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REALISING POLICY
The who and how of policy production

Trevor Gale


**Introduction**

I appreciate definitions of ‘policy’ as the ‘authoritative allocation of values’ (Easton 1953; Anderson 1979), not least because they draw attention to the who and the how of policy production. Prunty has argued similarly, that

> The authoritative allocation of values draws our attention to the centrality of power and control in the concept of policy, and requires us to consider not only whose values are represented in policy, but also how these values have become institutionalised. (1985, 36)

Such considerations are important because they expose the partiality (and, hence, fallacy) of rationality and consensus in policy production, or at least make room for such disclosure. In my view, traditional representations of the democratic process, in which policy is produced through mutual agreement while authority to produce it is invested in elected representatives (often supported by technical expertise) – consigning all else and others to the domains of implementation and consumption – are both theoretically naive and politically abhorrent. Drawing attention to the who of policy production enables the naming of values inherent in things that are seemingly technical (such as policy) and the foregrounding of a radical democracy (Lummis 1996) (which engages all people in public processes) as a legitimate basis for policy’s authority. Whereas drawing attention to the how of policy production challenges not just the premise of rationality in policy making but also how particular individuals and groups are involved in various contexts as policy makers. In brief, the who and how of policy production are dialectically related. They are, as Bourdieu might describe them, much like field positions and stances: ‘two translations of the same sentence’ (Spinoza, in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 105).

These are the issues I seek to explore in this paper: relations between the who and how of policy production and how these are connected to particular contexts of policy making. To borrow from Foucault (1972, 207), they represent the conditions of policies’ realisation and are matters I have characterised elsewhere (Gale 2001) as the interests of critical policy historiography, specifically policy archaeology and policy genealogy. Regarding the first:

- critical policy archaeology asks: (1) why are some items on the policy agenda (and not others)?; (2) why are some policy actors involved in the production
of policy (and not others)? and (3) what are the conditions that regulate the patterns of interaction of those involved?

(Gale 2001, 387–8)

Whereas:

Policy genealogy...is not convinced by analyses of policy production explained by ‘bounded rationality’ (Simon 1960) or ‘incrementalism’ achieved through ‘partisan mutual adjustment’ (Lindblom 1959). Certainly, it asks (1) how policies change over time, but it also seeks to determine (2) how the rationality and consensus of policy production might be problematised and (3) how temporary alliances are formed and reformed around conflicting interests in the policy production process.

(Gale 2001, 389–90)

These interests, particularly (2) and (3) of both policy archaeology and genealogy, involve discerning the nature of ‘social actors’ engagement with policy’ (Gale 2001) and are explored in this paper through analysing the production of Australian higher education entry policy during the period 1987 to 1996, with a particular focus on the production of Queensland higher education entry policy text in 1990 (Viviani 1990). In particular, data are drawn from 27 semi-structured, in-depth interviews with policy actors located at various levels of the Australian state: politicians and political advisers (PPA), bureaucrats and policy advisers (BPA), ‘cowboys’¹ and independent authorities (CIA), and academics and university administrators (AUA).²

To put this research and its dataset in context, Australian institutions of higher education (universities and colleges), which were established through legislation by State³ governments, initially managed their affairs under the auspices of their respective States. These arrangements began to change from the mid 1940s with increasing federal funding of higher education, following the federal government’s takeover of income tax collection from Australian citizens, leaving the States with diminished primary sources of revenue. In the early 1970s, under an agreement between the federal and State governments, increasing federal involvement in higher education culminated in the States officially transferring their responsibility for financing and managing Australia’s universities to the Whitlam federal Labor government. Federal responsibility for higher education was further strengthened in the late 1980s and early 1990s by the Hawke/Keating federal Labor government during the amalgamations of Australian universities and colleges into the Unified National System.

