

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 3-7, 2014.

Against the tide: Enacting respectful student behaviour polices in 'get tough' times

Bruce Johnson and Anna Sullivan

University of South Australia

Citation: Johnson, B. & Sullivan, A. M. (2014) *Against the tide: Enacting respectful student behaviour polices in 'get tough' times*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 3-7, 2014.

Key words: Policy enactment; student behaviour; school leadership

Introduction

Schools are expected to do extraordinary things to educate and socialise each new generation. They largely succeed but not without the attention of numerous interest groups who target schools as prime sites to implement their 'solutions' to perceived social and economic problems in society. While most of the ways schools operate to achieve their mandates are determined by tradition and precedent, there is considerable 'decision making space' (Smith, 1983) for school leaders and teachers to respond to changes in social and political priorities that are manifested in new policy initiatives. Understanding what these educational actors do in that 'space' is the focus of this paper. It is argued that school-level micro-political activity should be the focus of studies that seek to understand the ways schools respond to external calls to deal with the 'problems' of post-industrial societies.

The 'problem', in this case, is the behaviour of students at school. Schools are under increased pressure to 'control' student behaviour to ensure 'good order'. This pressure is mounting in many countries, as there is a growing sense of social and moral panic about students' behaviour in schools (Ball, Maguire, & Braun, 2012). The media reflect society's unease by consistently reporting widespread public and political concern over allegedly negative and deteriorating student behaviour in our schools.

An overview of Australian and international research on student behaviour reveals several recurring themes:

- Orderly schools and, in particular, orderly classrooms, are associated with high student engagement and achievement (Angus, et al., 2009; Creemers, 1994; Fraser, 1998; Hattie, 2003; Lewis, Romi, Qui, & Katz, 2005; Overton & Sullivan, 2008; Sullivan, 2009).

- Ineffective classroom management leads to detrimental effects including student resistance and disengagement, general misbehaviour and, in some cases, school violence (Angus, et al., 2009; R. Lewis, et al., 2005).
- Classroom management is reported by teachers as their greatest concern, often leading to teacher stress, job dissatisfaction and early exit from the profession (Australian Education Union, 2008; Blase, 1986; Friedman, 1995; Ingersoll, 2001).

These and other studies clearly establish student behaviour at school as a problematic and contested field of inquiry in which many interest groups have a stake. Not surprisingly, discourse about student behaviour frequently moves beyond this research base to reflect deep ideological differences about, for example, the status of children in society, the role of schools and families in teaching children to be sociable and cooperative, and what actions are seen as appropriate and legitimate when ‘disciplining’ children and adolescents (Johnson, Oswald, & Whittington, 1994). The intrusion of overtly ideological protagonists into the field of student behaviour has presented schools with a major conundrum – how to undertake the messy and complex work needed to make sense of, mediate, and enact behaviour policies from the plethora of options open to them (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2012, p. 3).

The inadequacies of logico-deductive approaches to policy implementation

Before embarking on an analysis of the micro-political strategies and tactics used by schools to ‘do policy work’, it is important to expose the fallacies inherent in bureaucratic conceptions of policy development and implementation. The logic of this view of policy implementation is presented in Figure 1.

Example of Policy Implementation	Application to student behaviour
1. Define what is problematic	Disruptive and disengaged student behaviour
2. Identify what causes the problem	Students’ inability to self-regulate their behaviour (among other things)
3. Decide what to change	Inadequate regulatory regimes in schools
4. Develop new policies to bring about change	Increase suspension and exclusion powers for school principals
5. Issue the policy and mandate its implementation	Principals implement the policy
6. Observe the effects of the policy	Collect suspension and exclusion data
7. Modify the policy to improve outcomes	Make the policy more specific, clearer, more concrete, and less ambiguous

Figure 1: Application of a model of policy Intervention in the area of behaviour management at school

Kaufmann (1987) identifies a major flaw in the predominant conception of policy implementation. He believes it to be predicated upon a flawed causal model of action in which key events remain in

an unexplained, unopened 'Black Box'. However, without attending to the complexities of the contents of this 'Black Box', the dynamics of policy enactment cannot be fully understood, their failures cannot be adequately unexplained, and their potential to address serious social and educational problems is diminished. By focussing on the technology of policy development and implementation, and largely ignoring the perceptions, intentions, and abilities of those charged with enacting policies (i.e., school leaders and teachers), the model fails to account for what actually happens in schools. Without challenging the basic assumptions of the predominant model of intervention, policy makers may be left facing what House (1974: 2) calls 'an enormous conundrum' - trying to understand why so much effort directed toward policy development and compliance, produces so little change.

