

The use of Bernstein's transmission context in policy analysis.

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Introduction

Code theory, pedagogic discourse and symbolic control are synonymous with the theoretical and empirical project of the late British sociologist Basil Bernstein (1924-2000). Basil Bernstein (2001) himself considered four of his papers as the benchmarks of the development of his theory:

- i) On the classification and framing of educational knowledge (1971)
- ii) Codes, modalities and the process of cultural reproduction: A model (1981)
- iii) On pedagogic discourse (1986)
- iv) Vertical and horizontal discourse: An essay (1999)

Recent research embracing Bernsteinian concepts includes applications in teacher education (Beck, 2009), pupil consultation (Arnot & Reay, 2007), the role of the teacher in the transmission and acquisition of decontextualised language (Bourne, 2003), teachers' navigation of the boundary between school science and everyday knowledge (Sikoyo & Jacklin, 2009) and in the physical education arena, the use of the pedagogic device in theorising of the body as a corporeal device (Evans, Davies, & Rich, 2009).

In this paper, we would like to draw attention to Bernstein's model of transmission context (2000) (Figure 1) which is less frequently used by researchers, but arguably no less important, especially in conventions where the transmission process takes precedence over the acquisition process, such as with the implementation of government policies. Notwithstanding the more established methods of policy analysis (Fischer, Miller, & Sidney, 2007) and discourse analysis such as Norman Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995, 2001, 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), we contend that Bernstein's (2000) model of transmission context, incorporating his other theoretical constructs (e.g. classification and framing), may offer researchers an alternative avenue to conduct policy analysis within a sociological framework. This presentation provides a study of health promotion policies transmitted to schools by the Queensland Government.

Context

The significance of schools as key locales for public health strategies in alleviating the so-called obesity problem has been highlighted by policymakers (Commonwealth Department of Health, 1973; Commonwealth of Australia, 2009; Institute of Medicine of the National Academies, 2005; National Health and Medical Research Council, 1997; United States Department of Health and Human Services, 2001). As highlighted by McKenzie and Lounsbery (2009), schools have the potential to promote healthy, physically active "lifestyles" among students with health and physical education (HPE) subject in particular, as a possible solution to the obesity problem (Gard, 2004; Johns, 2005; Kirk, 2006).

Using the schools as key sites for intervention and action, the Queensland Government promulgated its flagship policy directed at childhood obesity – the *Eat Well Be Active*

(EWBA) –*Healthy Kids for Life Action Plan* (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2005a). Two offshoot policies directed at state schools emerged from the EWBA Action Plan – *Smart Choices* (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2005b) and *Smart Moves* (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2007b). The former specifically addressed the provision of food and drinks in the school environment while the latter mandated the quantity of physical activity to be provided within curriculum time (30 minutes of daily physical activity for primary school students and 2 hours per week for secondary school students).

Within any pedagogic discourse, there needs to be a process of transmission and acquisition (Bernstein, 1990, 1996, 2000) and it is no different in the case of the EWBA policies. In terms of transmission, given its status as the author of the EWBA policies, the Queensland Government is undoubtedly the most important transmitter of the pedagogic discourse of the EWBA policies. Through the analysis of the policy language in the EWBA Action Plan (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2005a) and its derivatives i.e. Ministerial Review Report (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2007a), *Smart Choices* and *Smart Moves*, we attempt to delineate how Bernstein’s (2000) model of transmission context and his sociological constructs can be applied to the analysis of public policies and how it may make a valuable contribution to a sociological theory of transmission and acquisition within the policy-making process. Specifically, we seek to address the questions: (i) what is the *voice* and *message* of the EWBA policies; (ii) how are the EWBA policies classified and framed in the current educational landscape mired in achievement and accountability; and more importantly, (iii) how do the EWBA policies writers transmit their *voice* and *message*?

The Model of Transmission Context

In Bernstein’s (2000) view, his model of the transmission context (Figure 1) provides an overview of “how the distribution of power and the principles of control translate into classification and framing values which select out recognition and realisation rules to create contextually appropriate text” (p. 18). The model below (Figure 1) is a representation of the Bernstein’s (2000) model of transmission within any pedagogic context. The recognition and realisation rules are in effect functions of *classification* and *framing* where the recognition rules “create the means of distinguishing between, and so recognizing, the *speciality* that constitutes a context” [or voice] and realisation rules “regulate the creation and production of specialized relationships internal to that context” [or message] (Bernstein, 1990, p. 102, original emphasis). In other words, “recognition rules regulate *what* meanings are relevant and realisation rules regulate *how* the meanings are to be put together to create the legitimate text” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 18, emphasis added). These two set of rules shape the creation, reproduction and possible transformations of specialised contexts. The *interactional practice* is defined by classification and framing procedures which act selectively on the recognition and realisation rules (Bernstein, 2000) and the *text* is considered to be “anything which attracts evaluation” (Bernstein, 2000, p. 18).