Despite these arrangements, the Australian States’ residual legislative responsibility for higher education and the high ‘unmet demand’ for university places, peaking in the early 1990s, contributed to increasing political pressure from their constituents to address issues concerning the supply of Australian university places. In Queensland, for example, this ‘under-supply’ was perceived as a function of an unfair method of selecting students for university and, therefore, the responsibility of the State government. As a way of dealing with the politics of these arrangements – both the methods of selection and matters of university finance and governance – the Goss State Labor government, newly elected to power in Queensland, undertook a review of university entry policy in the State and produced what became known as the ‘Viviani Review’ (1990). It is in this complex mix of federal – State responsibilities for Australian higher education that the policy issues below are discussed.⁴
The paper begins by considering the political nature of ‘policy speak’, although this is primarily argued in relation to theoretical issues. It includes an account of the relations between policy makers and contexts of policy making or which policy actors tend to dominate particular stages of the policy process. The second section of the paper examines more empirically who has permission to speak policy and is interested in uncovering how the boundaries of ‘who’, ‘where’ and ‘what goes on’ are contested and, therefore, how particular production processes represent temporary settlements (Gale 1999) of policy vocalities. As noted above, this work is informed by a policy archaeology although I have refrained from engaging in a discussion of the specifics of this methodology, given that my account of such matters, drawing on similar empirical data, is recorded elsewhere (Gale 2001).

In exploring the how of policy production, the third section of the paper extends the analysis of ‘what goes on’ to consider the strategies policy actors utilise from particular positions within particular contexts to produce particular policies. That is, the interest is in the work of production: what policy actors do, more than what they produce, although these are not unrelated. Focused on one particular context of policy making, specifically the Viviani Review in Queensland, the contention is that what can be done by policy makers is related to where they are positioned within that context; that is, how they are related to other actors and contexts. Again, the policy genealogy that informs this account is not discussed in any great detail, given its previous elaborations (Gale 2001). Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that throughout the paper I am guided by what Troyna sees as the central questions in any critical analysis: specifically, to determine ‘What is really going on?’ and ‘How come?’ (1994, 72–3).

**Policy speak: should politics be part of the vocabulary?**

Traditionally, permission to speak policy has been vested in the state. In the academic literature, for example, definitions of policy often carry references to the state or to government as a way of framing what is legitimate policy and what is, or what is not of particular significance. This literature also refers to distinctions such as ‘public’ policy and ‘education’ policy – references one could imagine as framed respectively by the ‘context of outcomes’ and the ‘context of political strategy’ (Ball 1994) – as ways of demarcating policy from other sociopolitical activities and actors. Many of these definitions are informed by ‘executive’ models of policy production, whereas others adopt a ‘partnership’ model (Yeatman 1998) and, hence, different conceptions of the nature of the state and how this defines the positioning of policy actors. Some extend this examination to questioning the legitimacy and adequacy of the state itself in producing policy in postmodern societies (see Dale 1992; Hoffman 1995). Others note that the rhetoric of withering nation states and policy relevance under the influence of market globalisation is not simply matched by empirical evidence (Keating and Davis 2000).

Such distinctions are informed by matters of ‘policy speak’: what is considered legitimate to say in policy contexts. Even though ‘policy’ and ‘politics’ are derived from the same root word (from the ancient Greek city-state of polis) and are indistinguishable in many European languages (politik in German; politique in French; and so on), some still view policy as ‘concerned with outcomes, whereas politics is concerned with process – and in particular, with the participants’ position in the game’ (Colebatch 1998, 73). Drawing on Bourdieu and Wacquant (1992), I return
below to such talk of positions and games but in a way that gives recognition to
the politics of the policy process. That is, rather than viewing policy as static, the
understanding here is that it invites its own distinctive type of politics that is 'internal
to the policy process and is shaped by it' (Yeatman 1998, 22). In particular, it is a
politics that speaks of a desired future: 'policy occurs when social actors think
about what they are doing and why in relation to different and alternative possible
futures' (Yeatman 1998, 19, emphasis added).

Such discussions are about the political and theoretical boundaries we draw
around policy, including those who participate in its production (and those who do
not) and under what conditions. The theoretical boundaries between those who
produce and those who implement policy have undergone considerable debate in
the policy literature (see, for example, Wilenski 1986) and are now well and truly
dismissed as ill informed...

Roger Dale, for example, has noted that
Severing implementation from formulation of policy involves not only a
distortion but a serious misunderstanding of the role of the state in education
policy. It is a misunderstanding connected to the view that the State involve­
ment in education implies ownership, control and operation of education
systems, with a functional division of labour between formulation and
implementation of policy.