The study reported in this paper confirmed that alternate ways of conceptualising the dynamics of policy enactment are more appropriate than the predominant approach to policy work outlined by Kaufmann (1987) and critiqued by Ball, et al. (2012). In essence, the predominant model shares the same problems of 'fidelity' orientations to curriculum implementation (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977) – it is overly rationalistic and managerial, and largely ignores the multiple perspectives of those involved in the process of policy enactment.

Policy work

Policy work done in schools is complex and messy. Drawing on the work of Ball, Maguire and Braun (2012) we understand policy as a composite of directives, legal requirements, procedures and local practices. Schools receive policies and then 'do policy work', that is, they construct, translate, interpret and enact policies (Braun, Ball, Maguire & Hoskins, 2011). 'Policy is always contested and changing (unstable) – always 'becoming'' (Ball et al., 2012: 119). Every school is a unique context with 'actors' who assume various roles in doing this policy work.

Ball et al. (2012) found that various contextual dimensions influence the enactment of policy. These contextual dimensions include:

1. Situated Context which involves the locale, school history and population;
2. Professional Cultures which encompasses the school ethos, teachers' values and 'policy management';
3. Material Contexts which includes staffing, budgets and buildings; and

4. External Contexts which takes into account the broader policy context and system support.

Additionally, Ball et al. (2012) found that in doing this policy work, all actors do not assume an equal role. Some actors are positioned to take more responsibility for leadership and others avoid it. The descriptions of various policy actors and the work they tend to do is useful to understand the complexity of policy work in schools. The policy actors Ball et al. (2012) identified are presented in Figure 2.

Policy Actors	Policy Work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/supporting, facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Production of texts, artifacts and events
Critics	Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter discourses
Receivers	Coping, defending and dependency

Figure 2 Policy actors in schools and their work (adapted from Ball et al., 2012)

The policy context

In Australia, the policy context related to behaviour in schools is complex. The Australian schooling system consists of three sectors: government/public schools (66% students attend), Catholic schools (20% students attend) and independent schools (14% students attend) (Gonski, et al. 2011). There are two main levels of government responsible for schooling; federal and state/territory governments. Most schools in Australia are part of a particular schooling system which has its “own common ownership or ethos” and “administrative arrangements” (Gonski, et al. 2011: 4). However, the independent schools tend not to be associated with a system, but are rather individual entities. Accordingly, schools in Australia are subject to different policy directives but within a National regulatory regime that ties Federal funding to all schools to performance outcomes.

Australian schools are required to implement or enact school discipline-related policies which take into account various state, territory and national legislation and action plans. In South Australia, this includes the Education Act and regulations under the Act (South Australian Parliament, 1972); the Equal Opportunity Act (South Australian Parliament, 1984); the Disability Discrimination Act (Commonwealth of Australia, 1992); the National Safe Schools Framework (Student Learning and Support Services Taskforce, 2005); and the Child Protection Act (South Australian Parliament, 1993). Given this legislative context, Ball et al. (2009) suggested that schools adopt a 'smorgasbord approach' to policy development where they draw selectively on a range of directives, policies, legal requirements, procedures, and local practices – 'a profusion of ideas' – that have emerged over the past few years in response to problems like truancy, child abuse, bullying and school defiance. These are then rendered into and enacted as particular programs and initiatives at the school level (Ball, Braun, and Maguire 2009).

