Managing educational change:

Issues, actions and examples

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In this article we hope to provide comments on managing education through policy research and analysis, drawing on our work on a major national post-compulsory contemporary curriculum reform that occurred during the 1990s. In doing so, we briefly revisit dominant policy forms and the assumptions and intentions that drove much educational thinking during the decade before. We make reference to the critique of this work and provide some details of our own positions - as policy adviser and policy evaluator - through reflections on the processes and procedures of Australia's Key Competency Projects [KCP] which officially concluded at the end of 1996.

The experiences we build on in this paper are grounded in a set of policy processes that are currently impacting on policy decisions in a number of contexts throughout Australia. These processes offer a way forward for future policy development underpinned by practitioner-based research. Finally, we discuss measures of quality and equity which we believe should be at the forefront of deciding which policy initiatives are most worthwhile to pursue in managing educational change.

DEFINING ‘POLICY’

At the macro level, policy is represented as decisions that mandate action. A change in policy is intended to result in new ways of doing things that result in improved practices or more efficient use of resources. Our interest is in the intersection between macro and micro policy, that is, policy events that have systemic implications and were intended to significantly change existing local practices. In the school sector, this type of policy decision usually involves changes to such things as resource levels and distribution, curriculum content and structure, assessment regimes and reporting methods. Any of these would represent a significant new policy footprint.
There is evidence to support the view that policy decisions frequently do not result in the intended changes to existing practice (Ball, 1990, 1994; Ball, Maguire and Macrae, 2000; Crump, 1993a, 1993b, 1997, 1999, 2001). In the worst cases there appears to be a policy-practice dichotomy that requires practitioners to adjust to a work environment characterised by paradox and ambiguity. This phenomenon results in learners having to negotiate differences between the espoused policy rhetoric of the organisation and the practices that are modelled within it. We recognise, however, that policy paradox and ambiguity are not unique to educational settings.

In our view, effective macro policy would result in changes to practice that are consistent with the changes desired by the decision makers. In educational settings we would expect that the most significant changes are intended to improve the educational outcomes for the majority of students with the greatest benefits flowing to those for whom the system has traditionally worked least well.

POLICY HISTORY

Educational reforms and legislative initiatives in many countries during the 1980s represented unfulfilled possibilities for changes to the patterns of schooling because they were undertaken ‘back to front’. This is an important point given the depth, breadth and magnitude of reforms to education undertaken as governments worldwide turned to schools and training to address economic as well as traditional social objectives (Marginson, 1997). Management of educational change was seen to be the key to measureable, even quantitative ‘outcomes’.

We suggest that in deciding the effectiveness of managing education better, the question becomes the extent to which the philosophical and ideological basis of earlier reforms provided adequate understanding of what problems these new policies were addressing. Further, we are concerned about the extent to which educational initiatives in the 1990s incorporated the perceived and real problems of teachers and students (along with families and communities) and, where applicable, whether this incorporation was tokenistic and rhetorical, or integral to a well-founded and resourced policy process.

In airing our doubts about the educational thinking that underpinned earlier policy initiatives we acknowledge that school practices unequally distribute power between groups. This point was driven home for Australia through popular texts such as Making the Difference (Connell, Ashenden, Kessler & Dowsett, 1983), Running Twice as Hard (Connell, White & Johnston, 1991) and Teachers and Class (Harris, 1982); for the USA through, for example, Schooling in Capitalist America (Bowles and Gintis, 1976); and, for the UK through Schooling and Capitalism (Dale, Esland & MacDonald, 1976).

It is now clear to us that unequal distributions of power also need to be understood as unequal distributions within groups. For example, inequitable structures of power exist between groups of students and between groups of teachers and administrators. In the latter case, teachers tend to be disadvantaged through the further imbalance of power
they often experience from the exercise of less dominant policy and management perspectives. While this is not a new insight, we argue that this knowledge has not penetrated policy making to any marked degree, and that it should.