(1992, 393)

But the distinction lives on in the minds of many and in hegemonic ways that serve
to privilege some policy actors and their activities in particular contexts at the
expense of others. In short, advocating such separations on theoretical grounds
amounts to political strategy. Yeatman, for example, notes that to define policy

as technical in character...[is to privilege] the advice of experts not the
participation of citizens. This is the function of the recent take-over of the
policy agenda by libertarian neo-classical economics where the most impor­
tant policy issues are represented as economic ones. This particular brand of
economics is especially salient because it not only privileges the private power
of business corporations who command enormous political influence but it
seems to speak on behalf of the freedom of choice of the ordinary person.

(1998, 25, emphasis in original)

What is clearly evident here is the political nature of the policy process or, more
accurately, the political nature of attempts to deny the legitimacy of the policy
process. In a political sense, ‘for the conception of policy as a policy process to be
possible, the work of state administration has to be conceived democratically’
(Yeatman 1998, 17). Here Yeatman intentionally confuses politics and theory; a
strategy she extends to conceptions of policy activism:

I am offering a normative definition of policy activist...as anyone who
champions in relatively consistent ways a value orientation and pragmatic
commitment to what I have called the policy process, namely a conception of
policy which opens it up to the appropriate participation of all those who are
involved in policy all the way through points of conception, operational
formulation, implementation, delivery on the ground, consumption and
evaluation.

(Yeatman 1998, 34, emphasis in original)
I appreciate the politics here but would want to theorise policy activism as also including the activities of those with commitments to less participatory interests, those who are committed to restricting the participation of others. However, I acknowledge the theoretical intent of aspects of Yeatman’s account, particularly its broadening of Heclo’s (1978) original conception of policy activism, as restricted to policy advisers, to include activists at all stages of the policy process.

We might imagine, then, a pairing, as illustrated in Table 13.1, where particular policy actors dominate particular policy contexts. What is envisaged are ‘key mediators of policy in any setting who are relied upon by others to relate policy to context or to gatekeep’ (Ball 1994, 17). In other words, ‘only certain voices are heard at any point in time’ (Ball 1994, 16). What is not meant is a strict separation between contexts and their productive activities (see Gale 1999) nor a linear representation of the policy process despite this suggestion in Yeatman’s (1998) listing of stages. As particular policy actors tend to dominate particular contexts, so they are dominated by particular activities but not exclusively so. Policy actors and their activities cannot be pinned down indefinitely but rather are temporarily settled in particular contexts. Similarly, contexts are not defined simply by their material properties but can be conceived as ‘different descriptions of the same social reality’ (Gale 1999, 404).

Another way of explaining these relations between policy contexts, actors and their activities is in terms of Bourdieu’s notions of capital and field (see, for example, Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 98–9). In such terms, determining the limits of a policy field is one and the same thing as determining the capital valued within that field. In other words, at any one point in time certain cultural, social, economic and

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Produced where?</th>
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<td>Stages of the policy process (Yeatman 1998)</td>
<td>Interest groups (Lawton 1986)</td>
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<td>(Bowe et al. 1992; Ball 1994)</td>
<td>Policy activists (Yeatman 1998)</td>
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</table>

- Context of influence (Bowe et al. 1992)
- Setting the policy agenda and policy development (Yeatman 1998)
- Context of policy text production (Bowe et al. 1992)
- Policy formulation
- Context of practice (Bowe et al. 1992)
- Policy implementation and policy delivery (Yeatman 1998)
- Context of outcomes (Ball 1994)
- Context of political strategy (Ball 1994)
- Policy evaluation and policy monitoring (Yeatman 1998)