Policies can complement and/or contradict each other. When doing policy work, schools have to interpret, translate and enact the plethora of policies they are expected to attend to. 'The policy texts that schools produce and the enactments generated are complex, but sometimes 'untidy' co-constructions – sophisticated, ramshackle and flawed' (Ball et al., 2012: 119). Furthermore, this work is complicated by the numerous actors both from within and outside the school. Making sense of policy is influenced by the ways in which schools and actors understand what is meant by behaviour and discipline. The challenge for schools is to interpret, translate and enact the plethora of policies so that they complement rather than contradict each other.

The micro-political perspective

The enactment of policy in schools is complex work that involves a 'rich "underlife" and micropolitics ... [which] means that policies will be differently interpreted (or 'read') and differently translated and worked into and against current practices, sometimes simultaneously.' (Maguire et al. 2010: 157).

Micropolitics acknowledges schools as intrinsically political organisations in which teachers and school leaders use both formal and informal power to achieve their goals (Vanderlinde & Kelchtermans, 2013). As Christensen writes,

The micro-political perspective emphasises how individuals or 'actors' within organisations interact with others with differing interests, goals, status, power and authority. Members of the school are understood to be political actors who

employ strategic power to pursue their interests in their daily work. While micro-political dimensions are influenced by the formal structures of the school, micro-political theory generally gives greater importance to the power of individuals and groups, based on their personalities, expertise, and access to information and resources (Christensen, 2013, p. 75).

In this study, we drew on insights from studies of the micro-politics of schools (Ball, 1987; Blase, 1991; Johnson, 2004) to help unravel the complex processes schools use to develop student behaviour policies and practices in a social and political climate characterised by greater 'outside' interest in student behaviour.

The study

The study reported here addressed the following research questions:

- How do schools interpret, reconcile and make decisions about what student behaviour research, legislation and advice to consider when developing local student behaviour policies?
- What micropolitical skills and understandings do they employ to do this work?

This study drew on Ball, Braun and Maguire's (2009; 2012) recent study of the processes used by four English secondary schools to construct and enact student behaviour policies at the local level. It built on Ball, et al.'s (2009, p. 1) findings that student behaviour policies:

- are 'enacted in particular and distinct institutional contexts with their own histories';
- at the school level, are 'an ensemble of issues/fragments, principles, directives/imperatives, procedures/practices which are messy and complex';
- 'are very much a collective enterprise'; and
- are developed through 'sophisticated interpretations and translations of policy texts into action' at the local level.

These policy development and enactment processes were investigated using in-depth case study methods within the South Australian context. Five schools were purposefully selected using the following criteria (based on Johnson, 2004, p. 271):

- evidence of success in developing and implementing policies, programs and initiatives that create a school environment in which 'students can engage in meaningful academic learning and ... enhance student social and moral growth' (Wubbels, 2007, p. 267);
- openness of members of the school's leadership team to discuss their thinking and decision making about the development of student behaviour policies;
- diversity and representativeness across the schools – care was taken to include schools at different levels and with different organisational arrangements.

We drew on our experience working with schools (Johnson, 2004, 2008; Johnson, Peters, & Williams, 1999) to identify the local micro-political work of individuals and groups involved in the development and enactment of local student behaviour policies. This involved collecting four kinds of data (based on Ball, et al., 2009, p. 2):

1. contextual information about schools;
2. policy texts – State, District, and school-developed;
3. observations of meetings, staff training and development activities, informal discussions, and the school physical environment; and
4. semi-structured and focus-group interviews with school leaders, teachers, and groups of students who had an interest in local student behaviour policies.

As most of the data was qualitative, we used the innovative qualitative data management and analysis program NVivo 10 to code and analyse a large amount of textual data.

Data analysis showed that there were some common themes across the case studies about how schools enacted student behaviour policies. The most dominant themes were:

- *Rejecting deficit views of students:* Leaders adopted discursive practices that continually rejected deficit beliefs about students.
- *Promoting core values:* Leaders promoted core values that acted as key organising ideas and guided policy work.
- *Emphasising student engagement rather than behaviour management:* Leaders consistently identified student engagement with learning as being more important than targeted behaviour management strategies.
- *Changing the physical environment.* Leaders recognised the link between features of the physical learning environment and student engagement.
- *Recruiting and retaining compatible and skilled staff.* Leaders used recruitment and performance management strategies to appoint and retain staff who held compatible values and beliefs about how to treat students.

