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Pedagogy, police training, D/discourses – subcultures and situated identities and meanings

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Abstract

Qualitative and quantitative methods were used in this research to distinguish the prevailing D/discourses (words, tools, beliefs, thinking styles) in police training and to analyse the ‘discourse-practice’ (Cherryholmes 1988: 1) framework of policing in a training environment. The manifestations, functions and consequences of the D/discourses raise concerns about the efficacy of training (its doctrinal intent and value versus its educative intent and value) and its implications for individuals’ identity, subjectivity, agency, learning, and “membership” within the policing community. The literature revealed that police training acts as a formally sanctioned vehicle for police culture, subcultures, and D/discourses. This is complicated by (a) the predominance of pedagogical training practices that support a trainer-centred approach and standardised lecture format for training, (b) police training focusing predominantly on law enforcement at the cost of higher-order conceptual skills, and (c) Australian and international studies of police management education which reveal a subculture resistant to theoretical analysis and critical reflection, and a set of unconscious and unchallengeable assumptions regarding police work, conduct, and leadership. The agenda of Australian and New Zealand police services for police to become a profession provides a backdrop to this research and findings.

Keywords: Policing community, culture, subcultures, police training, D/discourses.

Introduction

Any attempt to identify and analyse prevailing D/discourses (words, tools, beliefs, thinking styles) in a police training context has to acknowledge the dynamic nature of police culture and subcultures and their production and reproduction through various formal and informal structures, processes, and interactions within a police organisation and between its members (Chan 1996 & 1997; Chan with Devery & Doran 2003; Foster 2003; Sackmann 1991; Reiner 2000). Shearing and Ericson (1991, p.487) defined police culture as ‘figurative logic’ whereby culture is not literal. Instead, it is symbolic, rhetorical, and metaphorical: it is the product of oral communication (narratives, ‘war stories’) which explains and justifies action. These conceptions of police culture resonate with the notion of D/discourses as ‘…a set of ideas and practices which condition our way of relating to, and acting upon, particular
The demands on policing in the 21st century require that police training (knowledge and skills to fulfil police operations) and police education (conceptual skills for theoretical and analytical learning) are capable of meeting a range of expectations (Kratcoski 2004). Kratcoski (2004) reviewed Australian and international police training and found that the training concentrates on rudimentary aspects of law enforcement at the cost of the higher-order conceptual skills. This raises questions about the efficacy of police training and education not only to meet the requirements of dynamic practice, but the aspirant intention of police to become a profession.

A deconstructive/post-structural approach and assumptions were applied to this research. Key assumptions include: knowledge and power are interconnected; language contains a multiplicity of meanings; and an individual’s identity is a product of encounters with a range of complex social and cultural agendas and settings (Connole 1993: 14-15). This research therefore aimed to challenge that which is taken-for-granted by investigating the construction and interpretation of knowledge, “truth”, and social realities and the deconstruction of these through the lens of the prevailing D/discourse. Through the elicitation of the personal constructs or perceptions of a cohort of police trainers and trainees, the D/discourse that configures learning in a police academy was analysed with the intention of: confirming the findings of the literature review; identifying the potential impact of the D/discourse on the learning, subjectivity, and agency of the individuals; and engaging in preliminary theoretical analysis of the causes and effects of that D/discourse. This paper provides a summary of the analysis of those findings.

**Methodology**

Data from the questionnaires and interviews were analysed using grounded theory and a discourse analytic framework respectively. Discourse analysis is about describing, interpreting, and explaining the interaction and tensions between language and other elements, and their cause and effects within specific historical and social contexts (Fairclough 1995; Gee 2005; Rogers 2004). This was achieved using Fairclough’s (1995: 96-97) three dimensions – ‘local’ (language-in-use), ‘institutional’ (social institutions), and ‘societal’ (policies and meta-narratives) and Gee’s (2005) analytic process of exploring cultural, social, personal, individual, and situational facets and meanings within these dimensions.

The repertory grid interview (Cassell & Walsh 2004; Dick & Jankowicz 2001; Fransella & Bannister 1977) enabled the collection, documentation, and correlation of the extent and strength of the trainees’ and trainers’ perceptions (personal constructs) of various character and personality attributes and gender as they relate to a range of policing functions and roles. The grid is situated within the constructionist paradigm, which explores how D/discourse creates reality and justifies and privileges certain tacit language, thoughts, and actions over others (Terre Blanche & Durrheim 1999).