- Politicians (Lawton 1986)
- Government executives (e.g. cabinet), legislators, the judiciary (Yeatman 1998)
- Bureaucrats (Lawton 1986)
- Public officials – bureaucrats, public servants, public managers (Yeatman 1998)
- Professionals (Lawton 1986)
- Direct service deliverers – e.g. those who staff a school, from principal to teachers to ancillary staff (Yeatman 1998)
- The consumers, users, recipients of policy, and those subject to its regulation (Yeatman 1998)
- Policy analysts – analysis of and for policy (Gordon et al. 1977; Kenway 1990)
symbolic resources (capitals) tend to dominate any one policy context. Hence, as illustrated in Table 13.1, the capital seen to be required to formulate policy is privileged in contexts of policy text production. Further, it is not just the volume but also the structure of one's capital that determines a policy actor's positioning (his/her relative force in producing policy) and his/her strategic orientation within particular policy contexts. Hence, bureaucrats and public officials, for example, might be better positioned to write policy text and, therefore, dominate contexts of policy text production because they possess more of the relevant capitals that the context values. Bourdieu's analogy of a game to explain the interactions of and more fluid relations between (policy) actors within (policy) fields is instructive here. In negotiating the policy process or 'game', policy actors or players can play to increase or to conserve their capital [and, hence, their positioning in a particular policy context]...in conformity with the tacit rules of the game and the prerequisites of the reproduction of the game and its stakes; but they can also get in it to transform, partially or completely, the immanent rules of the game. They can, for instance, work to change...the exchange rate between various species of capital, through strategies aimed at discrediting the form of capital which the force of the opponents rests...and to valorize the species of capital they preferentially possess.

(Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 99)

**Permission to speak policy: the who of policy production**

These are issues well illustrated in the production of Australian higher education policy during the period from 1987 to 1996. The players in this policy 'game' are those named above as politicians and political advisers, bureaucrats and policy advisers, cowboys and independent authorities, and academics and university administrators. And the rules of this policy game can be found in the withdrawing and redrawing of commitments, conditions of eligibility and manageability, and the sites of engagement with policy matters. These are matters discussed in turn.

**Withdrawing and redrawing commitments**

Changes in government are telling moments for policy actors. They can result in the repositioning of policy actors within policy contexts, a reduction in their status and/or legitimacy as policy producers and sometimes their exclusion from policymaking contexts altogether. The following interview extracts illustrate something of the effects the newly elected (1989) Goss Labor government in Queensland had on one set of policy actors identified with a particular independent authority (IA1) with considerable investments in issues of Australian higher education entry. As the incoming Minister of Education in Queensland described it,

I had the boffins in [IA1] still telling me, 'look, the TE [Tertiary Entrance] score system's terrific. It really is the fairest thing.' I mean they were just totally convinced. They didn't want to change it, and they could sit down and draw up the graphs and the computer models all they liked, I told them, 'but', I said, 'out there, you've lost the battle. Whether it is the fairest system in the world or way up there with the best, it doesn't matter. You've lost. The war's over. People don't think it is.'

(PPA1)
What is championed here by the Minister is the need to take account of politics within the policy process; an account that these policy actors were unwilling or unable to accept and which formed the rationale for withdrawing IA1’s authority as the dominant policy maker and repositioning it as subservient to a second and new independent authority (IA2). The Minister’s political adviser noted at the time that the intention was to create

> a more community orientation than [evident within IA1], and it has to [be community orientated] because it’s a forum which has representatives from all different groups... That’s not a criticism of [IA1]. It is a technical organisation... [That’s] one of the reasons why [IA2’s] there... to expose them and the other players to ‘Well, hang on, what other views have the other groups?’

(PPA3)

There is a certain politics in claiming technical expertise and

> it’s quite easy for these authorities [such as IA1] to become branded as cowboys, and they are viewed typically as cowboys because they’re not bound by the same level of accountability to the political process or the financial processes... Statutory authorities... are not obliged to account financially in the same way, and the political process is not as hard on them because they can always say, ‘Well, we’re an independent authority.’

(BPA4)

But the effect of creating IA2 was to insert new interests into the policy-making context and to rework the regard for existing interests, diminishing previous levels of autonomy. It is as Bourdieu suggests: the policy field was (re)defined by the capital it valued. As illustrated in this example, such reconstruction

> put TAFE [Technical and Further Education] in there which changes the balance, they put the Department [of Education] in there as well, and the interest groups in the outer ring have changed that balance... the broader redistribution of power will follow from that. I think that it will be the case that [IA1’s] powers have been diminished by this... [whereas] the universities have not been losers... they have retrieved their position.

(Viviani)

And, as Colebatch (1998, 22) notes, ‘in this context, the question is not simply, “Who needs to be included?”, but also, “Who must not be left out?” – that is, whose exclusion would frustrate the policy or simply make it pointless?’