Theme 1: Rejecting deficit views of students

In three of the five schools studied, school leaders assertively interrupted teachers who ‘talked down’ their students and their families. They knew that ‘the ways we think and talk about a subject influence and reflect the ways we act in relation to that subject’ (Karlberg, 2005, p. 1). This basic premise of discourse theory (Foucault, 1972) was well understood by these school leaders who effectively banned ‘blame the victim’ explanations of student disengagement at school. They strategically shifted the focus of thinking about student behaviour from internal deficiencies in students or shortcomings in their family life to concentrate on what the school could offer its

students. The following conversation with one of the school leaders exemplifies the strong commitment he had to rejecting deficit thinking about the students at his school.

You know where we're located and there's all these kinds of assumptions about the low SES northern suburbs, ethnicity, and 'English as an Additional Language-ness' and all of that, all of which we reject. I don't discern any difference in the aspirations of parents for their children here or for the students of themselves. I've been rejecting that for 12 years, and I think it's really getting across now. I do speak about this sometimes, but I never want to play that card, the 'down and out card', and I refuse to do that.

This year we enrolled 162 new five year olds, 48% of whom are EAL (English as an Additional Language learners) and a high percentage have all these other issues. So if we were going to excuse bad behaviour or indifferent learning outcomes there's plenty of scope there, but we don't go down that track. We don't see this diversity as a deficit.

We changed the conversation from a deficit view of the child and their family, and the community, all that blame factor, the EAL (English as an Additional Language status), and the northern suburbs, we put that all aside. When I first came here, people said to me, 'you just don't understand this community', and I said to them, 'well, I don't think *you* understand'.

So I think we've changed that conversation by deliberately just saying, 'hold that stuff about your deficits talk, suspend your disbelief, and focus on the positive actions we can do, and see what happens'. (Principal, St Xavier's Primary School)

Another school leader also recognised the discursive power of language when she 'interrupted' conversations about the children at her school that referred to them as 'feral' and 'naughty'.

So now I would say that the conversations I hear are not at the 'naughty child' level which is what they were at one stage. That's what they used to get called – 'those naughty feral children'. 'Feral' was used all the time for our kids. (Principal, Ridgewater Primary School)

These are powerful and assertive statements which serve to marginalise and discredit defeatist thinking and action in schools identified as socio-economically disadvantaged. By explicitly defining the way teachers could publicly talk about children and their families, the leadership teams effectively dismantled the negative attributional thinking that previously permeated 'at-risk' discourses at the schools (Valencia, 2010). This served as a powerful micro-political strategy that promoted the interests of reformist school leaders whose mission at their schools was to challenge damaging beliefs about students and their families, and to promote more hopeful views as the foundation for positive action.

Theme #2: Promoting core values

As well as countering deficit discourses, school leaders consistently used the framing power of slogans, mottos and mantras to project the values they wished to influence the ways teachers interacted with their students. These are summarised in figure 2 below.

Slogan, Motto or Mantra	Values
School A (Bethlehem College)	
'Firm in principle, gentle in manner' 'Rigour, relevance and respect'	Compassion, respect, justice and fairness, and having a fair go.
School B (Arlington Park Primary School)	
'We are here for the kids first and foremost' 'The kids come first'	Respect, resilience, responsibility, honesty, community
School C (Ridgewater Primary School)	
'A learning community working happily together in a safe and caring environment'	Respect, excellence, acceptance, cooperation and honesty.
School E (Blue Cliff High School)	
Respect of self and others	'4 Rs': relationships, relevance, rigour and resilience

As discursive practices, these public and repeated declarations of what was valued at the schools provided a common mechanism through which school leaders managed to persuade most teachers to accept their educational values. In these cases, the discourses of school mottos and slogans helped construct particular 'attitudes, opinions and beliefs in such a way as to make those beliefs appear 'natural' and 'common sense' (Simpson & Mayr, 2013, p. 3). As one of the school principals noted,

