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EMOTIONS IN EDUCATION POLICY: A SOCIAL CONTRACT ANALYSIS OF ASYMMETRICAL DYADS AND EMOTION

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ABSTRACT

Like other academic fields, educational policy is being reviewed for the affective component. Analysis is occurring in two forms: (a) the affects of education policy on education, school leaders, teachers and student learning outcomes and (b) text analysis of specific education policies. This chapter explores the representation of emotions in education policy texts, drawing on a theory of social contracts (Rawolle & Vadeboncoeur, 2003; Yeatman, 1996) as a way to explore what is being conveyed to administrators and teachers. This chapter considers the way in which emotions are represented in education policy, through social contract analysis. Social contracts are underpinned by three underlying conditions: consent to be a part of a contract, points of renegotiation through the duration of the contract and mutual accountability to those involved.

The relay of contractual obligations in policy texts provides one way to consider the location of emotions within policy work. This account provides a framework for investigating the flow of emotional obligations in schools and education policy, and the ways that these obligations are met by teachers and young people positioned within a variety of contracts.

In comparison to other areas covered by education policy, emotions are a relatively recent area of concern to policy makers. There are some obvious reasons why this might be the case. Emotions and the concepts that are used to understand emotional states have typically been viewed as matters left untouched by governments, although of importance in understanding specific issues related to learning, assessment development, anti-social behaviour and a variety of risks attached to schooling, but hardly a topic suitable for direct public scrutiny and regulation. For policy makers, emotions were a private matter, unsuitable for policy development. But in recent years, this has changed, and the boundaries of topics suitable for intervention and public calculation have shifted. Recent shifts have highlighted therapeutic aspects of education, which have swiftly become a topic for a variety of education policy developments, expressed, for example as a concern for emotional intelligence, emotional development and emotional well-being (Australian Education Ministers, 2008).

This chapter concerns the role of emotions in education policy, as viewed through the language and conceptualisation of social contract. Social contracts may be viewed as a specific approach to policy characterised by explicitly expressed sets of expectations about the
provision of funding, which entail obligations or duties expected as a result of this funding. Not all policies are presented in the form of social contracts, though this appears to be increasingly drawn upon within education policy in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia. Within policy studies, social contracts have been studied in a variety of ways. This chapter draws in particular from one branch of these studies referred to as new contractualism (Yeatman & Owler, 2001). In this broad account, for a policy text to present a social contract, three key characteristics are required (Yeatman, 1996). First, the policy text should present a bargain underpinned by informed consent; second, there should be points at which the terms may be renegotiated, and third, there should be mutual accountability for the enactment of the contract (Rawolle, 2013; Yeatman, 2000). When applied to emotions, this account deals with the importance that is given to emotions in the setting and enactment of social contracts in education.

Three kinds of social contracts embedded in education policy will be considered. The first kind is broad social contracts, which provide the basis for connecting all people in a society together, such as Roosevelt’s New Deal in the United States and Keynesian settlements in other nations. Broad social contracts are broad obligations expected of all citizens in a reciprocal bargain for a range of services or safety provided by the government. In more specific terms, these are field-based contracts, tailored to the interaction between government and the corresponding field of interest. The second kind is social contracts for education, which provide a rationale for the contributions the field of education should make to other social fields. Social contracts for education are the sets of expectations that are made on behalf of education, as a trade-off between the broad contributions that education makes to other fields and financial or other supports from Government. In the United States, these are exemplified by the No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top policies; in the United Kingdom, by the policies connected under the slogan Education, Education, Education and in Australia, by the policies described as the Education Revolution. The third kind is contract-like mechanisms embedded in institutional texts, which make explicit the expectations of learners and teachers in the provision of education. Contract-like mechanisms are texts that embed and make accountable the expectations and relations between dyads of people in regulated service provision. These include individualised education plans, behaviour contracts and learning contracts. The assumption of this argument is that these three kinds of social contracts relay the obligations of other levels, forming a coherent suite of contractual relays. This chapter draws on these three kinds of concepts to consider the location of emotion within education policy.

This chapter also presents a review of the links between emotion and education policy, and the increasing regulation and policy demands expected of students, teachers, leaders, policy makers and governments in terms of emotion. This considers the way emotions have become an object of education reform. The chapter presents an approach to the analysis of education policies based on a social contract, which connect asymmetrical dyads – such as teachers and students – through explicit expectations and commitments to practice. This approach draws on the three characteristics of social contracts outlined above: informed consent, points of renegotiation and mutual accountability. These conditions will be drawn on the basis of an analysis of representative policy texts that refers to emotions. This account will emphasise social contracts for education and contract-like mechanisms. The chapter concludes with discussion of the relation of emotional regulation in education policy, and the scope for further research on the relays of emotions in education nationally and globally.
EMOTIONS IN EDUCATION POLICY

Within research in education policy, emotions have been drawn on in a variety of ways. Though there are a wide variety of approaches taken, three broad sets of literature will be touched on here briefly to understand the argument that follows in relation to social contracts and education policy. These include policy research drawing on a range of concepts related to emotion as a way to understand the effect of education, research focussed on policies in which emotions have become a central object of reform and government strategy and finally the role of emotions as an object of specific kinds of education policies, such as within inclusive education.