Before looking forward, which is our main task, we will briefly report on some policy ghosts. Our task, as expressed by Ball (1994, p.11), is not intended “to minimise or underestimate the effects of policy”; rather, we hope to problematise them to better understand the ways we can improve policy inputs, processes and outcomes.

POLICY INTERVENTION

Educational reforms and legislative initiatives during the 1980s and early 1990s imposed new political solutions on to problems experienced in educational settings. Two decades ago, Miller (1980) argued (against the trend) that interventionist policies - in that case on gender - embody deficit hypotheses which involve a culture-centric paternalism and possible psychic violence to the doubly-bound “disadvantaged” dependent female.

Our analysis of educational policies similarly challenges the use of interventionist theories and practices which give a too simplistic account of policy invisibility and/or lack confidence in the professionalism of teachers. For example, past policy approaches have tended to be contested on the basis of economy or ideology but with what impact on producing a fairer curriculum? Legislative and policy texts are multi-faceted: firstly, they express sets of competing political intentions and act as resources for national/state debate; second, they form a stated policy direction that has been endorsed by government; third, they act as micro-political resources for educators, consultants, parents and others in the community, to interpret, ignore or resist during “implementation” (Crump, 1993a, pp. 31-38).

Policy implementation has too often isolated practitioners to receptive and passive roles that build upon each other in an aging teacher workforce to breed cynicism and resistance to new initiatives. In the enigmatic reform of the 1980s, there was a need to assert the role of educators in the policy process that, we argue, was not met. The promotion of desirable change in education needed to allow teachers to develop more powerful problem-solving strategies. Managing education in this way hinges on addressing the real and perceived problems teachers and students experience from a starting point which acknowledges that teachers and students might already be active constructors of policy solutions to their problems.

In the 1960s and 1970s educational policy decision-making occurred in what Ball (1990, p. 7) called a ‘triangle of tension’. This is a triangle of producer control but one with teachers at the blunt end. Many interventions into this triangle during the 1980s were spurred on by criticism of schools from conservative forces which attempted to make educators more accountable to the economic arena of the state through legislation. These functional and structural changes were intended to alter teaching and schools in a mechanistic and predetermined fashion (Fidler & Bowles, 1989, p. 18), but did not.
The push for change in education through legislation occurred across western/developed democracies regardless of the politics of the government. However, it is possible to challenge the concept that the new discourses represented in nation-state policy and legislation (and frequently adopted in school-level policy statements) were adapted into new practices in schools. While most schools reflected the intent of policy, they recontextualised policy intentions through policy-in-use.

There are often two schools in one: an official school as formally recorded in documents and the informal school as it exists in unofficial daily practice. The same can be said for early education, for technical and further education and for higher education. There is thus an interesting meeting ground in these sites between macro and micro politics that has rarely been exploited in managing education policy. As Ball (1994, p. 10) argues, policy is part of the workings of the state but it is also:

"text and action, words and deeds, it is what is enacted as well as what is intended. Policies are always complicated insofar as they relate to or map on to the ‘wild profusion’ of local practice."

Given the evidence that policy decisions frequently do not result in the intended changes to existing practice, the management of educational change needs to be aware of the policy-practice dichotomy that requires practitioners to adjust to a work environment characterised by paradox and ambiguity. Thus our view is that the 1990s was a period of debate about policy that involved the partial redefinition of educational terms such as ‘participation’, ‘equity’, ‘excellence’ and ‘reform’ (see Burbules, 1997) which in turn led to sharpened politics of difference and identity (see Marginson, 1997).

The late 1990s was a period of high policy expectations for intended reforms. Yet the number of reports and the rate of change - coupled with ambiguities, contradictions, duality of purposes and unreconciled tensions - meant that too much policy continued to be felt in schools problematically, or sometimes not at all. We argue that while policy research is able to acquire and convey ideas, it should also be able to gain and add meaning through being used as a shared experience and joint action during the policy-making process. This brings us to the issue of policy models.