As a Christian school we have got values – compassion, respect, justice and fairness, and a fair go. There is a list of 10 values that we would hold as part of the school but we don't have them on posters around the place, *it's just the way that we are* (emphasis added). (Principal, Bethlehem College)

Some leadership groups made explicit links between their core values and the kinds of teacher behaviours they deemed to be consistent with those values. In an initial interview, one principal explained his school's 'no yelling at kids' policy:

We didn't even look at the behaviour management policy except for one thing - we had a no yelling policy with staff. No staff is ever allowed to yell in one of the

faces of the kids. So, yeah, that notion of staff getting into kids' faces and yelling at them and doing that power thing doesn't exist anymore. (Principal, Blue Cliff High School)

In a later interview the principal was asked about the significance of such a small but symbolic 'rule' for teachers. He replied that,

It's a shame that we had to do that as we hoped that it would be implicit at this school. But I guess there are still some teachers who believe that getting in a kid's face and yelling at them is the way they should behave. We knew right from day one that if we were going to form those positive relationships with kids, then no matter how badly they were behaving, you shouldn't yell at them. So the blanket 'no yelling' rule made a statement to all staff very early on. (Principal, Blue Cliff High School)

The use of catchy slogans and trite school mottos has been criticised on a number of levels. As Martin observes, mottos 'conjure up unsavoury images of advertising jingles, hypocritical political slogans, and superficial minds adrift in clichés' (Martin, 2011, p. 49). Yet their capacity to crystallise attitudes, elicit resolve, and guide conduct is well illustrated in the research schools.

A further example of this process of encapsulating a core value in an easily remembered mantra was provided by a school leader who recounted an incident involving a teacher who had 'given-up' on one of his students.

I had a situation yesterday where I sent a year 9 teacher an email about a boy who was behind in his subjects. He sent me an email back saying, 'I've had enough of working with him. I've given up enough of my personal time working with him'. Well that wasn't the end of that conversation. I went back to that teacher and said, 'No, actually that's not the end point. You can't just sign off on a kid like that. It doesn't fit in with how we want to operate. It's not how we do things here'. I can understand the frustration from the teacher's point of view, but someone said to me once in a previous school, 'When is enough, enough?' 'Never!' is the answer. No, you just keep working on it. You find a key. (Bethlehem College)

Finally, it is worth noting that the schools promoted *particular* core values that defined their commitment to treat students respectfully and in ways that maintained their human dignity. This is significant as it marks a point of separation from many 'behaviour management' regimes (Canter & Canter, 2002) which elevate the rights of teachers to 'teach and control' children over the rights of children to be treated humanely and respectfully.

The source of these core values can be traced, in several schools, to their Christian ethos. One school leader (Head of Middle School) was quite explicit about the link between her shared Christian beliefs about the importance and uniqueness of each human being, and the ways she treats students.

I guess people who haven't been in a Christian school before don't understand that the basis of the whole relationship with students is that each student is treated as a special human being, you know, that they're created unique. Someone said to me very early in my time in a Christian school, 'you know Jesus died for them too and that Jesus died for them just as much as he died for you

and me'. So that brings a responsibility for us to treat them in a certain way.
(Bethlehem College)

In the case of teachers and leaders working in Government schools, the source of their core values is less easily traced. However, there is considerable resonance between the core values espoused by these leaders and the long standing principles underpinning the Progressive Education movement (Dewey, 1897).

Theme #3: Emphasising student engagement rather than behaviour management

In a recent Australian study of teachers' views on student behaviour in classrooms, Sullivan, Johnson, Owens and Conway (2014) found that most teachers attributed the causes of student disengagement and unproductive behaviour to the students themselves or to inadequacies in their home environments. They rarely acknowledged the importance of curriculum or pedagogic factors in influencing students' in-class behaviour. Yet these contextual factors were the focus of the leaders of the schools that participated in the study reported here. Most leaders quite deliberately changed the focus of their attention away from student behaviour and its 'management' towards an examination of the dynamics of student engagement. As one of the leaders said,

We didn't set out with the aim to improve behaviour. We aimed to improve kids' education and as a result of what we've done we've seen the behaviour improve markedly. We have seen the behaviour improve because the kids' learning is personalised, they have autonomy over their work, they can choose what they work on, when they work on it, who they work with, and where they work. (Principal, Blue Cliff High School)

He went on to report that there had been a 97% reduction in students being sent from their classes for behavioural reasons.

