p. 124) calls the authorial intentions presumed to lie behind the text. Rather, it reiterates the point that texts are made up of language and as such contain divergent meanings, contradictions and structural omissions, and that a plurality of readings that are liable, or likely to be produced are in themselves indicative of the existence of a plurality of readers (Codd, 1988, p. 238). This however does not imply, as many proponents of this theoretical perspective believe, that any 'reading' of the text is possible and indeed valid. What it does explicate is the idea that while authors of texts cannot completely control the meanings they attach to their texts, they strive to put in a reasonable amount of effort to exert such control by the means they have at their disposal. As Walford

(2000, p. 125) puts it, 'only a limited range of readings is possible, but that range permits a diversity of forms of implementation'.

Thus, as far as what in the context of this paper is described as the policy implementation paradox is concerned, the conception of policy as 'text' is important for three reasons. First, it endorses the rejection of the 'idealist and technocratic assumptions' (Olssen et al., 2004, p. 60) underpinning traditional conceptions whereby policy is conceived and operationalised as a problem-solving tool designed to rectify particular issue(s) of concern (Dale, 1989). In other words, the conception lends support to the view of those researchers who understand policy not as the expression of political statements of the courses of action that policy makers and administrators are to follow, as the 'traditional' or 'technocratic' view would like to have us believe. Rather, the conception helps us to see the policy process as a contested terrain involving muddle, negotiations and compromises.

Second, the conception brings to the fore the idea that policies by their very nature are likely to shift and change in the face of modifications in their contexts over time. The contested and negotiated character of the policy process presupposes that given time, policy representations are liable to shift and change and so are the key actors and interpreters as well as the possible interpretations and meanings that actors attach to policy (Ball, 1994, p. 17).

Third, the conception implies invariably that it is very rare for a text, in this context policy, to be the work of one person and as such, for any text, a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings (Codd, 1988). The differences in the interpretation of policy texts stem from the difficulty that policy authors face in their attempts to control the meaning and achieve a 'correct' reading of their texts. The texts themselves, as Ball (1994, p. 16) maintains, are not necessarily clear, closed or complete and therefore to assume that a text can actually have a single meaning or portray the actual intentions of the author(s) is to subscribe to what Olssen et al. (2004, p. 60) refer to as the 'intentional fallacy' which holds that the meaning of literary text corresponds or can be taken as being evidence of what the author(s) intend to express.

Thus, the conception of policy as 'text' indicates quite clearly that policies are as sites of struggle, negotiation and dialogue, in that they show traces of differing discourses and ideologies contending and struggling for dominance. By conceptualising educational policy in this way therefore, the researchers who adopt a post-modernist understanding of contemporary society to fashion a perspective on the policy implementation paradox appear to stress the importance of social agency of struggle and compromise and its relationship to understanding the different ways that policies are read.

Policy as 'discourse', on the other hand, is taken to mean how ideas and propositions contained in policy texts are interpreted and the way the process constrains the 'intended' meanings of such texts. Recognizing 'policy as discourse' basically draws on and emphasizes a post-modernist view of the ways in which the discourse available to us as people, limits and shapes our views and perspectives about the world (Trowler, 1998, p. 79). Such an idea, according to Walford (2000), 'links to those of Foucault (1977) and many others and emphasizes the limitations on what can be said and thought, and also who can speak, when, where and with what authority' (p. 125). Related particularly to the issue in contention in this paper, the conception draws on the ways in which the constraining effects of the discursive

contexts set up by the policy makers come to the fore in the policy implementation and institutionalization processes (Trowler, 1998).

By way of definition, researchers in this conceptual tradition understand discourse to embody the meaning and use of propositions and words (that is, the way ideas are expressed). They take discourse to refer to language as a social practice determined by social structures. By this conception, they suggest that discourses, and in this context policies, do not merely represent social reality but help as well in creating them. For these researchers, in the process of representing reality, discourses disguise the created nature of social reality by denying and or limiting the language resources needed to be able to think about and describe alternatives.[3] This idea of discourse creating and constituting reality (that is, the objects we speak) is reiterated by Foucault whose work arguably forms the bedrock for subsequent authors in identifying and conceptualising policy as discourse. He comments:

> discourses are practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak ... Discourses are not about objects; they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own inventions. (1977, p. 49)

Stressing how discourses in the process of creating social reality conceal their own identities and therefore consequently limit and shape our own understanding and initiatives about issues, Foucault (1974), in another discussion adds:

> We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, and the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows. We do not 'know' what we say, we 'are' what we say and do ... we are spoken by policies, we take up the positions constructed for us within policies. (p. 49)

What this conception of policy, particularly with regards to policy implementation paradox signifies is that policy makers and actors in general can, and do (as Trowler, 1998, also believes), generally constrain the way we think and act on policies. It thus, for instance, exemplifies the point that although policy actors in practice are embedded within a variety of discordant and contradictory discourses, some of the discourses within which they are embedded are more dominant than others, and that 'those discourses supported by the state have an obvious dominance in circumstances linked to the law and Acts of Parliament' (Walford, 2000, p. 125). Ball (1994) explains this point much more succinctly. Taking education as a case in point, he argues that conceptualising policy as discourse means that a specific set of intellectuals inhabit, disseminate and legitimize the new 'science' and ideas (such as, discipline, quality of teaching, efficient use of resources and instructional time, just to mention a few) that have to do with the attainment of learning objectives. With regards to those on whom these ideas impinge, he explains that they may only be able to conceive of the possibilities of response in and through the language, concepts and vocabulary which the discourse makes available to them.[4] Reiterating the discursive nature of 'policy as discourse', he concludes:

> the effects of policy is primarily discursive, it changes the possibilities we have for thinking 'otherwise', thus it limits our responses to change, and leads us to misunderstand what policy is by misunderstanding what it does ... policy as discourse may have the effects of redistributing 'voice', so that it does not matter what some people say or

think, and only certain voices can be heard as meaningful or authoritative. (Ball, 1994, p. 23)

Thus, the post-modernist conceptualisation of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' does help to exemplify and reiterate the point what in the context of this paper is referred to as the 'policy implementation paradox' is a natural policy phenomenon occurring as a result of the discursive contexts and/or shifts that emerge as policy gets enacted, and that this needs to be acknowledged and concerted efforts made to manage its effects on policy processes. Trowler (1998), p. 77), for example, supports this view. He contends that conceptualising the policy issue in this way is a very useful attempt to keep in view both the way behaviour and ideas are constrained by factors external to the individual – policy as discourse – and the relative freedom of individuals to change things – policy as text. Ball (1994) endorses Trowler's views. He stresses that the conception is a demonstration, for example, of the relationship between policy texts at the governmental level and how these policy texts are read within schools. He reiterates that the idea of policy as 'text' emphasizes the social agency of the policy process. That is, it explicates the point 'that there are real struggles, disputes, conflicts and adjustments in the policy process and that these take place in a pre-established terrain' (1994, p. 23). He explains further that as 'text', the conception shows that there are real struggles over the interpretation and enactment of policies due to the contested, muddy, changing and negotiated nature and character of the policy process. 'Policy as discourse', according to Ball (1994), buttresses the moving and discursive frames within which these struggles are set and how these articulate and constrain the interpretation and enactment of policies.

The inherent weakness of the post-modernist conception of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' rests in the fact that the model is tentative (Walford, 2000), as it seeks to 'replace the modernist theoretical project of abstract parsimony with a somewhat more post-modernist one of localized complexity' (Ball, 1994, p. 14), and in the process fails to take account of what Ozga (2000) refers to as 'the bigger picture'. In other words, the perspective appears to have prioritized actor interaction in the policy-making process over the task of implementation. Trowler (1998, p. 80) captures this weakness much more succinctly. He points out that the post-modernist perspective, and in fact, all phenomenological approaches to policy, among other things, overestimate the discretion of the lower-level actors and fail to recognise that the upper level sets the ground rules for negotiations.

While this criticism is quite critical and damning, for the purpose of this paper, Ball's (1994) defence of the post-modernist perspective and model is particularly relevant. Although he does appear to have taken the criticism head on, he argues particularly against the ruling out of certain forms and conception of social action on the grounds that they are simply awkward, theoretically challenging or difficult. The issue for him, and as far as this paper is concerned, is the utmost need and urgency of 'relating together analytically the ad hocery' of two levels (macro and micro levels) with a view to understanding policy processes, and more importantly making sense of why the policy issue in contention exists. The point therefore, and as Ball also indicates, is that of accounting for agency in a constrained world and showing how agency and structure are implicit in each other.