**POLICY MODELS**

Before looking at one possible solution to this dilemma, we want to explore the predominant policy research tools available. The process of conducting research on, or analysis of, public policy is a fundamental government responsibility linked to issues of accountability as well as public interest, private rights and social justice. The general approach of government is to tackle a social problem in order to determine pragmatic, action-oriented recommendations for alleviating that problem or, at least, communicating a sense of recognition of the problem and a political will to solve it.

As early as 1984, Majchrzak argued that without a general understanding of the policy process, policy researchers could not begin to provide decision-makers with useful information. Since the 1980s, however, one concern in policy work has been the issue of
providing this information without any control over how it is used, whose interests are being served and what that means for research independence when much of what policy reviewers now do is commissioned and thus confidential to the funding agency.

Maguire and Ball (1994) looked at the politics of research and argued that, while policy work in the UK has become the dominant paradigm within the qualitative research setting, this work faces the tension of research that raises issues of social justice those providing the funding may not want to hear. There is the paradox of the state providing funding for research on its own public policy behaviour which, by definition, may draw attention to any damage, rather than good, it has caused.

To overcome these dilemmas, policy research has to form itself according to the issue and task at hand. Policy research tends to be multi-dimensional and follow a grounded theory approach, even when ‘terms of reference’ are quite strict. Policy researchers attempt to focus on malleable variables about aspects of social problems open to influence and intervention. While academic centres for policy studies - and other privately funded political entities - make their own decisions about which social problems are worth pursuing, the problem common to all public policy research is that of access; approval for which may not be forthcoming without the researchers having to give up some (or all) control over the use of the data. Allied to this is a requirement to adhere to ethical standards and practices within possible conflict or confusion over who controls the funding, the location and the personnel.

Traditionally, there have been five major activities in policy research and evaluation: Preparation, conceptualisation, data analysis, recommendations analysis and publication (though this may be very limited in scope). Policy research strategies include surveys, case studies, interviews, field experiments, site visits, participant observation, documentary analysis, cost-benefit analysis, focus groups, data-base analysis, and so on, usually involving multiple methods and various forms of triangulation. Since the 1980s, alternatives for policy analysis and research have been developed despite resilience of linear models of policy implementation (Haynes, 1997, p. 25).

If educational policy research is to be meaningful there is a need to recognise the degree of change tolerated by the policy environment, the degree of change that is fiscally possible, and the degree to which the context will impact on policy research recommendations. Traditional models do not account properly for: establishing shared understanding of meaning; building information and development strategies; reaching decisions through a transparent process; identifying policy stakeholders at all levels; defining the locations of power; analysing competing theories about the issue, its cause, constraints and solutions; involving participants; and, incorporating professional values. These are the questions we intend to explore in the rest of this article.

**POLICY TALK**

One of the central achievements of work done in policy studies over the last decade has been the development of the ‘policy cycle’ model, founded on extensive and meticulously collected empirical evidence across a range of issues (Ball & Bowe with
Gold, 1992). Part of this achievement is the controversy elements of the model have caused in the public policy sphere as the contestation of this work was highly productive for both the originators and the critics.

Phrases such as ‘policy toolkit’, ‘policy adhocery’, ‘policy sociology’, ‘policy ensembles’, ‘policy texts’, ‘policy trajectory’, ‘policy recontextualisation’, ‘policy vacuum’ and ‘micro-politics’ have provided a vocabulary and focus for work around the globe on policy production, legislated policy and policy-in-use. Work by one of the authors has attempted to add phrases to the debate such as ‘policy burlesque’, ‘hidden policy’, ‘policy footprint’, ‘policy soup’ and ‘micro-meso-macro-mega policy’ (Crump, 1992, 1993a, 1993b; Crump and Walker, 1994). Others have coined phrases such as ‘critical policy’, ‘policy archaeology’ and practitioners coin their own phrases such as ‘desktop policy’ and ‘policy-on-the-run’ as a means of surviving the policy flood.