By changing the gaze from students' overt, presenting behaviours to focus more on learning contexts, the curriculum, and teachers' pedagogical choices, this school leader quite deliberately re-framed the attributional explanations that were used to make sense of student engagement at his school. In doing so, he and his staff rejected approaches to 'behaviour management' that used the technologies of coercion and inducement (i.e., regimes of punishments and rewards) preferring, instead, to recognise and take some responsibility for affecting a broader range of factors that impact on student engagement. This meant 'turning a blind eye' to policy directives and student discipline procedures that were designed to 'control' student behaviour. As Ball, et al. (2011, p. 615) write, 'policies such as these can ... be ignored, or underplayed or sidelined, they can be spaces of delay or neglect or creative re- packaging'.

At another school, the leadership group employed an external consultant to help staff identify different 'world views of teaching' and how they affect teachers' practice. They encouraged their

teachers to identify their own perspectives and to consider the implications of subscribing to one of the following ‘world views’.

Content and Control which is a kind of more traditional perspective with high organisation, a ‘this is what we are going to do’ approach with not a lot of negotiation.

Relationships and Rescue which is very much about everyone feeling good, where there’s a good relationship between the teacher and the students, and there is an understanding that ‘if you don’t hassle me, then I won’t hassle you. But no one is really challenged.

Evolving Pedagogy where there is a lot of negotiated learning, building on prior knowledge and concepts, lots of interaction, and a lot of teacher responding to things to form a community of learners within the classroom.

(Leader, St Xavier’s Primary School)

They did this to discredit ‘coerce and control’ approaches to teaching, and to challenge ‘softer’, ‘feel good’, relationships-based approaches that lacked rigour, challenge, and accountability. As was the case in the previous school, these leaders quite overtly identified teacher pedagogy as a key determinant of student engagement:

If you have pedagogy that engages them then you will have less behaviour problems in the classroom so they should work on that. Less mat time, sitting, listening, kids being an audience to the teacher (‘sage on the stage’) and more getting your hands dirty through student directed enquiry.

(St Xavier’s Primary School, Co-ordinator)

In summary, these principals and senior leadership team members acted as ‘narrators’, ‘translators’ and ‘entrepreneurs’ (to use Ball, et al.’s terms) to select, promote, and create new narratives about their preferred approaches to promoting student engagement. In enacting these roles, they marginalised, ridiculed, and selectively ignored alternative policies and procedures that were overly behaviouristic and control oriented.

Theme #4: Changing the physical environment

The buildings and physical spaces in schools are strongly regulated by external funding arrangements and design specifications that are seemingly beyond the sphere of influence of most of those who work, play and study in them. Yet an emerging literature on the impact of the built environment on learning and behaviour (see Higgins, Hall, Wall, Woolner & McCaughey, 2005; Victoria Institute of Teaching, 2008) provides the rationale for local action to change the physical conditions that affect student engagement and teacher pedagogy.

The schools involved in this study had all made significant changes to their built environment. These included:

- Removing doors to promote greater student movement
- Designing new learning spaces that enabled students to work collaboratively in groups
- Replacing walls with glass panels to make classroom more open and public spaces
- Removing traditional classroom furniture (desks and chairs) and replacing it with café-style seating
- Installing Wi-Fi to enable students to collaborate on-line
- Designating common spaces for student gatherings and celebrations

(see photos below)



www.photovisi.com



www.photovisi.com



www.photovisi.com

From a policy enactment perspective, these interventions into the previously tightly controlled area of classroom and building design were quite bold and challenging initiatives. While some school leaders used formal funding approval processes to achieve their building programs, others acted unilaterally in defiance of directives ‘from above’. For example, one school leadership team enlisted the students to construct new furniture (benches with cushions) and to paint classrooms in brighter colours. Another commissioned a private architect to design a new school hall that exceeded the size specifications set by ‘the system’. The school leader paid for the new building by diverting funds from other areas of the school budget. These entrepreneurial initiatives demonstrate the power of local school leaders to defy external policies and regulations to achieve the teaching and learning outcomes that they and their senior leadership teams valued. The focus here is on these key actors and the ways in which they ‘work upon one another and themselves in ‘doing policy’’ (Ball, et al., 2011, p. 611).

