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Initial Investigations into Policy, Leadership and Governance Discourses in Educational Sites

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This paper presents the results of initial investigations into research investigating the interrelationships between policy, leadership and governance in educational organisations. The research is based on an understanding that leadership is not achieved in a social vacuum. That is, it recognises that the realisation of leadership is always set within a framework of possibilities and constraints derived from the cultural, political and economic contexts of education and from education policies framed within these contexts. Particular policy frameworks articulate particular leadership roles and responsibilities and exclude others. In addition, they shape and constrain the relationships with significant others in institutions and their environments e.g. school boards, university councils. The paper draws on insights from the fields of policy sociology, critical leadership studies and discourse theory to present a framework for further explorations into how leadership identities and practices are produced and shaped through discourses on policy and governance in educational sites, and into how leadership practices can respond to such policy and governance discourses.

Introduction
Recently the significance of educational leaders both to quality student outcomes and to successful innovation in educational practices has been highlighted by government policies at both the national and state levels (cf. Department of Education Science and Training, 2003; Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000; Education Queensland, 1999). Each of these policies stresses the importance of quality education to Australia's future. For example, the national innovation strategy, Backing Australia’s Ability (Commonwealth of Australia, 2001), recognises the importance of the innovative capacity and quality of Australia's educational structures to Australia's success in the 21st century. Indeed, quality education has been noted as "the means by which Australia can thrive in such circumstances [of significant social, cultural and social changes]" (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, p 8). Further, these reports note that quality leaders are essential to quality education (cf. Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000; Ramsey, 2000 00) because the quality of the system depends on the quality of educational leadership in schools (Education Queensland, 1999). Consequently, initiatives have been introduced to support and strengthen quality educational leadership. Such initiatives include the introduction of a National Institute of Quality Teaching and School leadership (Department of Education Science and Training, 2003), a national Quality
Leaders program (Department of Employment Education Training and Youth Affairs, 2000) and a Strategic Leaders Program in Queensland. The emphasis on the links between a competitive economy, quality schooling and educational leadership is a global phenomenon, with the recognition of the importance of strong and effective educational leadership being found also in the US (Olson, 2000), Britain (Department for Education and Employment, 2001) and New Zealand (Ministry of Education, 1998). It is timely, therefore, to revisit notions of educational leadership in order to further knowledge and understanding of key factors that influence the quality of Australian educational leaders.

Rethinking educational leadership

Educational Leadership has been recognised as a 'crowded and busy terrain' (Gunter, 2001, p. 94), with multiple meanings being attached to the concept (Hoffman, 2004). Such pluralism can be seen as being both an advantage and a disadvantage to research work in leadership studies. In an attempt to map the field, Ribbons and Gunter (Gunter, 2002; Ribbins) present a typology of five positions on leadership, which are informed by five different knowledge domains. The five positions are conceptual, critical, humanistic, evaluative, and instrumental. Conceptual positions on leadership are concerned with philosophical questions of morality, rights, life and humanity. The critical position focuses on issues of power and social justice and the humanistic position on lived lives and experiences. The latter two positions, evaluative and instrumental, are concerned with measuring effectiveness and the conditions for improvement and providing prescribed action for change. These positions reflect the preoccupation with technical matters noted by Thomson (2000) when commenting on the tensions that arise between the need to provide immediate practical advice to practitioners and the longer term growth of a critical, reflective research agenda. Such a research agenda needs to look beyond the evaluative and instrumental positions on leadership in order to identify those areas of leadership that ought to be studied but which have been neglected or ignored (Ribbins, 2002).

One area that should be the part of such an agenda is critical research into understandings of leadership in terms of how leaders' identities and practices are shaped and constrained. For example, Ribbins and Gunter (2002) believe that studies of leadership should focus on leading (what leaders do in specific circumstances) and leaders (what leaders are, why and by whom they are shaped into what they are and how they become leaders). Similarly, Thompson (2003) has called for work that will lead to a better understanding of how the practices of educational leaders are produced and shaped. Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond (2004) also note the lack of in-depth investigations into the how of leadership, and identify the need for investigations into the interrelationships between the individual agency of leaders and the role of macro-structures, such as education policies, in shaping what leaders do.

