MySchool: Whose School?

An Australian investigation of the mediatization of educational policy

by

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Abstract

The Australian Federal Government’s *MySchool* website, launched on January 28, 2010, provided unprecedented public access to the national literacy and numeracy results of Australia’s almost 10,000 schools. Echoing similar standardized testing and reporting regimes in comparable Anglophone nations, national testing and reporting represented a significant re-framing of Australian education, re-defining the relationship between central government and the states by strengthening national control over an area that was formerly the latter’s jurisdiction, while simultaneously re-defining teachers and schools by tightening accountability for “performance”.

*MySchool* was fiercely contested by disparate and often antagonistic members of the education field. Their concerns were often as much with how the press would report on the policy as they were with the policy itself, the chief fear being that the website would enable newspapers to produce “league tables” ranking schools.

This research is concerned with the mediatization of this policy and the processes by which it occurred. My interest in it grew from my experiences as an Australian teacher and, in particular, from the sense I have had in recent years of being “re-defined”; of my worth as a teacher being measured, calculated and assessed on the basis of the “value” I add to my students’ externally assessed results and, further, the sense that press reporting amplifies this process. The research investigates the extent to which, and the ways in which, three Australian newspapers supported or contested preferred government discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement in their reporting on the *MySchool* website. It locates this investigation in the context of each newspaper’s broader reporting on education and investigates the discursive effects of this mediatized policy on schools named in the press, from the principal’s view, through interviews with six school principals whose schools were “named” in the newspapers analysed.

Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social fields provided the overarching theoretical framework for this empirical study. The study also utilised aspects of Norman Fairclough’s Critical Discourse Analysis to analyse press and policy texts. To account for the multiple and complex interactions between the fields of politics, journalism, education and educational policy which emerged as central in the mediatization of this policy, the study drew on the framework of temporary social
fields and cross-field effects developed by Rawolle, associated research into the mediatization of educational policy, and wider research on mediatization.

The research revealed that while the internal workings of the journalistic field had a significant bearing on how the policy investigated was re-presented in the press, relations between fields were also crucial. Indeed, the interactions and intrusions of the fields involved in both the production and reception of this policy were important in accounting not only for the discourses constructed by newspapers, but also for the different versions of the policy each created. The research found that in re-working a policy’s intent, often to suit its own value-stances on education, individual newspapers not only alter how a policy is understood by the public, but potentially alter the policy itself. In so doing, newspapers may lend powerful support to preferred central government discourses around education. Equally, they may be highly active in offering resistance. In either case, they assume a policy-making role that goes well beyond mere reporting. Moreover, they play multiple, shifting and sometimes conflicting roles in this process and, indeed, these roles appear to be different in different newspapers, suggesting that mediatization may be newspaper-specific.

The research found that mediatization is not a one-way process in which the press does something to policy. It is, rather, a dynamic and contested process defined and shaped by ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) in which the press may also be subject to change. In investigating the effects of mediatized policy on schools, from the principal’s view, the research found that although schools and teachers often feel powerless in the face of the political, journalistic and educational policy fields’ attempts to define what schools and education ought to be, they are neither helpless nor acquiescent. They too have the capacity for dissent and, ultimately, the power to resist mediatized efforts to alter their practice and autonomy. They do this, in the end, by continuing their core “business”, guided by strong leaders who, operating from a particular habitus, can and do make a difference to how policy and press re-presentations of policy translate in practice.
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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>Australian Curriculum, Reporting and Assessment Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACER</td>
<td>Australian Council of Educational Research</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACSSO</td>
<td>Australian Council of State School Organisations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACT</td>
<td>Australian Capital Territory</td>
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<td>ACU</td>
<td>Australian Catholic University</td>
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<td>AEC</td>
<td>Australian Education Council</td>
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<td>AEU</td>
<td>Australian Education Union</td>
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<td>AIM</td>
<td>Achievement Improvement Monitor</td>
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Australian Labor Party</td>
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<td>ARA</td>
<td>Australian Reading Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>BER</td>
<td>Building the Education Revolution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COAG</td>
<td>Council of Australian Governments</td>
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<td>DEEETYA</td>
<td>Department of Employment, Education, Training &amp; Youth Affairs</td>
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<td>DEST</td>
<td>Department of Education, Science &amp; Training</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
<td>Education Reform Act</td>
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<td>ETAQ</td>
<td>English Teachers’ Association of Queensland</td>
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<td>GFC</td>
<td>Global Financial Crisis</td>
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<td>HSC</td>
<td>Higher School Certificate</td>
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<td>NAPLAN</td>
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<td>New Public Management</td>
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<td>WA</td>
<td>Western Australia</td>
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Chapter 1  Locating the Study