While many of these terms convey an interest in the operation and dominance of the state, we are as equally interested in what Ball (1994, pp. 108-9) called “that which lies outside the realm of the state and additional forms of power in over, above and beyond the negative and coercive”. That focus has been the major achievement of recent work on policy theory and is fundamental to our list of missing ingredients espoused above. This focus provides an appropriate basis for reviewing post-compulsory education reform, which is the example for managing policy better that we will discuss below.

On this basis, policy is not just centrally generated and imposed but is a specific form of educational practice governed by social rules, cultural mechanisms and power relationships that guide or prescribe what each policy will mean and becomes. Socio-organisational rules shape how public policy may be structured and thus needs to be taken into account when formulating hypotheses, instructions, arguments and so on for policy research and analysis. However, policies gather meaning in territory beyond their own. Policies do not exist in isolation but within larger systems of contending, contradictory or simply different policies. Historical change shows how different policies combine under particular conditions to produce new and complex outcomes.

Our particular concern is that policy researchers have ignored a range of valuable tools readily available which may provide much greater significance to their findings. These tools are important from our perspective as they provoke policy meaning or action, rather than submission or reaction. Therefore, as suggested earlier, a basic premise of our position is that an effective way to study teacher and student approaches to policy issues is to inquire into their problem-solving strategies. A problem-solution analysis starts with ‘problems’ as perceived by cultures or subcultures. The solutions are the practices or strategies acted on in response to specific problems. Differences within and between strategies are also linked to differences within and between groups noted above.

The different dispositions, perspectives and practices of teachers at different levels - and in different systems and sectors - suggests the presence of teacher sub-cultures that have not been adequately utilised in traditional policy research and analysis. Yet
instances of intercultural understanding between teachers is not uncommon, demonstrating a level of cooperation and understanding built up through effective, though mainly informal links. Our approach to policy analysis is to explore the context in which teachers’ sub-cultures often confront each other, but can be managed to make effective contact to drive long-term and substantive change. Our example in the next section demonstrates how teachers and students are capable of conducting or contributing to valid educational policy production through a research strategy.

THE KEY COMPETENCIES

The impetus for the shift towards competencies in Australia began with three major reports. In 1991 the Australian Education Council established a committee to review the participation of young people in post-compulsory education and training [The Finn Review] which produced a report titled Young People’s Participation in Post-Compulsory Education and Training. One major thrust was for a national project to identify the employment-related learning which young people should gain in the post-compulsory years at school or training. The first step recommended was a focus on six areas, which the Committee called key areas of competence.

In September 1991, the Mayer Committee was made responsible for further work on the key areas of competence. It produced two discussion papers followed by a final report in September 1992, The Key Competencies, Putting General Education To Work. The Mayer Report key competencies became:

Table 1: The key competencies

- Collecting, analysing and organising information
- Communicating ideas and information
- Planning and organising activities
- Working with others and in teams
- Using mathematical ideas and techniques
- Solving problems
- Using technology
- Cultural Understanding

Key Competencies, as defined by Mayer, were those considered essential for effective participation in emerging patterns of work tasks and work organisation, across industries and across occupations. The definition of competence in the Mayer Report recognised that “performance is underpinned not only by skill but also by knowledge and understanding, and that competence involves both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skills to new tasks and situations” (1992, p.4).
It is clear that Mayer saw competence as requiring 'heads on' and 'hands on' so that the competent performer grasps the principles behind the actions. When this occurs, Mayer (1992, p.5) argued, transferability to new contexts is heightened. In the final report, three levels of performance were described for each competence. The objectives of Mayer Report were a) To enhance educational outcomes for all young people; b) To promote the skills development necessary to enhance Australia's overall educational and economic competitiveness; and c) To support the convergence of general and vocational education.