All these calls for future research into educational leadership are based on an understanding that leadership is not achieved in a social vacuum but can only be understood in the context of its wider cultural setting (see also Ball, 1994; Bell, 2002; Collard, 2004; Gunter, 2001; Spillane, 2004) for, as Grace (2000) notes the school leadership-society relation defines what it is to be an educational leader. That is, the
realisation of educational leadership is always set within a framework of possibilities and constraints derived from the cultural, political and economic contexts of education and from education policies framed within these contexts. Particular policy frameworks articulate particular leadership roles and responsibilities and exclude others. In addition, they shape and constrain the relationships with significant others in institutions and their environments e.g. school boards, university councils. For example, Bell (2002) notes that recent changes in education policy in the UK has led to increased responsibilities and accountabilities for head teachers who report a resultant change in leadership style. While recent work in educational leadership studies is concerned with the centrality of policy, such work often is concerned with amassing empirical knowledge, rather than interrogating social theories (Ribbins, 2002; Thomson, 2000). Consequently, Thomson (2003, p. 82) calls for investigations of leadership that consider insights from the fields of policy sociology and critical management. Such a research focus is one in which little work has been completed (Apple, 2001, p. 13; Ball, 1994). There is a need, therefore, for critical research into the interrelationships between leadership, policy and governance and into how these interrelationships shape and constrain leadership practices.

The interrelationships between leadership, policy and governance

This paper outlines a proposal for an investigation that seeks to answer questions about the interrelationships between policy and leadership, between governance and leadership, and the relationship between all three areas. While research has recognised the significance of the links between these areas, these relationships are seldom the central focus of the work. That is, 'the specificity of this relationship is a key point for future research' (Ball, 1994, p. 92). One area of research that does focus on links between the three areas is concerned with the impact of globalisation, and its subsequent education policies of new managerialism, on leadership in local sites.

Researchers in this area recognise that there is no unitary 'reality' of globalisation (Gough, 1999). Rather, globalisation is seen to be not merely a convergent or unifying phenomenon (Peters, 2000) but complex and multiple (Marginson, 1999). Green (1999) refers to 'the accelerated international flows of goods, capital, labour, services, and information that have occurred in response to improved transport, the seemingly limitless revolution in communications technologies, and the deregulatory policies adopted in many countries during the past two decades' (p. 57). Globalisation, therefore, is about linkages and interconnections between states and world systems (Marginson, 1999). These researchers are concerned not with definitions, but with what globalisation does and how it does it in educational policy contexts (Gough, 1999).

Most researchers agree that globalisation has affected both the content and form of education policies. This global transmission of policies and practices increasingly ignores national and cultural boundaries (Walker, 2000), resulting in a phenomenon called policy convergence (Green, 1999), where policy discourses and objectives in various countries become increasingly similar over time. That is, while these global effects are heavily mediated in contexts (Angus, 2004), education policies create broadly similar patterns of challenge to education that shape possible responses in similar ways within a neo-liberal framework across a range of countries (Dale, 1999). Consequently, there is a new policy
consensus emerging that sees education in human capital terms as the basis of ensuring economic advantage in a globalised economy (Lingard, 2002). The dominance of this economic narrative is seen in the emphasis on standards, testing and accountability, where standards are seen to be a tool that produces effective workers who can compete economically in a global society (Hoffman, 2004). Thus, globalisation has led to changes in social and cultural conditions, which in turn, have resulted in new ways of managing public sectors and institutions, such as education and schools. In education, the rise of neo-liberalism has seen a significant shift away from the emphasis on administration and policy to an emphasis on management, sometimes called managerialism (Peters, 2000), leading to new conditions for school leaders where governance is legitimated by a rationality that depends on the efficiency of the market (Moos, 2003).

In this way, neo-liberal education policies are driven by market and managerialist imperatives that introduce reforms characterised by decentralisation, competition, and a move from democratic control to market control. They are concerned with economic rewards and sanctions, professional, entrepreneurial leadership in local sites and organisational flexibility and with the increasing use of evaluation and quality control measures (Green, 1999). These imperatives emphasise the instrumental purposes of schooling – raising standards and performance as measured by examination results, levels of attendance and school-leaver destinations – and are frequently articulated within a lexicon of enterprise, excellence, quality and effectiveness (Gerwitz, 2000). Managerialist approaches assume an ideal set of responses from school leaders. That is, leaders must have a 'good product', and be able to market their schools effectively, develop good customer/client relations and monitor customer satisfaction (Leithwood, 2001). School leaders are seen to be the key actors in processes of reform (Grace, 2000), being the main carrier of, or impediment to, such reworkings (Gerwitz, 2000, p. 254).