**Conditions of eligibility**

A further condition that determines policy actors’ access to contexts of policy making is related to the particular structure of their capitals (the resources they draw on to produce policy) and how these are valued within the field. That is, the reconstruction of the policy context described above privileged different kinds of policy makers and capitals. In this particular context,

Nancy Viviani was chosen because she’s an expert at policy making, not because she knew anything about this particular [issue]... She’s a very bright, able policy analyst. That’s her background. And that’s what they wanted.
They didn’t want any educational person...That was the rationale behind choosing [Ken] Wiltshire [as Chair of the Reference Committee]...and Viviani [as the Reviewer]...that they’re both policy people.

(AUA1)

Such positioning of ‘education people’ is not uncommon in contemporary contexts of education policy making, where their vocality within the field of education is seen as indicative of an inappropriate structuring of the capital that is required to produce education policy or, at least, to drive its production. In short, the strategy is to discredit the form of capital education people possess. Hence:

the people you negotiated with in [Australian] higher education were almost never the educators. They weren’t from the Faculties of Education. The people who set the pace and had the views came from Engineering, or Medicine, or Physics.

(CIA6)

Emphasised here is the productive work within policy-making contexts and their associated capitals more than the content that might inform a policy text. This is the critique above of education policy that stresses education (expertise) rather than policy (expertise). Hence, in allocating permission to speak policy and to manage its production,

it’s the capacity of people that’s important more than their so called expertise in a particular area. That doesn’t mean you pull people off the cane harvester and get them to do [a review of] tertiary education, but if they’re broadly educated and well known in educational areas, it’s much more important to pick a person with that strength of character and background which shows they can do things, rather than saying, ‘well, let’s find the person who is the expert in that area’.

(PPA1)

In this account, policy ‘problems’ are no longer dominated by the expert knowledge of specialist content areas but by policy expertise; that is, the politics of the policy process. This is what is valorised, as Bourdieu would say. Eligible policy actors, therefore, are those who possess a particular kind of political expertise, which necessarily has implications regarding the allocation of values.

**Conditions of manageability**

A second set of conditions regulating how policy actors are positioned within policy-making contexts more explicitly involve the structural relations established among policy actors. In producing Australian higher education entry policy, these structures were informed by certain time constraints that were mediated by a desire to incorporate a more participatory politics (noted above). Although, given the particular interests and historical dominance of some policy actors in this context, politicians and political advisers regarded participatory policy making as subservient to these time constraints. Hence, a particular kind of structuring of the policy context was required:

The idea of a single reviewer had been something which the British Civil Service had adopted some years ago – I think out of something called the
Rayner Review Process. Derek Rayner was Chief Executive of Marks and Spencer, I suppose one of the early quality managers... [He] came up with the idea of a single reviewer with a reference committee... in the belief that a single reviewer had a better chance of doing the job than a committee.

(AUA4)

Here, again, is the imperative of 'doing the job', getting it done, a focus on the political work of producing policy. And, according to the Minister who appointed this 'single reviewer', Viviani, and charged her with the responsibility of producing the policy text, this particular structuring of the policy context was one of her ideas. It was a very good idea – a consultative committee... with the players in the field having a real chance to influence her... They'd be on this committee that worked one down from her, but it would be her report. Not their report. And they had a chance to help and not to dominate.

(PPA1)

A particular outcome was envisaged by these arrangements, one informed by 'the context of outcomes' (Ball 1994). That is, strongly influencing this particular context of policy text production was how current Australian higher education entry arrangements were perceived by the public and, more specifically, the immediate users of the Tertiary Entrance score that current policy settings delivered. The rationale, or fear, that informed this restructuring, then, was that

if you had a committee design it, you'd have different people doing different things all over the place. And you might not have ultimately a situation that everyone's happy with. But if you have a Reviewer, one person with the responsibility to produce a report to the government, who can use the views of experts and others in the field to bounce ideas off, but then, that person's held responsible for providing a report to the government, you've got a much better chance of an outcome, and it was an outcome that we really wanted.

(PPA3)

Illustrated here is that 'coherence is not so much one of the attributes of policy as one of the central problems: how to get all the different elements to focus on the same question in the same way' (Colebatch 1998, 3-4). Inevitably, this is a political issue.