Theme #5: Recruiting and retaining compatible and skilled staff

The final theme we wish to discuss relates to the strategies used by school leaders to recruit and retain ‘enthusiasts’ who shared core values about how to treat students. While staffing policies and practices differ between systems in Australia (independent and church schools have more autonomy than government schools), it is salient to reflect on how some school leaders ‘bent the rules’ to circumvent the tight staffing policy strictures imposed on them. They did this dangerous policy work to ‘get the right people’ (Principal, Mount Barker). Briefly, the three leaders of the government schools,

- postponed declaring staff vacancies to prevent ‘the system’ from appointing teachers who did not share the school’s core values
- described teaching positions tightly and specifically to target ‘compatible’ applicants
- advertised leadership positions and appointed ‘compatible’ leaders
- rejected ‘incompatible’ applicants (even if they were incumbents)
- utilised external support (i.e., staffing officers and regional/district/area directors or superintendents)

They undertook this work to circumvent the constraining staffing policies of a centralised system that was largely unresponsive to the quite specific needs of local schools. They justified their subterfuge by invoking higher order commitments to core values. As the narrators of anti-bureaucratic stories about the inappropriateness of centralised staffing policies, they helped to normalise and legitimate what, in other circumstances, would be seen as defiant rule breaking rather than ‘creative’ and selective policy enactment.

Conclusions

In this study, schools enacted behaviour policy as a ‘collective enterprise’ (Ball, et al, 2011: 9). School leaders, guided by clear principles and values, orchestrated the collective efforts of staff.

An enduring commitment to reject deficit views provided the essential rationale for active policy work and micropolitical activity. Continually emphasising student engagement rather than behaviour

management helped focus policy work towards promoting attention and discourse away from student behaviour towards an engaging and caring approach to teaching and learning.

School leaders in this study recognised the importance of contextual dimensions (Ball et al., 2012) in influencing policy work. They actively worked on these contextual dimensions to help achieve a collective policy approach. Principals were extremely micropolitically active and savvy in adopting multiple policy actor roles, often simultaneously. They carefully employed and enlisted enthusiasts to facilitate policy work, which aligned to their philosophical aspirations.

Finally, in these schools, behaviour related policy was enacted in ways that were largely consistent with the philosophical aspirations of their leaders. These aspirations are not new (see Slee, 1995) but this study contributes to a greater understanding of how school leaders use micropolitics to do their policy work. More importantly, this study provides a deeper understanding of how school leaders and teachers interpret, translate and enact behaviour policies in a policy context full of contradictions and competing demands.