The links between emotions and education policy has become something of an emerging theme in education policy studies. One of the central themes of this strand of work has been an exploration of the kinds of emotional demands that are made of teachers in schools, with a particular emphasis on those demands that accompany reforms of different kinds (Kelchtermans, 2005; Lansky, 2005). In this literature emotions are used as a way of exploring aspects of the lived experiences of teachers and leaders in schools, and the unremarked costs of emotional labour that is expended during reform efforts (Gewirtz, 1997; Lingard, 2003).

In contrast to this use of emotions as a means of explaining the effects of education policy and reform, a separate strand of literature relates to the taking up of emotions as an object of education policy, as a target for the application of government strategy and reform (Ecclestone, 2007). Extreme accounts of this literature discuss the therapeutic turn in education policy as an emerging incursion of therapeutic thinking and practice into the lives of all young people, an extension of the thinking and practice usually reserved for students with specific learning needs.

This chapter provides a link to these sets of literature: it considers emotions as they are located within social contracts of different kinds, but it also considers the way that emotions are relayed to different levels, and emerge as one part of teachers’ work through sets of obligations. This requires some discussion about central themes in research involving education policy.

Understanding Social Contracts Involving Emotions in Education Policy

There are at least two major concerns that underpin policy studies. One of the key concerns lies in developing accounts of the construction and operation of policy texts, their arrangement, functions and links to other policies. This is referred to in a variety of ways, each of which refers to the process by which policy texts are produced. The second concern lies in understanding and explaining the effects, intended or unintended, that can be attributed to the policy text. This leads to a variety of mechanisms for exploring these connections, and relevant literature used in support of different considerations, factors considered and the influence of broader political and social contexts. The argument about social contracts in policy developed above suggests that one of the key questions in understanding both policy texts and policy effects lies in understanding the relays of expectations between different levels of social contract. Students may not immediately see the relevance of their learning for the economic prosperity of a nation, or for ensuring social cohesion within local communities. Yet government funding for education in Australia and elsewhere is in part premised on these connections. Likewise, the imperative to improve school results in literacy and numeracy may not be something that has immediate relevance for teachers in other areas, yet is imperative to continued funding to schools and districts. It is in these relays of obligations that the location of emotional labour or emotion work in education policy may be reconstructed. In the sections that follow this account will be developed by looking at the way these emotions are represented.
within specific policy texts. The selection of policy texts for this discussion is based on the
direct inclusion of emotions, represented in different ways. To illustrate this approach examples
have been taken from Australia and will be drawn on in the discussion below.

FIELD-BASED SOCIAL CONTRACTS

The core emphasis of field-based social contracts is to provide a broad rationale for government
funding and public support of education, and to outline the specific obligations that the field is
expected to perform in relation to other fields. In Australia, field-based social contracts for
education are represented in a set of National Agreements on Schooling every 10 years, through
the input and agreement of all State, Territory and Federal Ministers or their representatives.
The most recent agreement is the Melbourne Declaration, which provides a broad rationale in
the form of a preamble, a description of the two main goals – commitments to actions and a
statement on accountability – and public discussion of these goals each two years. The two
goals that the Declaration outlines are represented in the text in the following way:

Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7)
Goal 2: All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals,
and active and informed citizens. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 8)

Within the body of the policy, emotions are referenced in four separate places within the text.
In the preamble to the Declaration, which provides a rationale for government support, an
emphasis is placed on the role schools play in promoting emotional development and well-
being:

Schools play a vital role in promoting the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral,
spiritual and aesthetic development and wellbeing of young Australians, and in ensuring the
nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4)

Emotions also appear in relation to Goal 2 of the declaration, under the expansion of ‘Confident
and creative individuals’ who will ‘have a sense of self-worth, self-awareness and personal
identity that enables them to manage their emotional, mental, spiritual and physical wellbeing’
(MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9).

Emotions are referenced directly in relation to the commitments that the government
makes to early childhood education, which is expressed as ‘Australian governments commit to
supporting the development and strengthening of early childhood education, to provide every
child with the opportunity for the best start in life’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 11). In an elaboration
of this commitment, the policy text recognised that the period from ‘birth through to eight
years, especially the first three years, sets the foundation for every child’s social, physical,
emotional and cognitive development’ (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 11).