Sites of engagement

A final area concerns the sites in which the politics of policy making are engaged. Certainly, formal meetings were featured in the research reported here but what should be noted is how the dominant policy maker in this context explicitly connected these formal meetings with other less formal sites of policy production and, therefore, drew them into the control features of the process. As she explains,

We would send the drafts out on a Monday by fax to everybody and then they [would] have a meeting the next Monday with their interest groups. They all had this very sophisticated networking processes of all these interest groups. And they would fax back the groups' comments. And then they would come to the [Reference Committee] meeting to reinforce it and then we'd go
through the next stage. So we’d draft it. We’d draft it in committee, in those kinds of ways.

(Viviani)

Indeed, several policy actors used and even created informal sites of policy production with some effect. For example:

Queensland turned on some real power... it appears as if the Premier’s Office itself insinuated itself strongly into the game, opened channels of communication directly through to the Prime Minister’s Office, and so the two education bureaucracies – the [Queensland] State one of higher education [and] the Commonwealth [division of] higher education – were playing to a context created by Premier to Prime Minister Office contacts.

(BPA2)

Yet while politicians and political advisers were very aware of the need to engage with the policy process in less formal contexts, others were not. It was as if some of these policy actors (e.g. those associated with IA1) held to a theoretically naive executive model of policy production that could not or would not entertain the possibility of influencing policy text production within sites other than those officially designated. Hence, the need to engage with the media’s criticism of current policy settings, for example, was not fully appreciated. However,

That’s the reality we face. This is not the 1950s. This is an example of the [IA1’s] failure to engage publicly. I mean given that reality, they should have got stuck into that, and they’re the only ones who could demystify it, who could make it understandable, who could give out the comfort messages that we needed, and they tried once or twice and then gave up, and blamed the Courier Mail. And the Courier Mail was just outrageous – just outrageous but no worse than the Sydney Morning Herald when they first put league-tables in or anybody else. And it was – it’s a failure to understand modern policy making which is a public phenomenon, and if you haven’t got the skills or the drive to engage publicly, you lose. And the [IA1] could have done that better.

(CIA4)

Playing with the hand you’ve been dealt: the how of policy production

Focusing on the how of policy production provides another translation of this ‘same sentence’ (Spinoza, in Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 105): a reading of policy makers’ ‘strategic orientation toward the game’ (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 99) or what Lyotard describes as ‘a “move” in a game’ (1984, 10). More strongly, in producing Australian higher education policy, ‘determining the “who” of policy production [their objective positioning] necessarily influenced aspects of their interaction’ (Gale 2001, 388). The research disclosed six strategies in the negotiation of Australian higher education policy developed from the data: strategies of trading, bargaining, arguing, stalling, manoeuvring, and lobbying. While their separations imply a certain discreteness, they are more cogently understood as interrelated. For instance, a certain amount of stalling can be exercised in the process of bargaining, lobbying can involve a degree of trading and argument, while a strategic manoeuvre might involve several strategies of negotiation. Each of these strategies is illustrated in turn.
Trading: negotiating the exchange of interests

In the process of producing policy text for Australian higher education entry in Queensland,

Viviani would come to the Reference Committee and she would listen to them and then she would say, ‘No, I don’t like that, I won’t do that’... [but] she’s a very good operator, because at the same time, when she is strong and makes her position, she’ll tend to give a bit of ground somewhere else. So, she doesn’t alienate people, or there’s a minimum of that.

(CIA7)

Interestingly, however, trading was not a strategy frequently engaged by policy makers in this policy context and was almost exclusively confined to politicians and their political advisers in other contexts of influence (Bowe et al. 1992) or in what Bourdieu refers to as broader fields of power.

Bargaining: negotiating the moderation of interests

In contexts of policy text production, policy makers were more frequently and discursively engaged in the to-ing and fro-ing (as in the Latin discurrere) of interests or what might more accurately be described as their moderation. Evidence of this can be seen in the bargaining over targets for new entrants into Australian higher education. For example, some Queensland policy actors went out publicly and got the school leaver targets back because the [Federal] Government was getting hit over the head with the huge retention increases to Year 12 – social pressure from parents and kids – and the universities themselves had argued with the Government that they needed to expand the sector in order to accommodate the Year 12 increases. So we thought at least on that we could hold them, so we included these school leaver targets. Then they came back to [us to] say by using them we were denying mature age access.