Education policies driven by market and managerialist imperatives have led to shifting discourses of schooling across sectors, including secondary schooling (Gerwitz, 2000) and further education (Gleeson, 2001). In turn, these discourses have led to transformations both in the practices of headship and in the ways that school heads think and talk about their role (Gerwitz, 2000). The role and sense of school leaders are being reworked and redefined in struggles over language, policy and practice (Peters, 2000). However, local structural, institutional and individual factors mediate and inflect the reworking of these discourses of leadership (Gerwitz, 2000), giving rise to tensions between local particularities of policy-making and policy enactment (Ball, 1998). That is, managerial discourses of leadership are embodied in different ways in specific policy regimes in particular countries and their formation is 'an utterly contingent and pragmatic affair driven by what is thought might work' (Peters, 2000, p. 111). In addition, principals and senior managers do not necessarily constitute a neat or homogeneous group and their responses and perceptions of leadership vary in relation to institutional effects, context, experiences and gender (Gleeson, 2001). Investigations into these shifting discourses of leadership, need to focus on the shifting and complex positioning of real people or institutions and their roles in specific places and over specific periods of time. That is, investigations of the interrelationships of policy, leadership and governance need to be situated in the specific social context.
The discursive nature of policy, leadership and governance

This paper outlines a proposal for one such investigation. It presents a theoretical framework that will enable insights from the fields of policy sociology and critical leadership studies to inform research into the interrelationships between leadership, policy and governance and so contribute to a better understanding of these processes and practices. The project will draw, also, on insights gained from discourse theory, in particular from insights into the discursive constructions of identity. Such an approach recognises that people, including educational leaders, policy-makers and governors, live and act within textually-mediated social worlds (Smith, 1990). Further, social worlds that turn on text and discourse are characterised by new forms of social life (Luke, 2002). They are enabled by discourse saturated environments, or semiotic economies, where 'text, language and discourse have become the principal modes of social relations, civic and political life, economic behaviour and activity, where means of production and modes of information become intertwined in analytically complex ways' (Luke, 2002, p. 98). As Harvey (1996) notes, discursive effects saturate all other moments in the social process, 'internalising in some sense everything that occurs as other moments' (p. 80). Therefore, while it is important not to privilege the discursive over other moments in social life, an analysis of the discursive moment will further understandings of the social world. That is, an analysis of the discursive constructions of educational policies, leadership and governance is essential to an understanding of the interrelationships between the three areas.

Such an analysis is premised on an understanding of discourses as systematic set of meanings (Blackmore, 1999). They are social constructions of reality, or forms of knowledge, (Fairclough, 1995) that 'locate[s] a field in which relations and courses of actions are mediated by symbolic forms' (Smith, 1990, p. 162) in an ongoing intertextual process. As McHoul and Luke (1989) have noted, discourses are the social processes in which texts are embedded, the 'ensembles of knowledge which both permit and emerge from techniques of control ... part of the armature of power' (p. 326). Discourses are manifestations of power (Harvey, 1996) that constitute particular social realities (Fairclough, 1995; Miller, 1997). Implicit in such an understanding of discourse is the transformation of the human subject (Foucault, 1982) in that discourses constitute both objects and subjects. That is, discourses constitute identities (Fairclough, 1995; Gee, 1999; Gee, 1996) that position the subject in contradictory ways. Such positionings may be homogenizing, representing particular groups of people in ways that privilege the voice of some groups over others. However, these positionings may also provide resources for creativity and differentiation, allowing people to represent themselves as a collective identity (Chouliaraki, 1999). People recognise, or know themselves as certain kinds of people as they 'enact, perform, and recognize different socially, situated identities' (Gee, 1999, p. 86) through discourse. That is, subject positions constructed in discourse constitute identities, not only in terms of the way people are represented by others, but also in terms of the way they represent themselves (Chouliaraki, 1999 #675).