1.1  Introduction

This study investigates the discursive effects of the processes of the mediatization of educational policy on particular schools in the context of an emerging national agenda in education and an emerging global educational policy field (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Located within a broader exploration of the interrelationships between the fields of education, educational policy, politics and journalism, the study investigates the ways in which, and the extent to which, three Australian newspapers, The Age, The Australian and the Herald Sun, supported or contested preferred Australian Federal Government discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement in their reporting on the publication of national literacy and numeracy test results on the MySchool website. It investigates the processes by which this policy was mediatized, examining how the discourses constructed in each newspaper discursively positioned and represented schools and education. It then explores, through interviews with school principals, the discursive effects on particular schools that were named in the media, from the principal’s view.

1.2  Key research questions

The key research question this project poses is:

What are the discursive effects of the processes of the mediatization of educational policy on particular schools in the context of an emerging national agenda in education and an emerging global educational policy field?

It is underpinned by the following specific research questions:

(i) what were the preferred discourses on education constructed by the Australian Federal Government in the context of an emerging national agenda in education and how can these be accounted for?

(ii) what were the preferred discourses on education produced by each newspaper in their reporting on the MySchool website and how can these be accounted for?

(iii) how did these preferred discourses on education discursively position and represent education and schools?
what were the discursive effects on particular schools that were named in the media, from the principal’s view?

1.3 Locating and contextualising the study

The location of this investigation within a broader exploration of field interrelationships requires contextualization of the policy investigated, the media in which it was released and the political, education and policy landscapes which informed and influenced its development. Thomas (2005, p.100) emphasizes the importance of situating the ‘critical analysis of media and policy texts within the social contexts in which such texts are produced’, while Ball (1993, p.11) points out that policies have ‘an interpretational and representational history’ and do not ‘enter a social or institutional vacuum’. The same might also be said of newspaper texts written about education policies which, as Ozga (2000) argues, could also be viewed as policy texts. Contextualisation is therefore a crucial first step in the analytical process.

The period analysed in this study was one of significant change in Australia’s political and educational landscapes. It included a change of federal leadership; a federal election which resulted in a hung parliament, and state elections in both NSW and Victoria which saw the Liberal-Coalition party defeat the Australian Labor Party. During this period, the federal government took unprecedented ‘control of education reform from the states’ (Milburn, 2009a), altering the autonomy of the political field by intruding in an area ‘jealously protected by the states as their responsibility’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.94).

The following discussion locates the policy analysed in its social context in the three key periods of data analysis: June,2009-February,2010; July,2010-February,2011 and February-March,2012. It presents this material as a narrative account, then sketches the policy’s location in, and contribution to, an emerging national agenda in Australian education (Lingard, 2010) and its positioning within a ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). It concludes by outlining the significant changes occurring in the print media in which this policy was released.

1.3.1 Contextualising the MySchool story: 2009-2010

Launched by Federal Education Minister and Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, on January 28, 2010, the MySchool website provided unprecedented public access to the nationally-assessed
literacy and numeracy results of Australia’s almost 10,000 schools. An Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) grouped and compared schools that served similar student populations (ACARA) and determined which schools were listed as statistically similar on the website (ACARAd), enabling users to compare a selected school’s results with the results of sixty ‘statistically similar’ schools (ACARAb), many of which, as Lingard (2010, p.131) points out, were likely to be located in other states. Schools, however, could only be accessed individually in order to obtain this comparative data, a strategy employed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)\(^{(1)}\) to prevent newspapers publishing “league tables”.