This program of reform intended to insert competencies into industry training and higher education, as well as into secondary school curricula. With this plan came a shift in funding from the Australian government away from universities to technical education. While opposed in some universities, there has been penetration of industry training and education at the state level through the notion of generic skills common to education, training and employment. In 1993, the States and Territories accepted the proposal to pilot Key Competencies in schools to see to what extent they could be found in existing syllabus documents, whether they were appropriate to include in curricula, how they could be applied within technical and industry training, and how professional development for the Key Competencies might proceed. Pilot projects and field testing began in 1994 and concluded late in 1996.

The Commonwealth Key Competencies Program provided the opportunity to try a methodology different to that typical of the same task in other contexts. The evaluation was not a report on the comparative strengths and weaknesses of the 70 projects nor did it aim to make comparisons between the projects managed by the States and Territories. Instead, a national evaluation found that the KCP was seen to be a groundbreaking project, not only in what it suggested educationally and cross-sectorally but also in the way that it made those suggestions to the diverse, often conflictual, educational community in Australia. The implications for the research on a policy that utilised a research strategy through collaborative and cross-sector field testing and piloting were that the evaluation needed to embrace this policy iteration and dialogue or risk stagnation. Thus policy outcomes need to be presented as a series of carefully informed judgments that retain some tentativity in deference to the way, in this case, the KCP evolved.

The Australian version of post-compulsory educational reform was able to capture the spirit of initiatives underway in secondary schools and to reinforce the development of partnerships between schools and Colleges of Technical and Further Education, though these contexts also saw resistance and cynicism. We acknowledge that the KCP suited the human capital needs of the state. Yet we argue that the KCP also provided a mechanism to release disenfranchised young people from inappropriate and irrelevant schooling and to motivate them through holding out the prospect of routes of progression through a variety of learning settings (of more equal status and access) with interchangeability of course elements across the tertiary education spectrum.
MANAGING EDUCATIONAL CHANGE

Major research studies in a number of educational areas (tracking, ability grouping, class size) have shown how, according to Elmore (1995, p. 25), “Changes in structures are weakly related to changes in teaching practice, and therefore structural change does not necessarily lead to changes in teaching, learning, and student performance”. Eimore (1995, p. 26) argues that this requires reform programs:

   to invest more heavily in developing the knowledge and skills of teachers (...) and it would require reformers to treat structural change as a more contingent and uncertain result of change in practice, rather than as a means of reaching a new practice. [our emphasis]

Australia’s Key Competency Program provides an example of a design that worked through discovery-problem identification, to tentative implementation (piloting and feedback), to error elimination by participants, to policy adoption or rejection (Crump, 1993a; Corson, 1996). Certainly, the KCP has shown linear models of implementation to be inadequate. We acknowledge that the design of the KCP was incomplete. Nonetheless, we suggest that the KCP was a step forward in managing educational change for the better in that the design required a methodology that had to authorise something it could not directly regulate. The program had to be tolerant of change and allow projects to alloy themselves to the pilot field testing context, rather than impose change top-down.

While policy tolerance might be seen to juxtapose efficiency and effectiveness, tensions such a methodology set loose were reconciled in different and mostly satisfactory ways (if one accepts policy fidelity is a myth anyway). ‘Efficiency’ differs to ‘effectiveness’ in that it measures expediency, dispersion and apportionment - rather than depth of occurrence and consequences of practice. The design of the KCP engendered both efficiency and effectiveness as participants were encouraged to take the program up as their own and generally committed themselves and their organisation to the program in ways unlikely through a directed mandated model.

In addition, the KCP made research contiguous, rather than absent or preparatory to implementation. Indeed, this tactic was pushed even further into an implementation-as-research strategy that acted as a mode of policy production. This tactic ensured decision-makers were informed about real contexts and specificities, and then encouraged to use that information to improve implementation work by, for example, being aware of the degree of change being tolerated in the various project contexts. The alternative was to see many of the projects stop dead in their tracks as teacher and employer resistance take over from the initial enthusiasm. To what extent policy decision-makers use policy research information is something normally beyond the control of the researchers though, in a new project on equity in vocational education, this issue too is being tackled (Crump, 2000).
Thus, the KCP managed educational change differently in the way that it evolved. While evolution within a program is not unusual nor unexpected, what made it different for the KCP was how the program was managed to evolve through a process of self-evaluation, and how it tolerated diversity in accord with the array of levels, providers and sectors [Table 2]. This is not to say that all aspects of the 70 local projects worked this way, but we argue that that there was sufficient evidence for this point to stand.