Policy can be analysed as discourse because language conflicts are pivotal in politics as the words that label a problem also constrain the solution and advance certain interests and values (cf. Codd, 1988; Placier, 2002; Poulson, 1996; Taylor, 1997). That is,
policy discourses discursively constrain the possibilities of response as the discourse constructs the topic and appears across a range of text forms and practices at a number of different sites at any one time (Ball, 1998). The policy process, therefore, is a matter of discursive and textual practices (Jones, 1998) in which policy documents are discursively produced (Grundy, 1994). Further, such discursive production of policies takes place within particular contexts whose parameters and particulars have been temporarily (and strategically) settled by discourse(s) in dominance (Gale, 1999, p. 405). Policy texts are seen to constitute nodal points in webs or networks of signifying practice generally; [they are] networks of discourse which constitute a field of power and knowledge (McHoul, 1984, pp. 1–2). There is a need therefore, to problematise language, practice, beliefs and what are current and taken-for-granted assumptions about organisational realities and structures, in order to focus on 'the lacework of meanings and significations' (Gunter, 2001) of the policy process. Such an recognises what Bacchi (2000) calls the 'non-innocence of how "problems" get framed within policy proposals, how the frames will affect what can be thought about and how this affects possibilities for action' (p. 50).

Thus, policy is conceived as a site of discursive struggle between competing but unequal interests (Ball, 1993; Gale, 2003; Taylor, 1997). Consequently, policy represents the temporary settlements between diverse, competing and unequal forces within civil society, within the state itself and between associative discursive regimes (Kenway, 1990, p. 59). That is, policy discourses define what can be said and thought, who can speak, where, when and with what authority (Ball, 1993). Policy discourses on leadership and governance, therefore, define both what quality leadership and governance can and should be, as well as who can and should speak with authority on them.

Educational leadership can understood as discourse also, for the management of meaning is an important instrument of professional and institutional control (Humes, 2000). Further, as Lingard et al. (2003) note, 'educational leadership is an effect of discourses on schooling, rather than a set of practices or dispositions adopted by individuals who occupy certain positions within schools' (p. 143). Such discourses provide the concepts and assumptions that shape commonsense understandings of schools and leadership practices (Humes, 2000). Discourses on leadership, therefore, construct particular professional identities, or versions of being a good leader. In addition, such discourses also create possibilities for leaders to create alternative identities or styles, ways of representing themselves (Fairclough, 2003). Consequently, the professional identity of educational leaders is shaped and constrained within a discursive field constructed through many discourses, including discourses on policy and governance. These discourses form discursive chains or threads in overlapping clusters that work to naturalise, or reify, common sense understandings of educational leaders, privileging a decisive definition of leadership that is generated as meanings are negotiated and contested through particular representations, identities and power relations within the discourse. That is, discourses construct a hegemonic equilibrium that constitutes subjectivities through discursive practices in a complex process of claims and counter claims, of contestation and negotiation, and of the making of discursive links across diverse sites, including discourses of policy and governance. Such discourses become a starting point for investigations into 'the shifting and complex positioning of real people
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or institutions acting out their roles in specific places and over specific periods of time' (Gerwitz, 2000, p. 254). Consequently, investigating leadership as an effect of discourse provides a means of furthering our understanding of how leadership is constituted and how it may be reconstituted (Lingard, 2003). In this way, a discourse analysis of leadership deconstructs the rhetorical practices that are part of education policy-making and management practices (Humes, 2000), drawing attention to the meaning making which goes on in legal and policy debates in order to spend more time theorizing the 'space for challenge' to dominant discourses of education policies and leadership (Bacchi, 2000, p. 55). That is, an exploration of the discursive field of connections between policy, leadership and governance will lead to deeper understandings of educational leadership in current policy contexts and open up spaces to challenge dominant discourses of leadership such as the managerialist discourses discussed above.

Investigating the discursive connections between policy, leadership and governance