Finally, the Declaration references emotions in relation to curriculum, in a section in
which Australian Governments commit to ‘Promoting worldclass curriculum and assessment’
(MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13). Emotions are then referenced as the second major point in the
foundation that this curriculum will provide:

The curriculum will include a strong focus on literacy and numeracy skills. It will also enable
students to build social and emotional intelligence, and nurture student well-being through
health and physical education in particular. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13)

Through its location within the Declaration, emotions are included as a reference point for the
support of the development of each young person, and their self-management of their own well-
being. This provides a broad normative goal for the relationships between young people and teachers and others who work in Australian education systems. Beyond development, the last instance that mentions emotions also locates emotional intelligence as one of the key commitments of the area of health and physical education. This may appear as a limitation on the commitments, but could also be viewed as an explicit point of accountability.

The location of emotion within this policy text highlights its importance to the national goals for young people. However, to return to an earlier point, the issue of consent appears vexed in relation to this agreement. The consent in the production of the Melbourne Declaration is attributed to the representative ministers of Australian States or Territories or their delegates, rather than the broader public, or the young people, teachers, parents, carers and leaders who will be impacted by the specific commitments made. In addition, the first drafts of the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008) were produced prior to public discussion. There was a period of time available for feedback on this draft, which contributed to the final version of the document.

Like previous declarations, processes of negotiation and renegotiation between different levels of government underpin the development of the Melbourne Declaration. Negotiation and renegotiation can therefore be considered as specific commitments made by governments via core elements of the documents, though notably there is an asymmetry in relation to the input that some groups of people can have in the development of this and other policy texts.

Throughout the process of each of the three declarations developed, changes in the wording and commitments have become apparent. Alongside the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008), a four-year plan was produced that outlined specific commitments and elaborations about how the states and federal government would take responsibility for these goals (MCEETYA, 2009).

Commitments made by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG)\(^1\) to targets are also outlined in their policy plan. In the additional four-year plan, emotions are only directly referenced in relation to early childhood education, although the specific goals outlined in the original document are directly included in the recent text. The accountability of government to these commitments was originally to be reported as part of yearly National Report cards on education. However, in 2010 the reporting of outcomes based on this four-year plan appeared to be superseded by the announcement of the MySchool website, which provided a limited set of accountability measures initially on a detailed account of the performance of individual schools on literacy and numeracy tests. Emotional development or intelligence are not featured in the accounts offered either by the National Report cards on education or the MySchool website, though as more information is added to the MySchool website, there is the possibility of this being included at a later date. By including emotional development as an aspect of individual development, the accountability to these goals could therefore be relayed to contract like mechanisms.

The establishment of informed consent, points of renegotiation and forms of accountability surrounding the National Goals highlights the way in which it acts as a social contract for education within Australia, though the degree of commitment to emotions in terms of accountability is somewhat limited. Through their position in support of government commitment to enabling the development of confident and creative individuals within Australian early childhood and schooling settings, emotions are important to governments’ outline of a social contract for education. While they may be implicated in specific goals and targets for improvement, there are no specific targets for emotional development or emotional intelligence. There is, however, in the commitment to each young person a point of relay of obligations to specific contract-like mechanisms.
CONTRACT-LIKE MECHANISMS

Contract-like mechanisms provide a way of relaying the obligations and expectations expressed in social contracts for education by specifying specific kinds of engagements between people as requiring regulation and accountability. These may be found in a variety of forms in childcare centres, schools, universities and vocational and further education. These contract-like mechanisms often employ the language and form of legal contracts. In early childhood settings and schools, contract-like mechanisms may be found in individual education plans, learning contracts or behaviour contracts. These may also be identified in curriculum planning documents and individualised curriculum plans in schools and classrooms. In relation to emotions, the detail of specific contract-like mechanisms provides a potential relay of the commitments to emotional development and wellbeing or emotional intelligence which are made within the social contract of education.

In Australia some of these contract-like mechanisms, such as the curriculum, are publicly available for scrutiny prior to teaching periods, and are available to parents, caretakers and others who make decisions on behalf of young people. These documents are also available to all young people, however the individualisation and tailoring of curriculum to specific student learning needs take the form of a negotiation with a larger range of people. In schools, for example, schools’ syllabus statements provide some guidance as to the required curriculum, and negotiated individual learning contracts provide places for students to negotiate their expected outcomes throughout their study, and to renegotiate these expectations at specific points in their study. Likewise, individual learning plans provide explicit forms for the negotiation of learning goals for students with specific learning needs, or for individualised learning. The underpinning assumption of these kinds of contracts is that students, when beginning on a phase of learning, are at a point of distinct disadvantage from teachers in terms of knowing what kinds of experiences, demands and expectations will be made throughout their study. These kinds of relationships between students and teachers can be thought of as asymmetrical dyads, where the asymmetries of knowledge and power are fundamental and productive aspects of these relationships. The consent for these contract-like mechanisms is generally attributed to the selection of involvement, which may be viewed as an expression of individual choice, or as the decision of someone taking responsibility for the wellbeing and interests of another (such as parents and caretakers of school students). Likewise, the potential challenges to self-beliefs and self-knowledge that accompany learning throughout some subjects or units are not necessarily the expectations held by all students, yet may be demanded by their lecturers or teachers.