Two features about this policy’s delivery were significant. The first was its harnessing of new technologies to deliver online the first national test results for all Australian schools, replacing previous practice whereby schools posted their state-based test results on their own websites. Thus the public were given unprecedented access to the nation’s educational “performance” in one convenient online location. The second was the political field’s attempt to control and restrict media access to the data, a move suggesting awareness of the capacity of the journalistic field to re-present\(^{(2)}\) policy, and one which had significant implications, both for the policy’s re-presentation in the press and for the nature of its mediatization.

MySchool was part of an education ‘reform package’ (Ball, 2003, p.215) introduced by the ALP’s Rudd Government following their election in December, 2007. Reforms included Australia’s first national curriculum; the introduction in 2008 of a national assessment program in literacy and numeracy (NAPLAN); the establishment of a national curriculum, assessment and reporting authority (ACARA); uniform nationally accredited standards for teachers and MySchool which, in 2010, reported publicly on the results of NAPLAN testing and, in 2011, was broadened to include financial data about schools’ income and government funding levels. Collectively, these policies were the product of an ‘ideological and political climate’ (Taylor et

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\(^{(1)}\) The functions of ACARA include developing and administering a national school curriculum and national assessments; collecting, managing and analyzing student assessment data, and publishing information relating to school education, including information relating to comparative school performance (Commonwealth of Australia ACARA Act, 2008).

\(^{(2)}\) Pettigrew & Maclure (1997, p.392) have argued that newspapers ‘do not just write about education, they also represent to their readers what education is “about”’. I have used ‘re-presented’ rather than represented throughout this thesis to capture the processes of choice, selectivity and interpretation that newspapers engage in in reporting on education. In using this term, I draw on Wilkinson’s (2005, p.99) reference to the distinction drawn by Spivak ‘between representation as, on the one hand, “speaking for” groups, and, on the other hand “involving interpretation”. The latter is defined by Spivak as “re-presentation” (Spivak, 1988a in Wilkinson, 2005, p. 99).
al, 1997, p.16) which increasingly foregrounded ‘accountability, assessment, standards monitoring, performance, quality assurance and school effectiveness’ (Rowe, 2000, p.74) and reflected a ‘strengthened national presence in schooling and new national accountabilities’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130). These sought to impose a ‘system of performance indicators upon the education market’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1), re-defining the relationship between central government and the states and constructing teachers as individuals who should “add value” to themselves, improve their productivity (and) strive for excellence’ (Ball, 2003, p.217).

The decision to publish school attainment data on the MySchool website was fiercely contested by members of the Australian education community, including the Australian Education Union (AEU), academics, school principals’ associations and parent organizations. This contestation and dissent was often less about the policy than about how it would be reported in the press. The major concern was that the data would be used by newspapers to produce “league tables” ranking schools, effectively “naming and shaming” underperforming schools which, it was assumed, would largely be disadvantaged schools. On March 23, 2009, in an unprecedented show of unity, teacher unions and principals’ associations across school sectors wrote to the Education Minister ‘to strongly (urge) her to take legislative action prohibiting the creation and publication of league tables’ (Harrison, 2009f). At its 2010 annual federal conference, held in January, just before the launch of MySchool, AEU delegates voted unanimously not to cooperate in the implementation of the 2010 NAPLAN tests unless the Federal Government took action to ‘protect students and school communities from the damaging effects of league tables’ (Gavrielatos & Robinson, 2010), effectively holding the government to ransom unless it acted to intervene in the journalistic field. Such intervention had already occurred in New South Wales (NSW) when, in June 2009, the Greens and the Coalition united in the upper house to ban the publication of “league tables” in that state, backed by fines of up to $55,000 for organizations such as newspapers (Ferrari & Kelly, 2009).