References

- Angus, M., McDonald, T., Ormond, C., Rybarczyk, R., Taylor, A., & Winterton, A. (2009). *Trajectories of classroom behaviour and academic progress: A study of student engagement with learning*. Mount Lawley, Western Australia: Edith Cowan University.
- Australian Education Union. (2008). *New Educators Survey 2008. Results and Report*
- Ball, S., Braun, A., & Maguire, M. (2009). *Disciplinary texts: A policy analysis of national and local discipline policies*. Paper presented at the British Educational Research Association Annual Conference, Manchester.
- Ball, S., Hoskins, K., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2011). Disciplinary texts: A policy analysis of national and local behaviour policies. *Critical Studies in Education* 52 (1), 1-14.
- Ball, S., Maguire, M., & Braun, A. (2012) *How Schools do Policy: Policy Enactments in Secondary Schools*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Blase, J. J. (1986). A qualitative analysis of sources of teacher stress: consequences for performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 23, 23-40.
- Braun, A., Ball, S. J., Maguire, M., & Hoskins, K. (2011). Taking context seriously: towards explaining policy enactments in the secondary school. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(4), 585-596.
- Canter, L. & Canter, M. (2002) *Assertive Discipline - New and Revised: Positive Behavior Management for Today's Classroom*. Carter and Associates.
- Creemers, B. P. M. (1994). *The effective classroom*. London: Cassell.
- Dewey, J. (1897) My Pedagogic Creed. *The School Journal*, Volume LIV, Number 3 (January 16), pp. 77-80.
- Foucault, M. (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. London: Tavistock.
- Fraser, B. J. (1998). Science learning environments: assessment, effects and determinants. In B. J. Fraser & K. Tobin (Eds.), *International Handbook of Science Education*. London: Kluwer Academic.
- Friedman, I. A. (1995). Student behavior patterns contributing to teacher burnout. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 88, 281-289.
- Gonski, D., Boston, K., Greiner, K., Lawrence, C., Scales, B., & Tannock, P. (2011). Review for funding for schooling-Final report. Canberra, ACT: Commonwealth of Australia.

- Hattie, J. (2003). *Teachers make a difference: What is the research evidence?* Paper presented at the Australian Council for Educational Research Annual Conference on Building Teacher Quality, Melbourne, Australia.
- Higgins, S., Hall, E., Wall, K., Woolner, P., & McCaughey, C. (2005) *The Impact of School Environments: A Review of the Literature*. London: Design Council.
- Ingersoll, R. M. (2001). Teacher turnover and teacher shortages: an organizational analysis. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38, 499-534.
- Johnson, B. (2004). Local school micropolitical agency: An antidote to new managerialism. *School Leadership and Management*, 24(3), 267-286.
- Johnson, B. (2008). Implementing a Child Protection Curriculum: Lessons from a South Australian Trial. *Journal of Student Wellbeing*, 2(1), 1-19.
- Johnson, B., Oswald, M., & Whittington, V. (1994). Teachers' views on school discipline: A theoretical framework. *Cambridge Journal of Education*, 24(2), 261-276.
- Johnson, B., Peters, J., & Williams, D. (1999). Academics Working with Schools: Revealing the Tensions. *Journal of Education for Teaching*, 25(2), 123-133.
- Karlberg, M. (2005). The power of discourse and the discourse of power: pursuing peace through discourse intervention. *International Journal of Peace Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 1, pp. 1-23.
- Lewis, R., Romi, S., Qui, X., & Katz, J. (2005). Teachers' classroom discipline and student misbehaviour in Australia, China and Israel. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21, 729-741.
- Maguire, M., Ball, S., & Braun, A. (2010). Behaviour, classroom management and student 'control': Enacting policy in the English secondary school. *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, 20(2), 153-170.
- Martin, M. (2011) Of Mottos and Morals. *International Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 49-60.
- Overton, L. Y., & Sullivan, A. M. (2008). *Non-compliance in a democratic classroom: Is it prevalent?* Paper presented at the Australian Association for Research in Education International Education Research Conference, Brisbane, Qld.
- Slee, R. (1995). *Changing theories and practices of discipline*. London/Washington. The Falmer Press.
- Smith, D. (1983). On the Concept of Perceived Curriculum Decision-Making Space. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 3(1), 21-30.
- Sullivan, A. M. (2009). How can teachers enable students to become empowered? *Curriculum Perspectives*, 29(1), 53-63.
- Sullivan, A. M., Johnson, B., Owens, L., & Conway, R. (2014). Punish Them or Engage Them? Teachers' Views of Unproductive Student Behaviours in the Classroom. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 39(6) pp 43-56.
- Valencia, R. (2010) *Dismantling Contemporary Deficit Thinking*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Victorian Institute of Teaching (2008) *The Effects of the Physical Environment on Teaching and Learning*. Melbourne: Victorian Institute of Teaching.
- Wubbels, T. (2007). Classroom management around the world. In M. Hayden, J. Levy & J. Thompson (Eds.), *Handbook of Research in International Education*. London: Sage.