Fourteen police trainees (six females, eight males) and nine trainers (four females, five males) provided their personal constructs or perceptions of a range of personality

phenomena…” (Knights & Morgan 1991: 253) and as particular ‘ways of talking’ and ‘ways of seeing’ that are resistant to challenge and change (Fairclough 1995: 41).
and character attributes and gender within the context of a number of police roles and functions. In addition, a total of 54 questionnaires were completed. Forty-six trainees completed questionnaires, 15 females and 29 males, the majority were in the 19 to 25 years age group. Eight trainers, three females and five males, the majority in the 36-45 years age group also completed questionnaires.

**Literature: police subcultures and training**

The literature review revealed a range of common characteristics that were inherently interrelated, dynamic and need to be viewed as products and resources of discourses. These characteristics can be more easily explained in terms of three subcultures: family-relationships, command and control, and “real” police work.

The heart of the family-relationships subculture is that peers represent the ‘family’ and the organisation the ‘parent’ (Bonifacio 1991). Whilst ‘parent’ and ‘family’ provide a common understanding and identity, they are also supportive and punitive (Bonifacio 1991; Fielding 1994; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Prenzler 1998; Reiner 1992, cited in Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999b). Family-relationships are built upon the perception of and ability to be capable and reliable which necessitates the need to be or be seen to be “perfect” (Bonifacio 1991; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Manning 1978, cited in Chan 1997; Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999b).

The command and control subculture, with its paramilitary ethos and the organisation’s strict hierarchical command structure (Bonifacio 1991; Heidensohn 1992; Cain 2002; Fleming & Lafferty 2003; Palmer 1994; Panzarella 2003; Waddington 1999a & 1999b), simultaneously underpins and complicates the family-relationships subculture. Waddington (1999a:301) described the police organisation as a ‘punishment-centred bureaucracy’ where poor behaviour is readily noted and punished, but where good behaviour is often unacknowledged; a paramilitary model that is criticised for maintaining the status of police managers and stifling independent thinking and innovative practice (Cowper 2000; Panzarella 2003).

Finally, the “real” police work subculture is grounded in operational policing. This is supported by a ‘sense of mission’ (Reiner 2000:89) and political and legal sanctions to control society (Manning 1977). The ‘cult of masculinity’ combined with the emphasis on fighting crime provides further justification for the application of authority and the maintenance of reputation and status (Dick & Cassell 2004; Frewin & Tuffin 1998; Reiner 2000; Martin & Jurik 1996; Waddington 1999a & 1999b). The need to maintain assertive control requires quick and decisive action which means thinking (reflectively or critically) could be judged as a weakness (Bonifacio 1991).

The functions and consequences of police culture and these subcultures are amplified in the correlation between them and three discourses – ‘conformity’; ‘internal pressure’; and ‘police status’ – identified by Frewin and Tuffin (1998:178-181). Firstly, the ‘conformity discourse’ emphasises adherence to images and standards. Surveillance of peers and the marginalisation of those who “fail to conform” represent the resources of the ‘internal pressure discourse’. Further to this, the ‘police status discourse’ is concerned with the maintenance of the standing of police in the society at all costs.
The police training literature revealed the predominance of pedagogical training methods over andragogical (adult learning) methods and the doctrinal versus educative intent and value of these methods (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001; McCoy 2006; Marenin 2004). Such methods and the lack of integrated curricula and consequent disconnection between training, learning, and education, do not guarantee to teach or augment skills in decision making, problem-solving, and critical thinking (Birzer & Tannehill 2001, Ortmeier 1997, cited in McCoy 2006; Marenin 2004; White 2006).

Police instructors are ‘…primarily law enforcement practitioners and not educators’ (McCoy 2006: 88). McCoy (2006) stressed the need for police trainers to develop a professional training standpoint and to engage in reflective practice. ‘Experience alone does not make a person a professional adult educator…’ (Elias & Merriam 1995, cited in McCoy 2006: 89) and the ability to reflect upon her or his practice and experience is imperative. Vickers’s (2000: 508) and Adlam’s (2002) critiques of police management education found a set of unchallengeable assumptions about police work and conduct which repressed ‘learning through reflection and critique’.

**Words, symbols, “truth”, and meaning**

The grid interview facilitated access to trainers’ and trainees’ inner-most beliefs about themselves and others, either as police officers and police trainers or in the case of the trainees, as their anticipated ‘police self’ (Conti 2006: 227), and expectations of the ‘discourse-practice’ (Cherryholmes 1988: 1) framework of policing.

While trainers might believe their ‘discourse-practice’ framework is based on ‘true statements’ (Cherryholmes 1988: 34), from a deconstructive/post-structural perspective, ‘truth is discursive’, and discourses are situated in history and are influenced by power (Cherryholmes 1988: 34). According to Foucault (cited in Cherryholmes 1988: 34-35), truth is represented by:

...the types of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true...the means by which it is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.