**Table 2: Management of The Commonwealth's Key Competencies Program**

The Commonwealth's Key Competency Program was managed by:

- Placing policy into a relatively consistent series that provided a sense of development and cumulative processes;
- Piloting the policy so that diversity in itself was valued without compromising the intended direction of change or damaging the overall result.
- Doing this in a constitutionally complex relationship between state and federal goals and between changing political imperatives;
- Providing a focus for reflexive collaboration that allowed for equivocal state, systemic and sectoral positions within a set of nationwide possibilities;

What we have learnt by reflecting on the efficacy of initial academic responses to Key Competencies, compared to our findings about the management of the project outlined above, is the need to be wary of unreflective, unexamined preconceptions linked to deterministic theories that deny human agency against socioeconomic structures and functions. For example, the NSW Project (Ryan, 1997, p.7) found that quality learning in the various project settings, whether schools, vocational education institutions or workplaces, was a function of the integrated application of knowledge, skills and understandings and of reflection on learning. This was quite distinct from the automated, fragmented and behaviouristic view of learning some people believed would result from working with ‘key competencies’.

In suggesting that a significant sample of the intellectual response to the vocational educational policy initiatives in Australia in the early 1990s got it wrong, we are pointing to a general failure in educational critique to undertake adequate or appropriate policy analysis and/or to seek close contact with policy actors. Isolation from direct contact with policy practice, of the nature represented in the KCP, for example, rendered too many early responses impervious to the breadth and depth of a policy process that can take at least a decade to actualise and adequately perceive. We have indicated already how the practice of policy is, more often than not, a recontextualisation of original intent and stated purposes; and there can be many changes according to state, regional and local conditions, communities and other variables. Managing change needs to recognise this flexibility as an asset in implementation, one that drives a policy forward, not back.
In some (perhaps the most interesting) projects, the key competencies were put forward as a matter for inquiry and encouraged practitioners to explore a range of issues, reflect on progress, debrief, field test options, further reflect and debrief before attempting to come to conclusions. An iterative process appeared to work best in schools, vocational colleges and workplaces that exhibited many of the characteristics described for a ‘learning organisation’. Permitting contextualisation in the KCP may have invited some weakening of the initial definition of the program, inevitable anyway in a longitudinal context, but that weakening of definition was minimised through a process of staged reporting and feedback that generated new and vigorous networking developments.

Additionally, the managed flexibility of the KCP allowed participation in the program of groups at first wary of the presumed intentions, expectations and educational directions to which they might become bound in a way that would conflict with the perceived purpose of their organisation [some private schools, and some small businesses]. In the end, some of the best piloting took place in these sites. In sum, this approach allowed for a fixity of purpose linked through contrasting, yet common, projects.

**POLICY OUTCOMES**

In these organisations, aspects of quality management that characterised the processes of the projects were apparent: frequently, practitioners were confident to try new approaches, take risks, share their experiences with others and explore issues in the hope of improving practice. This represents a different view of quality to that which reconciles quantitative data to predetermined quality assurance criteria (noted in our introduction). In particular, we suggest that in measuring quality of outcomes in policy work, there are dangers in disaggregating data with a focus on components, or individuals, within a system rather than the performance of the system itself.