The effect of these contract-like mechanisms is to relay the expectations of the social contract for education to specific asymmetrical relationships. The text that outlines the contract-like mechanisms provides a material location for the obligations and expectations of students, teachers and others involved in meeting the requirements of the contract. Contract-like mechanisms about emotions relay the expectations of broader social contracts that deal with emotions by making explicit the specific goals involving emotions – outlining the emotional capacities that a young person may already have to deal with specific situations. These may be featured as goals in relation to the regulation of emotions in classroom settings, or enacting specific strategies that aid in responding to specific emotional states. The contrast to these steps may include specific consequences or steps that are followed if the obligations regarding emotions are not met. In a similar logic to the form of social contracts for education, contract-like mechanisms provide a balance between emotion-based considerations and other expectations of students and teachers. These explicit expectations provide the basis for planning future goals and actions. Contract-like mechanisms may also individualise learning, so that the expectations about emotions are simultaneously concerned with self-regulation and
meeting individual learning needs, goals and expectations related to emotions. As contract like mechanisms follow a similar form to social contracts for education, there is some inherent conflict in negotiating the expectations around emotions. As one common example, broader social contracts that are measured by standardised tests such as the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests prepare students for a generic test type, which may conflict with other social contracts, such as being engaged with personalised curriculum that fits the emotional needs of a learner. In practice, contract-like mechanisms involving emotions by necessity link back to broader social contracts of education and the broader social contract.

THE RELAY OF EMOTIONAL REGULATION

Given the account offered above of the role of emotions expressed in different social contracts, one key consequence of this account is that obligations about emotions are relayed between different levels of social contracts. Emotions figure in social contracts for education and in contract like mechanisms in which they may be a targeted goal for different kinds of asymmetrical dyads. In so far as the social contract for education supports broad social contracts in society, emotions also figure as an implicit target for social contracts of different kinds. As outlined earlier, this implies that emotions figure as a target of policy work and as a place to develop clear expectations for specific people in schools. Contract-like mechanisms, in the form of individual education plans, provide a specific relay point for this obligation, insofar as they may be explicitly developed in relation to particular emotional supports and capabilities. Contract-like mechanisms like individual learning plans have points at which renegotiation of the plans may be evaluated and altered, and processes attached to plans provide explicit guides for accountability. It is notable that in the main the relay of these obligations is not necessarily upwards: there are no public accountability measures that are directly related to obligations about emotions, emotional development and wellbeing or emotional intelligence at the level of social contracts for education. Accountability measures to social contracts for education in Australia are relatively limited to reporting based on performance in literacy and numeracy, with the possibility of other curriculum areas being added in due course to the MySchool website, the public vehicle for reporting on schools in Australia. Scope then exists for a broader set of accountability measures for emotions in relation to the performance of schools and national schooling systems.

The turn to social contracts as a specific form of policy development provides a broader interpretation of the concept of emotional regulation, in so far as the connections of social contracts provide a specific set of relays of contractual obligations related to emotions. These then provide relays of emotional obligations and emotional accountability to schools and asymmetrical dyads in which the work of developing emotional capacities is located: the emotional obligations attached to social contracts developed by governments are relayed to schools, teachers and other people involved in the provision of education. In this way emotions become annexed by government obligations and strategies, and the emotional development and wellbeing of young people become a potential target for reform. This turn to emotions in education policy raises a question about the reciprocity of emotional relays and connections. While the emotional capacities of students have become a target for the social contract of education and contract-like mechanisms, this in turn entails a supposed corresponding recognition of the emotional capacities of teachers and others who are then required to engage in a specific kind of emotional work in asymmetrical dyads. How do we now account for the obligations made on behalf of teachers, principals and schools? Policy makers are explicitly including work for emotional outcomes with students in social contracts while simultaneously neglecting that such work (a) has already been a part of the emotion work of teaching, which
is increasingly more difficult to do when regulated and (b) requires preparation, time and space to actually perform properly. Although this chapter focused on the policies of the Australian educational system, such issues abound in other areas, such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Further research on a global scale is needed to expose social policies created in schools that set up asymmetrical dyads and which ignore the terms of such contracts, such as consent to be a part of a contract, points of renegotiation through the duration of the contract, and mutual accountability to those involved.

NOTE

1. COAG is a high level council involving representatives from Federal, state (Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australian and Western Australia) and mainland territory (Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory) levels of government. Discussions at this council relate to the balance and provision of funding between the Federal, State and Territory Governments.

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