Gee’s (2005: 7) definition of discourse as the correlation between ‘language-in-use’ (little “d” discourse) and other elements (big “D” discourse) such as symbols, tools, values, beliefs, and thinking styles best captures the intent of this research. This definition is explained further by Gee (2004: 40-41) as:

...a way of using not just words, but words, deeds, objects, tools, and so forth to enact a certain sort of socially situated identity, and...cultural models (taken-for-granted stories)...to construct certain sorts of situated meanings.

Within a police training context, the language-in-use represented in police practices and culture combined with various symbols enact a particular ‘socially situated identity’ and a set of ‘situated meanings’ (Gee 2004: 40-41). Particular conceptions about “what is said” (discourse) and “what is done” (practice) in policing are privileged over other conceptions and are supported by the trainers ‘...those who are charged with saying what counts as true’ (Foucault, cited in Cherryholmes 1988: 35). The discourse-practice framework could be seen to represent ‘ideological discursive formations’ which are produced and reproduced by dominant ‘cultures, social groups, and institutions’ (Gee 2005: 7) through formal and informal structures and processes.
Distinguishing the D/discourses

The most common personality and character attributes and gender (elements within the grid interview), were classified according to the three D/discourses identified from the questionnaire data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1</th>
<th>Warrior D/discourse</th>
<th>Tough-love family D/discourse</th>
<th>Perfect self D/discourse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Element 1 – tough</td>
<td>Element 4 – compliant</td>
<td>Element 12 – reputable</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 2 – authoritative</td>
<td>Element 9 – accepted</td>
<td>Element 13 – sensitive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 3 – willing to exercise power</td>
<td>Element 10 – different</td>
<td>Element 14 – tolerant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 5 – strong</td>
<td>Element 11 – loyal</td>
<td>Element 15 – logical</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 6 – willing to use force</td>
<td>Element 17 – conforms</td>
<td>Element 16 – assertive</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Element 7 – female</td>
<td>Element 18 – self-control</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The analysis of the data from the interviews revealed the predominant D/discourse across the three groups was that of the Warrior, closely followed by the D/discourses of Tough-love family and Perfect self.

D/discourses and situated identities and meanings

**Warrior D/discourse – integrating the local, institutional, and societal dimensions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Female</th>
<th>“Males are always believed to be the stronger and tougher sex”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“At some stage throughout the course ALL the females have been emotional (i.e. upset, crying, etc) and no males have”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Police culture is conveyed through “war stories”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>“Putting your body on the line”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“Being tough, strong and aggressive”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Interestingly, in the grid interview, element 8 – “male” was positively correlated and ranked highly by the trainers in three constructs – admire, instructor, and ideal police officer.
officer with “female” ranked low. In the questionnaires, each participant group perceived differences (trainers – 62.5 per cent, trainees – 59 per cent and 46 per cent) between how males and females experienced police training. Gender differences relating to physical ability, levels of aggression, academic ability, and personality attributes such as an authoritative manner, were commonly identified by both the trainers and the trainees.

Trainees struggle to make sense of who they are in this environment and what ‘certain kind of person’ (Hacking 2000, cited in Ainsworth & Hardy 2004: 239) they need to become. It is not only the titles of “police trainee” and “police officer” or “cop”, but a particular image, behaviour, and thinking style that need to be practised, acquired, and demonstrated. The trainees are in a highly regulated setting where ‘disciplinary power’ (Foucault 1977: 153) is achieved through adherence to a strict time-table, observation, surveillance, assessment, constraints on freedom, regulation, and discipline. Through a range of mechanisms of ‘disciplinary power’, the trainees’ ‘situated identity’ and ‘situated meanings’ (Gee 2004: 40-41) are under construction, according to the ‘organizational ideal’ (Conti 2006: 222). As Foucault (1977: 138) argued, ‘discipline produces subjected and practised bodies, ‘docile’ bodies’.

**Tough-love family D/discourse – integrating the local, institutional, and societal dimensions**

<p>| | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>“It’s like a private club to be joined at some time”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male</strong></td>
<td>“Team, loyalty, strength, unity” versus “Look after mates, gossip, and bitchiness”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>“Supportive (common work goals) and provides peer networks” versus “Misguided loyalty and suppression of individual initiative”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Female</strong></td>
<td>“It’s a huge gossip factory – if you don’t hear your own name, you must be doing OK”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tough-love family D/discourse** is essentially about conforming, fitting into the ‘community of practice’ (Lave & Wenger 1991: 98) of policing through communication and activities. This D/discourse essentially operates to control internal relationships and interactions. ‘Performativity’ or the ‘forced reiteration of [hegemonic] norms’ (Butler, cited in McNay 2000: 33; Webster 2006: 5) is evident in this D/discourse. Being an effective student and demonstrating conformity (Freire 1970/2000, cited in Webster 2006) and that related to adopting and presenting a prescribed identity are key functions of this D/discourse.