Against this background of unified dissent among disparate members of Australia’s education community, MySchool was launched on January 28, 2010, and the press embarked on a period of intense reporting which, as predicted, included the publication in some newspapers of “league tables” of NAPLAN results. The launch of MySchool also coincided with a groundswell of criticism against the Rudd Government’s ambitious school stimulus package, Building the
Education Revolution (BER), hastily implemented in response to the Global Financial Crisis (GFC). The BER allocated a staggering $16.2 billion to provide schools with new and refurbished halls, libraries, classrooms, science labs, language centres and covered outdoor learning areas. Designed to stimulate the economy and prevent Australia sliding into recession, the BER attracted significant criticism, aired at length in *The Australian*, with claims of alleged fraud, waste and mismanagement. In April, 2010, the Federal Government established the BER Implementation Taskforce to investigate these claims. Its final report, handed down on July 8, 2011, found that the rollout of the program was largely successful, despite ‘clusters of poor quality outcomes’, particularly in NSW and Victoria (www.news.com.au). This story received extensive coverage in *The Australian* in the first period of data analysis and appeared to inform and influence its reporting on *MySchool*.

### 1.3.2 *MySchool2.0 - 2011*

Significant change in Australia’s political landscape dominated the months between the launch of *MySchool* in January, 2010 and its re-launch in March, 2011. On June 24, 2010, following a series of polls that predicted defeat for the ALP at the 2010 federal election, Education Minister, Julia Gillard, won the Labor leadership uncontested after PM Kevin Rudd, conceding that he lacked the numbers to withstand a challenge, stepped aside. The outcome of the subsequent federal election on August 21st, in which Gillard tested her claim to be Prime Minister, was a hung parliament, the first in Australia since 1940. Labor subsequently formed a minority government with the support of the Greens and three Independents. In September, Gillard’s former Education portfolio was split and divided between two ministers in a re-shuffle which inexplicably removed the title ‘Education Minister’. Former Minister for the Environment, Peter Garrett, became Minister for Schools, Early Childhood and Youth and Senator Chris Evans Minister for Jobs, Skills and Workplace Relations, indicating a further sublimation of education to national economic needs.

Set against this backdrop of significant political change were two events which were influential in the subsequent trajectory of *MySchool*. The first was a Senate report tabled in November, 2010, following an inquiry into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN in response to ‘allegations of schools cheating and manipulating test results’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.4). Its recommendation that ACARA and MCEECDYA ‘examine and publicly report on ways to...
mitigate the harm caused by simplistic and often distorted information published in newspaper
league tables’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.xii) clearly implicated the press in this policy’s re-
presentation. The second critical event occurred in April, 2010, when the ALP announced a
review of school funding, led by businessman David Gonski, the first such review since 1973. It
was anticipated that this would have significant implications for the nation’s independent school
sector which had benefited substantially from the Howard Government’s introduction, in 2001,
of an SES funding scheme for non-government schools. Its associated ‘no losers policy’
effectively meant that the new funding arrangements applied ‘only to those schools that it
benefitted financially’ (McMorrow, 2008, p.4) while previous levels of funding were maintained
to schools that would otherwise have received reduced funding. That the Gonski review was
announced just a few months after the initial launch of *MySchool* and coincided with the release
of school financial data on the second version of the website seems more than serendipitous.
Indeed, Garrett described the inclusion of that data as a ‘game changer’ (Harrison, 2011a). Its
proposed release caused enormous disquiet in the independent school sector, so much so that
when their concerns about inaccuracies in the data were confirmed by auditing firm Deloitte
(Ferrari, 2011b), the launch of *MySchool2.0* was delayed from December, 2010 until March 4,
2011.

1.3.3 *MySchool3.0 - 2012*

The launch of *MySchool3.0* on February 24, 2012, was preceded by the release of two significant
education reports. The Grattan Institute’s *Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in
East Asia* (Jensen et al, 2012) focused attention on Australia’s (under)performance on inter-
national testing measures compared to Shanghai, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore. The long-
awaited Gonski report (Gonski et al, 2011) was released shortly after, on February 20, 2012.
While these reports received much greater press coverage than *MySchool3.0* which, in its third
year, included no “new” information, all were ultimately ‘hijacked’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.720) by
events in the political field which offered the press a far more significant ‘scoop’ (Bourdieu,
1996, p.6). The resignation of Australia’s Foreign Minister, former PM Kevin Rudd, on February
22, 2012, just two days after the release of the Gonski report, dominated press coverage.
Announcing his decision to step down in Washington, Rudd returned to Australia where he
sought the numbers to challenge Gillard. The leadership ballot, in which Rudd was defeated 71-
31, took place on February 27th, just three days after the launch of MySchool3.0, so that the website’s release, in its third year, was bookended by Gonski and Grattan and by the unfolding federal political crisis.