(BPA1)

Arguing: negotiating the persuasion of interests

Similarly, there was struggle and conflict over more technical matters in which rational argument was used effectively by policy actors as a political strategy to persuade others of the legitimacy of their interests. The politics of these exchanges should not be under-estimated:

We had a lot of big fights about important things... I tried very hard to talk them into one form of scaling – I tried really hard – and if you read [Graham] Maxwell’s [academic appointed to the Reference Committee] argument (the first appendix) you can see why I couldn’t and anyone who wants to get rid of one form of scaling, has to answer his argument. And that’s why it’s there as the first appendix [in the policy document].

(Viviani)

Stalling: delaying the negotiation of interests

But policy actors did not always find it as easy to convince others purely on the basis of argument, particularly when the power relations were not balanced in
their favour and when there was little appreciation of the politics involved. In the
words of one of these policy actors,

one of the sources of greatest frustration for me and for [IA1] through the
early 80s was the fact that we could never ever get any dialogue with the
Federal government. It was a stone wall...I went to Canberra on a number of
occasions and interviewed numbers of different people...They'd always be
interviewed off the record, particularly if they were senior public servants.
Never on the record...We believed that Queensland was being given a raw
deal in terms of allocation of places and funds and all the rest of it.

(CIA7)

Manoeuvring: negotiating the circumvention of interests

When the shoe is on the other foot, differently positioned policy actors are able to
manoeuvre their way around obstacles to the policy process. In the following
example, the need to appease political interests and at the same time address comp­
pelling argument produced a political solution to the policy process that enabled
the circumvention of such argument. As it unfolded,

one group who'll be pushing it [a national system of university entry] is the
Commonwealth, again because it'll get them off this policy hook about shifting
load [to redress the imbalance of student places allocated to universities in
different Australian States]. If they can say, 'Well, anyone can apply anywhere
and go anywhere easily and there are no formal barriers to that', then that gets
them a bit off that policy hook that they really need to put political pressure on
Victoria to get rid of places. So they'll be supporting it. But the other bunch that
are supporting it – this is what makes me really cross – is the bloody Directors
of Admission Centres because they can become a national empire, you know.

(BPA4)

What is worth reiterating here is the dominance of politics over rationality in the
policy process.

Lobbying: negotiating the coalition of interests

Contrary to traditional rhetoric that positions bureaucrats as merely instruments of
the political process, the research reported here revealed these policy actors as well
versed in the politics of policy making. In particular, and more than most policy
actors, they were adept at combining interests in ways that served particular policy
agendas that held political currency while also advancing others. The use of partic­
ular economic discourses is a case in point. A number of these policy actors would
imbibe all this macro stuff about the economic environment and we construct rationales that are influential in those terms. Now, a lot of it's unresearched
and untested, but there's no doubt that we argue for certain things in terms of
what we describe as perceived economic advantage. And then you also try to
create a coalition of interests with what you know to be the Minister's personal interests... Some ministers are better than others at principles and
policy broadly and some are much more framed by personal experiences and understandings.

(BPA4)
Relations between policy actors and the (above) strategies they employ to produce policy are represented in Tables 13.2 and 13.3. Recognition needs to be given to the particular context in which these observations were made: the production of Australian higher education policy from 1987 to 1996, particularly the production of Queensland higher education entry policy text in 1990 (Viviani 1990). It should also be noted that these relations between policy actors and strategies are indicative rather than comprehensive. That said, Table 13.2 lists the most frequently used strategies by policy actors in contexts of policy text production while Table 13.3 lists the most likely policy actors associated with particular policy-making strategies. The point is to illustrate in tabular form that policy actors who are positioned in particular ways tend to employ some policy-making strategies more than others and, similarly, that particular policy-making strategies tend to be associated with certain policy actors more than others. The centrality of