A critical feature is that of ‘familiarity’ in terms of a common understanding of work, and knowledge and judgement of peers’ competence and ability in operational settings; in particular the capacity to “look out for each other” and demonstrate loyalty to a partner (Frewin & Tuffin 1998: 178). Frewin and Tuffin (1998) found that discipline is a significant feature of conformity, but with emphasis on the individual and her or his capacity (or not) to show discipline. The family relationships subculture is sustained through tools such as ‘marginalization’, ‘powerlessness’, ‘cultural imperialism’ (the dominant D/discourse judging the validity and reality of other D/discourses as invisible and indiscernible) (Young 1990: 48-63). The internal pressure to participate is a measure of an individual’s commitment to the “family” (peers, partners) and the culture, and ultimately reflects the individual’s ability to perform in operational policing contexts (Frewin & Tuffin 1998). Those who do not meet the expectations of the dominant are “Othered”: ostracised, marginalised, and the subject of gossip and innuendo.
‘Performativity’ (Butler, cited in McNay 2000: 33; Webster 2006: 5) is important in a training environment where a trainee is expected to repeatedly conform to social and cultural norms and achieve acceptance or membership. The manifestation and functions of this D/discourse therefore impact on individuals’ subjectivity. Gagnier (1991, cited in Hall 2004: 2-3) defined “subjectivity” as firstly the subject as “self” or “I” – essentially how one perceives oneself. At the same time, ‘the subject is a subject to, and of, others; in fact, it is often an “Other” to others’ which impacts on one’s perception of self. Importantly, the subject is also ‘a subject of knowledge...the discourse of social institutions that circumscribe its terms of being’. A trainee must remove the trappings of her or his ‘civilian self’ and adopt those of the ‘other’ – firstly, the police trainee and then the police officer (Conti 2006: 227).

Perfect self D/discourse – integrating the local, institutional, and societal dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>“It’s us (police) versus them (general public)”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>“Supportive, understanding and a sense of belonging” versus “insular, us and them mentality, and elitist”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“It is important to look and act professional.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“The public want to be comforted by us when they are hurt, but they want more so to be reassured by our actions – that we have things under control at an incident. Our strength makes them feel safe.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“We know right from wrong... and we act with honesty and integrity.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>“Must not allow the public to get under your skin and change your course of action.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perfect self D/discourse is concerned with the reputation and standing of police in society. It reflects notions of discipline, ability to handle self, to be reliable and capable, but importantly to present a particular image based on a set of behaviours which essentially represent ideas of separateness and elitist thinking. The view of police as separate and different from the public positions police in the ‘we/they [police/public] paradox’ (Perez 1997, cited in Garcia 2005: 68) and a ‘symbolised status hierarchy’; maintained by certain formal and informal rules and rituals that reinforce ‘social position and power with a ‘natural superiority’” (Adlam 2002: 27). Frewin and Tuffin’s (1998: 179-180) study identified the ‘police status discourse’ which centres on the social and political position and role of police in society. At the heart of this discourse are ‘reputation’ and the need to ‘look the part’.

Connections are evident with the “real” police work and aspects of the family-relationships subcultures. This D/discourse and complementary subcultures support the development of particular thinking styles which simultaneously support and maintain culture, D/discourses, actions, and power and gender relations. Once again, ‘performativity’ (Butler, cited in McNay 2000: 33; Webster 2006: 5) is significant whereby trainees are expected to be “perfect” students and to quickly acquire an image which represents the ‘organizational ideal’ (Conti 2006: 222). It is also an image perceived by the dominant as that desired by the public (Westmarland 2001). Of significance in this D/discourse, is how police work is constructed what practices and character and personal attributes are valued in policing and how these are maintained and measured? A lack of congruence often exists between the actual culture – policing as predictable, unexciting, and commonplace, and the aspirant intent – images and rhetoric of excitement, action, danger, and fighting crime (Foster 2003).
Of significance in relation to the Perfect self D/discourse is that achieving results translates to praise from peers and enhances an individual’s ‘status and sense of self’ (Westmarland 2001: 6). This is reflective of the family-relationships subculture – being capable, reliable, and “perfect”, thereby avoiding mistakes (Bonifacio 1991; Neyroud & Beckley 2001; Manning 1978, cited in Chan 1997; Shanahan 2000; Waddington 1999a & 1999b). This places significant expectations upon the individual and on others in relation to performance, identity, agency, and subjectivity. The individual’s struggle with being ‘…a subject to and of others’ and ‘a subject of knowledge…’ (Hall 2004: 2-3).