1.3.4 An emerging national agenda in Australian education

The introduction of national testing in 2008, and the subsequent publication of NAPLAN results on MySchool in 2010, marked a period of rapid change in Australian school education, reflecting the introduction of ‘new national accountabilities’ and a ‘strengthened national presence in education’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130) which has, historically, been the preserve of the states (Taylor et al, 1997). MySchool was, it could be argued, both a consequence of this increasing centralism in the governance of Australian education and a means of securing the state compliance and accountability necessary to drive national improvement. However, while strengthened federal control over education reflected the ALP’s ‘historical propensity to greater centralism’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.96), increased school and teacher accountability has, historically, had bi-partisan support.

The introduction of national testing and reporting, alongside other national education policies which emphasized “performance”, also reflected ‘the reconstitution of education from an economic frame which has occurred in recent decades in Australia’ (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007) and in comparable education systems in developed, Westernized countries globally (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), partly as a response to neoliberalism and the ‘ideologies of the market’ (Ball, 1998, p.122), the associated influence of globalization (Lingard et al, 2005a, p.771) and the ‘emergence of a global economic field’ (Rawolle & Lingard, 2010, p.276). The result for many countries, including Australia, has been a shift ‘from social democratic to neoliberal orientations in thinking about educational purposes and governance’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.3), reflecting a preference for the ‘minimalist state’ which promotes ‘instrumental values of competition, economic efficiency and choice’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.31). This has resulted in education being ‘colonized by an audit process’ (Power, 1997, p.95) and to teachers, once relatively autonomous, being held more publicly accountable for their performance (Power, 1997, p.95).

The emerging national agenda in Australian education is traced, in this study, in a critical discourse analysis of the ALP’s Education Revolution policy texts (Rudd & Smith, 2007a;
2007b; 2007c; Rudd & Macklin, 2007) and an analysis of National Reports on Schooling, 1996-
2006.

1.3.5 An emerging ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18)

The emergence of a ‘new global space in education policy’ and a ‘global field of performance
comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18) has increasingly led education systems around the
world to ‘steer their systems using standardized testing regimes’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.94).
The ‘push for valid and reliable comparative measures of educational outcomes, so that a nation
can see where it sits within a global field of comparison to give it a measure of its potential
global economic competitiveness’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18) reflects the ‘economisation’
(Lingard, 2010, p.136) of education which has occurred in the context of globalization.

The education policies of the ALP, prior to its election in 2007, reflected these global trends,
confirming policy makers’ ready seduction by quantitative evidence (Blackmore, 2002, p.264).
Presenting Australian education as failing by international standards, The Australian economy
needs an education revolution (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.27) mounted a powerful argument for
an increased national presence in schooling, for:

‘To be “good enough” is no longer acceptable for Australia’s national performance. Australia cannot afford to be
part of the trailing pack of nations – it must be up there with the leading handful in every major area’
(Rudd & Smith, 2007b ,p.27).

The solution was to gather ‘nationally available’ school by school data in order to allow ‘the
nation’ to ‘track attainment’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.4). Thus the drive for global “competitiveness”
enabled the state to assume a monitoring and surveillance role (Meadmore, 2001) by imposing a
system of ‘downward’ accountability and audit (Power, 1997), a ‘policy magic’ (Ball, 1998,
p.124) which reduced the complex social process of teaching and learning to a technical problem