Policy as 'text' and 'discourse': a conceptual approach to understanding policy processes

As shown in the illustrations above, the conceptualisation of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' has generally helped to unravel the reasons for the perceived disjuncture between policy intentions and purposes in theory and outcomes in practice. However, given the context and purpose of this paper, the following three points additionally make a specific case for the efficacy of the conception in providing a conceptual understanding of the dynamics of policy processes and the ways by which policy and practice exist in dynamic and iterative relationship.

First, conceptualising education policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' explicates and legitimizes the issue of 'power' and its uses and relationships between the various actors within the policy process. As 'text', education policy is conceived as a multi-dimensional process involving struggles, contestations and negotiations, whilst as 'discourse', it is thought of as what can be said and thought and by whom, when, where and with what authority (Foucault, 1977, p. 125). What this conception of policy means is that, although multiple and competing voices can or are always heard in the policy process it is actually only certain influences, agendas are recognised as authoritative. Policies typically posit a restructuring, redistribution and disruption of power relations, so that different people can and cannot do different things at a given time during the entire policy process. Ball (1994) points out this issue of power and how it affects the task of implementation when he says:

> [In the policy process] only certain influences and agendas are recognised as legitimate, only certain voices are heard at any point in time ... quibbling and dissensus still occur with babble of 'legitimate' voices and sometimes the effects of quibbling and dessensus result in blurring of meaning within texts, and in public confusion and dissemination of doubt. (p. 16)

As an approach to conceptualising policy, therefore, the conception of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' does not only help to bring to the fore, and touch on the legitimate voices in the policy process, but it more importantly explicates and exemplifies how the issue of power and its exercise affects policy-making and implementation processes at large.[5]

Similarly, unlike Foucault's conception of discourse which arguably became the bedrock for discourse analysts, the conception of education allows for linguistic and discursive analysis of social issues. Thus, Foucault's approach did contribute immensely to discourse analysis by focusing mainly on the social and political analysis of discursive practices as systems of rules. However, as Fairclough (1992, 1995, 2001c) points out, his approach neglects the textual analysis of discourse. It fails to point out and engage in textual analysis of real instances of what is said or written. As an approach for conceptualising social issues, the conception of policy as 'text' does integrate the social and political theories of discourse with more linguistically oriented approaches to discourse analysis. It also requires that attention be given to the relationship between texts and the wider domains of discursive and social practices to which the texts belong. On the other hand, as a piece of discursive practice, the conception of 'policy as discourse' typically touches on and illustrates the linguistic and intertextual processes and features and goes beyond these to exemplify the interpersonal relationships of power involved in the processes of text production, distribution and consumption and how these impact on policy processes.

All of these processes, as Fairclough (1992, p. 71) puts it, are social and require reference to the particular economic, political and institutional settings within which discourse, in this case policies, are generated.

Third, as an approach to understanding policy processes, the conception is useful because it draws on language as a resource for analysing social issues. To use Kress' (1989) expression, such a model sees language, and in fact policy, as a 'social semiotic', and as a resource for meaning, centrally involved in the process by which human beings negotiate, construct and change the nature of social experience. Viewed in this sense, the constant unity of language and other social matters as Wodak (2001) aptly point out, ensures that language is entwined in social power in a number of ways: 'indexing and expressing power, involved where there is contention over and a challenge to power as well as providing a finely articulated means for differences in power in hierarchical structures' (p. 11). The critical issue here, of course, is whether social issues or policies can be reduced to language. In other words, how is language used or portrayed as a resource in critical analysis of policy? Fairclough (1995) helps us with an answer. He explains that in seeing language as discourse and as social practice or the vice versa, one is committing oneself not just to analysing texts, nor just to analysing processes and interpretation, but to analysing the relationship between texts, processes and their social conditions (both the immediate conditions of the situational context and the more remote conditions of institutional and social structures). What this means in one sense is that anyone who has interest in the relationships of power in modern society cannot afford to ignore language. As Fairclough (2001a,b,c) again emphasizes, language contributes to the domination of some people by others. It rests upon commonsense assumptions, and the ways in which these assumptions can be ideologically shaped by relations of power (2001c, p. 3). The conception of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse' is thus useful not only in helping to show how policy is enacted at various levels, but also in raising the consciousness of the people about the ways in which their language use does contribute to the domination of one another.