Training and the prevailing D/discourses

**Male**
“The rank structure, authority, and discipline are driven home.”

**Male**
“I want to be a reputable police officer.”

**Female**
“…still an overriding feeling of male domination within the service.”

**Female**
“I often ask myself ‘why am I here’ and ‘should I be here?’”

**Female**
“We facilitate “fitting in” through team building exercises.”

**Female**
“Culture is based on loyalty to each other.”

**Male**
“I am decisive and good at physical work. I don’t allow personal feelings to interfere with my work. I am technically competent. I prefer to take charge. I like to lead rather than follow.”

Police training is focused predominantly on law enforcement (Kratcoski 2004) which reflects the aspirant intent of policing (Foster 2003), maintains the status quo, and positions training in a traditional, technical framework (White 2006). Webster (2006: 5) argued that when pedagogies are viewed as a set of ‘mechanical skills’, a means rather than an outcome, learning is at best ‘trivialised’, at worst, never evaluated, taken-for-granted, and overlooked. The focus is instead on how effectively trainees can acquire skills, knowledge, and attitudes to achieve certain behavioural learning outcomes and to demonstrate conformity. Pedagogies are not ideologically neutral; they can be used to regulate behaviour, actions, and practices and this is especially marked in settings where students are perceived ‘as objects’ of value to those in authority (Freire 1970/2000, cited in Webster 2006: 6).

In this context, a police trainee is a paid employee and that status essentially ‘buys off’ a trainee’s ‘rights to choose how she or he should be treated’ (White 2006: 393). The trainee is paid to learn and is an ‘object’ of value to the organisation. The focus and approach to police training, and the trainees’ status provide a context for the production and reproduction of the three D/discourses and consequently impact upon the identity, subjectivity, agency, and learning of the trainees. As Howarth and Stavrakakis (2000, cited in Ainsworth & Hardy 2004: 238) claimed, ‘Discourse…creates identities that individuals must take up to make sense of the discourse’; the consequence of which is that, ‘…individuals subject themselves to its disciplinary effects’.

Various authors (Birzer 2003; Birzer & Tannehill 2001; McCoy 2006; Marenin 2004; White 2006) are unanimous in recommending a move from traditional pedagogical approaches in police training to andragogical methods with integrated and holistic curricula, and the adoption of professional practice requirements for police trainers (McCoy 2006). Such a move and change in practice represents a paradigmatic shift in
both thinking and practice. It has the potential however to provide platforms for nurturing critical thinking, providing training with an educative intent, and evaluating the transformation of learning into effective practice.

Conclusion

The findings of this research are set in a broader “political” context with Australian and New Zealand police jurisdictions advancing the agenda for police to become a profession. The three prevailing D/discourses in police training corroborate critical aspects evident in the literature in terms of police culture, subcultures, and training practices. The research shows that the D/discourse of the Warrior predominates in police training closely followed by the D/discourses of Tough-love family and Perfect self.

Critically, the Warrior D/discourse influences both internal and external relationships and interactions, and therefore the enactment of the other two D/discourses. The trainers’ and trainees’ personal constructs in relation to gender and the body as ‘physical capital’ (Shilling1997, cited in Westmarland 2001: 5) reveal the strength of the Warrior D/discourse, and this is complicated by pedagogical practices that reflect doctrinal values rather than educative values. Membership, conformity, competence, and being the “perfect” police trainee are manifestations of the Tough-love family D/discourse and determined by the Warrior D/discourse. Similarly, the need to establish status and a reputable guise are manifestations of the Perfect self D/discourse imposed by the Warrior.

The functions of all three D/discourses revolve around ‘performativity’ (McNay 2000: 33) and the consequences are the acquisition of a specified identity and membership within the ‘community of practice’ of policing. The manifestations, functions, and consequences of the three D/discourses coalesce to establish and maintain a powerful and challenging context within which identities are formed and augur a challenging context for change. The words of two trainees reflect the challenges the culture, subcultures, environment, and these D/discourses present to the trainees:

Female  “Policing is the strongest, most pervasive culture I have come across.”
Male  “I try to fit in and I think I do fit in... most of the time.”
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