**Table 13.2 Most frequently used strategies by policy actors in producing Australian higher education policy, 1987–96**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy actor</th>
<th>Strategy (most frequently utilised)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians and political advisers</td>
<td>1. Bargaining</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Arguing and lobbying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bureaucrats and policy advisers</td>
<td>1. Manoeuvring and lobbying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Arguing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cowboys and independent authorities</td>
<td>1. Stalling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Arguing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics and university administrators</td>
<td>1. Arguing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Bargaining and stalling</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 13.3 Most likely policy actors associated with strategies for producing Australian higher education policy, 1987–96**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy</th>
<th>Policy actor (most frequent utiliser)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trading</td>
<td>1. Politicians and political advisers, and bureaucrats and policy advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Academics and university administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bargaining</td>
<td>1. Politicians and political advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Academics and university administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Bureaucrats and policy advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arguing</td>
<td>1. Academics and university administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Politicians and political advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Bureaucrats and policy advisers, and cowboys and independent authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stalling</td>
<td>1. Cowboys and independent authorities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Academics and university administrators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3. Politicians and political advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manoeuvring</td>
<td>Bureaucrats and policy advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lobbying</td>
<td>1. Bureaucrats and policy advisers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Politicians and political advisers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
politics in the policy process should also be recognised and how, in this particular case, rationality was treated within the process.

Conclusion
In this paper I have argued a number of matters of policy, referring to aspects of the policy literature and drawing on research data from the production of Australian higher education policy. They are matters about the politics of the policy process. They are not about neat, rational debate and then consensus on entry issues in Australian higher education, nor are they concerned with an examination of the differences from one policy text to the next in order to determine the extent of the increment. I suspect that often it is a narrow focus on policy texts that produces accounts of policy production as informed by the ‘characteristics of organized action...[that is,] coherence, hierarchy and instrumentality’ (Colebatch 1998, 3, emphasis in original). Certainly, ‘there is less written about what policy participants actually do than on almost any other aspect of policy’ (Colebatch 1998, 100) and perhaps this provides some explanation. However, I suspect our inability to provide adequate theoretical explanations of the policy process is also an issue of politics.

Theoretically, then, critical policy sociology is well served by explanations of policy and the policy process that concern themselves with the who and how of policy production. As illustrated above, these are not separate endeavours but necessarily go hand in hand. Such explanations also require a less rigid account of policy contexts and their structural relations (Gale 1999). Moreover, these theoretical explanations of policy production also seem well served by policy methodologies of archaeology and genealogy. As I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Gale 2001), policy archaeology involves an objectification of who is involved in producing policy, their structuring, whereas policy genealogy is interested in identifying the particularities of policy makers’ activities and in various contexts.

It is in relating these matters of theory and politics, and the methodology implied in their analysis, that I conclude by drawing attention again to Yeatman’s (1998) notion of policy activism and particularly to its normative elements. Policy is not only produced and reproduced in a theoretical sense by actors variously located within Western democracies. Such engagement by policy actors should also be acknowledged and encouraged as an expression of a radical democracy (Lummis 1996). In this account of policy making,

the intent...would be to establish the conditions for new conversations (genuine expressions of interest, understanding and aspiration) and for new actions (proactive engagements with local and global constraints and opportunities); their newness deriving as much from who is involved and how, as from appreciation for new times.

(Gale 2000, 132, emphasis added)

What is envisaged, then, are opportunities for policy actors: to focus on a wider sense of policy communities; for policy conversations across cultural and contextual boundaries, directed at collective commitments (rather than consensus); and for pursuing creative possibilities. This is a constant, ongoing task that is forever incomplete.
Notes

1 'Cowboys' is a term used by one of the interviewees (BPA4) to describe policy actors located in statutory authorities or quasi-government departments and who seem better positioned to resist the 'ministerialisation' or explicit politicisation of bureaucracies by government ministers.

2 When referencing the comments of interviewees, the acronyms 'PPA', 'BPA', 'CIA' and 'AUA' are used throughout to protect individuals' anonymity while also giving the reader a sense of the 'vocalities' of interviewees with respect to policy production in Australian higher education. Further, each interviewee is allocated a number to distinguish between those similarly positioned.

3 Throughout this paper, a distinction is made between: 'State' (first letter capitalised), which refers to one territory in a federation of territories that constitute a nation, as in 'the State of Queensland'; and 'state' (without capitalisation), which refers to a nation's collective political governance, as in 'the Australian state'.

4 A fuller account of these contextual issues can be found in Gale (1994a,b) and Gale and McNamee (1994, 1995).

5 I admit to some slippage here in referring to the state and government. In fact, they are different concepts supported by their own bodies of literature and present different implications for policy production. Hoffman (1995) provides a good account of such distinctions and the need for them. However, these discussions are beyond the scope and primary interest of this paper.

References