In economic rationalist terms, ‘quality assurance’ is a discourse of power which excludes and derides alternatives (Elliott, 1996). This discourse shapes assessments about ‘quality’ as performance in knowledge production and the development of indicators which turn education into a commodity that is measured in value by its outputs. Norris (1993) calls these indicators surrogate sales figures. Whatever one’s view, what is more important is the requirement, in this notion of ‘quality’, for conformity through economic efficiency, systemic functioning and new frameworks for judgment (see Elliot, 1996, p. 11). Thus ‘quality’ in the 1990s came to mean orderliness and uniformity, values which construct a consensus by exclusion. However, as Elliot argues:

Perfect control implies that the system into which inputs are entered - school improvement strategies, for example - is in a sufficiently stable state to accurately predict its outputs. However, this presupposes perfect knowledge of the initial stages of the system. Acquiring that knowledge however consumes so much energy that it drastically reduces the energy available for making improving inputs. The overall effect is to depress rather than improve performance. (1996, p. 15; our emphasis).
We agree with Connell (1997) that there is a danger of market driven policy resulting in a focus on narrow industry specific skills development and highly specialised academic curriculum patterns of study that work against social justice and towards reinforcing existing privilege. Our view of quality educational management is consistent with the work of Senge (1992) when applied to educational settings and Deming (1986) when not misunderstood in educational contexts (as at the well-documented Mt Edgecumbe High School, Sitka, Alaska). Our attempt to answer the questions ‘How do you get quality?’ and ‘How do you know it is quality?’ is provided in Table 3.

**Table 3: Policy Outcomes**

Policy:

- Is the product of experience;
- Equals the good practice it generates;
- Is defined by practitioners and participants;
- Deals with risk taking and often is unpredictable;
- Trusts the development of implementation as growth.

Policy managers who feel uncomfortable about the list in Table 3 could reflect on how teachers in all sectors already are marvellously flexible and adaptive. Teachers make on the spot decisions all day and can be creative and professionally inspiring in working this way. As Elliott (1996, p. 13) explains, teachers exercise skill and judgment in creating in situ the pedagogical conditions which make moments of excellence possible rather than predictable (as quality assurance presumes). In this context, pupils are enabled (rather than caused) to develop skills, knowledge and understandings that reflect quality education (inputs and outputs).

Our position should have enormous appeal to teachers and should appeal to those involved in and responsible for educational policy-making. There is common ground here that favours teachers and students that is not limited by existing systems thinking. Schools are a ‘context of action’, but teachers are ‘agents of action’ too. This gives them power to act responsibly while full responsibility falls to a broader community through a set of recursive and reciprocal relations.

**CONCLUSIONS**

The central purpose of this paper is to share what has been learnt from our experience and consider the implications within a broader context, and to provide a view on the Australia’s Key Competencies Program is an example of educational change management environment emerging in the policy world. We have shown how, in the KCP, there was acceptance that the changes being made to the relationship between school and work, between general and vocational education, needed to be addressed from a policy management perspective that tolerated diversity and contextualisation.
What the KCP achieved was a focus for reflexive collaboration for participants that allowed for equivocal state, regional and local positions within a generally agreed set of nationwide possibilities (Crump & Walker, 1996). That is, diversity in itself was valued without compromising the macro direction of change. What assisted this achievement was a perceptive understanding of policy implementation with process and product being worked through as one and the same thing. It is a recognition that policy gathers other aspects and issues in its development and implementation and gets modified as it is implemented to suit local interpretations and conditions.

The aim of policy management outlined in this paper is that of allowing growth when this occurs, rather than attempting to repress such growth through centralised policy hierarchy and power. This is a significant advance on linear implementation policy models, and even on models which see policy as a cycle. All policy ideas have the potential to improve or make worse the issues they are addressing. We think the way educational change is managed through policy implementation is central to making a positive difference.

Thus, the aim of policy management should be to enable systems, sectors and individuals to continue the policy process. This is possible only in an organisation of equitably distributed interests, and quality in education is achievable only in a genuinely democratic interaction (Dewey, 1916/66) between policy managers and policy actors. In Australia, we are a long way from that ideal, but these are issues, actions and examples that need to be placed on the table for all those seeking to manage educational change.

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