Conclusion

This paper has provided insight into the issue of the paradox in policy implementation. By way of conclusion, the following general points about the focus and/or purpose of the paper might be emphasized. First, the paper has exemplified the dichotomies between both the change management and democratic/participatory perspectives advanced by researchers and policy experts to explain and demystify the apparent disjuncture between policy purposes and intentions enacted for implementation in theory and outcomes in practice. The change management perspective identifies the kinds of operational and strategic works that need doing in order for change to take place, and is thus criticised for being overly deterministic and neglecting and/or missing out on the socio-cultural and political dynamism of the policy process. The democratic/participatory perspective provides a counter-criticism to the change management perspective and what in the context of this paper is being referred to as the 'policy paradox' itself. The perspective contends that policy serves as language for framing political discourse and for engaging people in processes of democratisation rather than the traditional problem-solving intent embedded in the change management approach to policy. However, the perspective is criticised on the

premise that the alternative democratic/participatory function of policy alluded to is not, or could not be, what policy actors hope to achieve.

Second, the paper has re-conceptualised the paradox in policy implementation using the post-modernist conceptualisation of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse'. Using this approach, the paper portends that what is referred to as the 'policy implementation paradox' is a natural policy phenomenon occurring as a result of discursive contexts and/or shifts that emerge as policy gets enacted, and that this needs to be acknowledged and concerted efforts made to manage its effects on policy processes.[6]

Lastly, the paper highlights the post-modernist conceptualisation of policy as 'text' and 'discourse' as a suitable approach for understanding and unmasking the messiness and contested nature of policy processes based on the following three factors:

- its efficacy in explicating and legitimatising the issues of power within the policy arena;
- its potential in integrating social and political theories of discourse with more linguistically oriented approaches to discourse analysis; and
- its potential to draw on language as a resource for analysing social issues.

Acknowledgements

Notes

1. What in the context of this paper is described as 'the policy implementation paradox' arguably has two facets. In a sense, the phenomenon implies policy is not implemented as policy makers expect. In a different and much broader sense, the label explicates the view that policy information is not used by different policy actors to achieve policy intentions and/or aims. While both of these views have been major themes for fundamental discussions within policy studies over a considerable period of time, for the purposes of this paper, the focus is on exploring the perspectives advanced in the policy literature to explain the apparent disjuncture between policy intentions and purpose in theory and outcomes in practice.
2. The distinction between policy as 'text' and 'discourse' is implied here and elsewhere in the paper as if they are different positions. This is not so in the literature. In fact, Ball (1994), Corbitt (1997), Trowler (1998), Rist (2000), Walford (2000), Fontana (2002), and Olssen et al. (2004) have brought these together, as have others.
3. It needs to be acknowledged that the argument (about policy as discourse) is portrayed rather narrowly here to seem or look as if policy merely produces discourses and is not itself a product of discourse. This in fact is an oversimplification of the conception. Taking the discourse on/of 'policy of targets' in education as an example, proponents of the conception of policy as 'text' and 'discourse' would argue that this emerged out of wider discourses about standards and school improvement which are themselves derivations of discourses mobilized out of research literature on school effectiveness and improvement appropriated in a highly selective manner to serve particular political interests.
4. Again, see Note 3 for a grounded and much broader illustration of the conception of policy as 'discourse'.
5. It is worth adding that not only are language and power foregrounded from the perspective of policy as both 'text' and 'discourse'; equally important, the conception points to the

significance of context(s) and how discourses are produced out of particular historical and material contexts. (See, for example, Fairclough, 2001b, 2001c, 2003; Lauder, Brown, & Halsey, 2004; Lingard, Rawolle, & Taylor, 2005, for a detailed discussion of this equally significant argument.)

6. The strength of this paper is seen particularly in its ability to draw on and/or conceptualise perspectives from disjointed policy sources to explain and/or unravel the paradox in policy implementation. Having said that, it needs to be acknowledged however that its key argument is not particularly new as it is the basis of the new policy sociology which has been around in education for some time now. It also needs to be acknowledged that poststructuralist accounts of policy as 'text' and 'discourse' using Foucault has now moved into considerations of how Bourdieu and, in particular, feminist approaches can be used. While this does not negate the value of Foucault, and in fact the ideas contained in this paper, it does suggest the need for the literature on this new policy sociology to be acknowledged. (See, for example, Ladwig, 1994; Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, & Henry, 1997; Bacchi, 1999; Henry, Lingard, Rizvi, & Taylor, 2001; Lauder et al., 2004; Lingard et al., 2005, for detailed accounts about how the field has moved.)

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