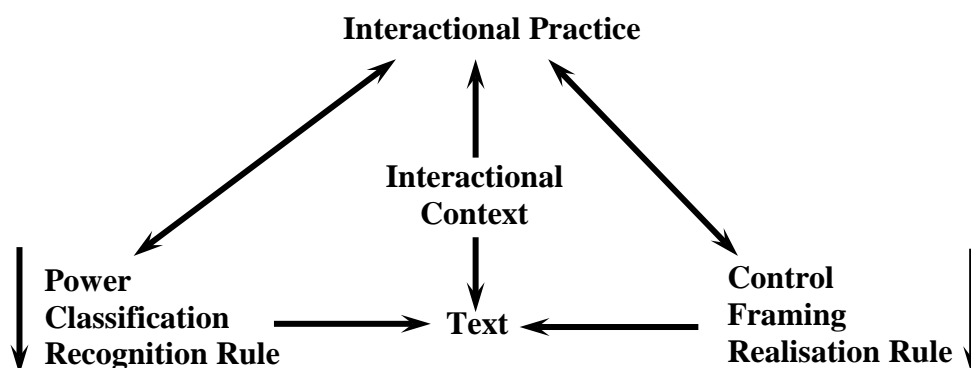


Figure 1 Transmission Context (Bernstein, 2000, p. 16)

In terms of locating the actors and agencies of the EWBA policies within Bernstein’s model of transmission context, the *interactional practice* can be constructed as the transmission process of policy dissemination (e.g. from state to general public and/or from state to state agents/agencies) whereas the *interactional context* denotes the physical and electronic spaces in which the intended acquirers (i.e. the policy readers – general public, schools and teachers) interact with the transmitters (i.e. the policy writers) via visual, verbal and electronic representations (e.g. through press releases, media, social marketing, EWBA campaign launch, circulation of policy directives from Education Queensland via e-mail or through staff meetings etc.) of that which is to be acquired (i.e. the policy). Figure 2 illustrates these relations within the model of transmission context (Bernstein, 2000).

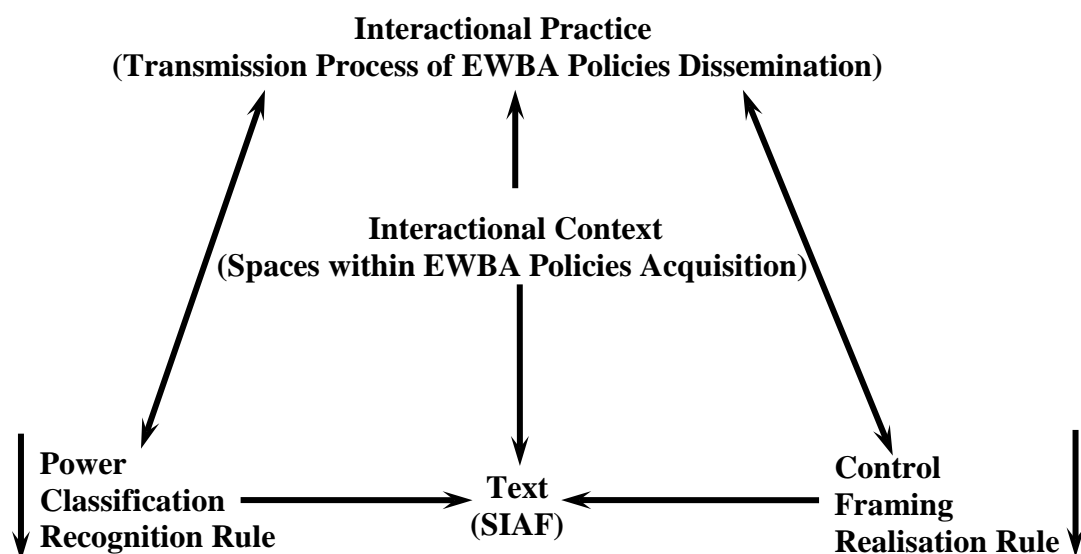


Figure 2 EWBA Policies within the Transmission Context

With measures of accountability promulgated under the School Improvement and Accountability Framework (SIAF) (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2008), as stipulated by the Ministerial Review Report (Queensland Government Department of Education and Training, 2007a) and the Smart Moves policy, the schools and their teachers are, in essence, legally charged with the task of managing the obesity “epidemic” within their locus of control. Thus, within the transmission context, the SIAF can be viewed as the *text*. In this paper, we ask questions about the place and power of this text in the current educational landscape, defined by the myriad of health promotion policies targeted at schools.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the EWBA policies, we demonstrate how Bernstein’s model of transmission context (2000) allows a characterisation of the political context within the written discourses of government policies. At the same time, it demonstrates, through the values of classification and framing, how power and control is differentially distributed between the transmitter and acquirer in the quest to create contextually appropriate text.

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