The discursive connections between policy documents, leadership and governance will be explored through a transdisciplinary approach that employs Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), but combines CDA with interviews and observations. CDA has been demonstrated to be an eminently suitable tool for critical policy analysis (Thomas, in press 2004; Thomas, 2004, 2002, 2003). Humes (2000) has noted the possibilities of discourse analysis to an interrogation of educational leadership despite such approaches to leadership studies currently being underutilised. CDA investigates discourse related problems in social life, for example, the interrelationships between education policy, leadership and governance. It begins with the identification of the problem, seeking to understand not only the problem, but also 'how it has come to be and what it might become, on the basis of which people may begin to make and remake their lives' (Chouliaraki, 1999, p. 4). A critical discourse analyst rejects the notion of rigid barriers between micro and macro methods of analysis (Fairclough, 1998; 1995), being concerned with several levels of analysis and with the relations between these levels (Fairclough, 2003). A characteristic feature of CDA is the movement between the analyses of texts to that of broad social formations (Kamler, 1997). As a multidimensional analytic method, CDA can include one, or all, of the following: the analysis of texts by the identification of features of the text through which discourses may be traced; the analysis of discursive practices drawn on in the production and interpretation of texts and of the interrelationships between them, that is, an analysis of the interdiscursive nature of texts; and, finally, the analysis of social and cultural practices (Fairclough, 1993, 1995, 1998, 2001). As such, CDA is an eminently suitable methodology to employ for the analysis of discourses on educational policy, leadership and governance as it gives an account both of the diversity within the discursive field, and of the interrelationships between, that is the interdiscursivity of, such discourses. Further, CDA's ability to move between micro, meso and macro levels of analysis will meet the need, noted earlier, for investigations into the interrelationships between the role of macro-structures, such as education policies, in shaping what leaders do, and the individual agency of leaders at the micro level (Spillane, 2004).
Further, in order to avoid reducing social life to discourse (cf. Chouliaraki, 1999; Fairclough, 2003), CDA should be regarded as only one aspect of research into social practices, one that should work together with other social scientific methods to investigate discursive practices in cultural contexts (Fairclough, 2001). That is, the analysis of text and context should follow the principle of exteriority, which requires the analyst to avoid 'burrowing into a discourse looking for its meanings' (Threadgold, 2000, p. 49) but to seek instead to 'explore the conditions of its possibility. Just how is it possible to know that, to think that, to say that' (Threadgold, 2000, p. 49). Therefore, an investigation into the critical analysis of discourses on policy, leadership and governance should be situated within the social contexts in which they are produced (cf. Luke, 2002; Taylor, 1997; Threadgold, 2000), combining a critical discourse analysis of policy, leadership and governance discourses with interviews with educational leaders and observations of the meetings of governing bodies.

The contextual data, gathered from these interviews and observations, will supplement the critical discourse analysis of policy texts and interview transcripts. That is, it enables the elaboration of readings generated or invited by the texts under examination. The contextual data, then, become an additional source for exploring the discourses under investigation. It seeks to access the meanings participants attribute to their understanding of what it is to be a leader within the particular environment constructed by discourses on policy and governance. In particular, the interviews will invite educational leaders to define in their own words how they provide educational leadership and what such leadership means to them (Bell, 2002). That is, the aim is to understand and document the selected participants' understandings of discourses on educational leadership, and of the way these discourses influence their decisions to become a leader and on their leadership practices. In order to do so, a recursive, or in depth interview, model will be used (cf. Miller, 1997; Minichiello, 1995). This model utilises in-depth interviewing techniques that rely on verbal accounts of particular social realities. The focus of the interview is on the meanings given, or the definition of the situation held, by the participant. Such an interview is conceptualised as a special form of conversation that encourages participants to talk about their lives in order to create or construct narrative stories of their social worlds (Holstein, 1997; Miller, 1997; Minichiello, 1995). In this way, local narratives on educational leadership are connected to the critical analysis of discourses on policy and governance.

The way forward
This paper has recognised the links between policy, leadership and governance, links that it identified as being both important and as being in need of further research. It has outlined a proposal for further research that will make a significant contribution to our understandings of the interrelationships between policy, leadership and governance. Drawing on the fields of policy sociology, critical leadership studies and critical discourse theory, the paper has linked insights from the three discipline areas in order to present a new lens for investigating these interrelationships. This paper reconceptualises policy, leadership and governance as discursive practices. It argues that such a conceptual framework will contribute to deeper understandings of how discourses on leadership,
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policy and governance produce and shape leadership practices. That is, the paper established the need both to investigate the interrelationships between policy, leadership and governance in educational organisations and to theorise these interrelationships as discursive practices. Such an investigation would:

- identify current work that makes links between any of the three areas i.e. education policy, leadership and governance
- give an account of how leadership identities and practices are produced and shaped through discourses on policy and governance, leading to a deeper conceptual understanding of the nature of the discursive field in which our perceptions of leadership are constructed
- further understandings of the interrelationships between policy, leadership and governance and of how these interrelationships constrain leadership practices
- further develop theoretical understandings of the discursive nature of policy, leadership and governance, in particular, of the discursive constructions of leaders in policy and governance discourses in both educational and other service organisation sites.

It is believed that this research would result in a better knowledge and understanding of these issues and inform the development of future policies and professional development strategies for educational leaders. It would result also in better understandings of how educational leaders can respond to current policy and governance initiatives for quality and innovation in education. It is hoped also that such understandings would highlight ways in which leaders can challenge the market and managerialist imperatives that drive education policy noted earlier in order to develop truly innovative and equitable leadership practices in education.

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