Despite a growing trend by OECD member countries to publish school results data (Gorard, Fitz
& Taylor, OECD, 2008b, p.13), Australia, England and the United States are the only OECD
nations to have introduced full cohort testing ‘where every child in given years of schooling is
tested using the same standardized tests’ (Alderson & Martin, 2008, p.4). In both England and
the U.S., testing was introduced as a response to apparently declining standards in literacy and
numeracy. Prior to the introduction of the Education Reform Act (ERA) in the U.K. in 1988, for example, there was general agreement in policy documents that responsibility for this decline rested largely with progressive educational methods (Ozga, 2000, p.18). The ERA led to a national curriculum, testing in four key stages of learning (West & Pennell, 2000) and a new external school inspection system (Rowe, 2000). In the U.S., the publication of *A Nation at Risk* and at least eight major reports in the 1980s which expressed concern about falling standards (Strickland, 1998, p.106) led to significant accountability-based educational reform. In 2000, when legislation tied funding to the development of standards, the ‘speed with which standards-based reform spread among the states (was) without historical precedent’ (Hamilton et al, 2008, p.28).

Critics of the publication of school attainment data argue that its circulation by the media opens ‘education to the public domain as a market’ (Meadmore, 2001, p.27) forcing schools, particularly “underperforming” schools, to adopt questionable practices to improve performance. Such practices include narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, excluding students who may lower the school’s mean and directing resources and specialist teacher assistance to those students who have the potential to improve overall scores, to the disadvantage of other students. Several U.S. and U.K. studies (Hamilton et al, 2008; Hamilton, 2003; Hamilton, Stecher & Klein, 2002; Amrein & Berliner, 2002a; 2002b; Klein, Hamilton, McCaffrey & Stecher, 2000; Warmington & Murphy, 2004; West & Pennell, 2000; Wilson & Piebalga, 2008; Youdell, 2004) have convincingly demonstrated the adoption of these practices in schools in the U.S. and U.K. It was precisely these practices that were highlighted by opponents of national testing and reporting when *MySchool* was launched, frequently in the Letters pages of the newspapers analysed.

1.3.6 ‘challenging times for the media’ (abcnewsb, 2012)

The period analysed in this study was also one of significant change in the newspaper industry. The impact of the digital age has led to newspapers ‘metamorphosing’ as they experience ‘fundamental changes to their formats and contents, their economic organization and finance, (and to) the newsgathering and reporting practices of’ journalists (Franklin, 2008, p.30). The impact of ‘media and technical convergence’ has required print journalists to completely rethink the ‘values and processes through which they (understand) their work’ (Hall, 2008, p.216). New
technologies have made the ‘publication, or news cycle…redundant’ (Hall, 2008, p.216); contributed to further declines in print circulations, reduced the revenue from classified advertising (Finklestein, 2012, p.10) and constructed print news as ‘a second-line product, repurposed (from) online multimedia journalism’ (Hall, 2008, p.216). And, while journalists are under increasing pressure to make news “direct” and in “real time” (Champagne, 2005, p.53), news itself ‘is no longer a one-way process nor can news workers determine the news agenda as print and the broadcast media once allowed’ (Hall, 2008, p.222).

Transformation and change emerged as key themes in my interview with a Melbourne journalist (Waterson, 2014) who observed that ‘flexibility, up-skilling’ and being willing to ‘embrace technology’ are now mandatory skills in her profession. ‘Massive redundancies across the business’ and a scarcity of work for journalists in Melbourne have occurred as a result of the revenue derived from classifieds, once the ‘river of gold’ for newspapers, being ‘stolen’ by online advertising (Waterson, 2014). Waterson (2014) commented on the decline of investigative journalism (now too expensive) and the ‘mind-shift’ required of journalists who are now expected to learn web-publishing and select and include pictures to accompany their stories. Stories themselves are now called ‘packages’, because they aren’t ‘just for print anymore’ and need to have ‘a life online’ in order to be relevant for audiences. Waterson (2014) spoke of the intense pressure journalists are now under to ‘file online five minutes after (they) arrive’. And, while she saw the digital age as ‘empowering for consumers’, she also argued that journalists are now more accessible and accountable to the general public via social media (Waterson, 2014), suggesting the potential of new technologies to ‘change the relationship between media institutions and their consumers’ (Errington & Miragliotta, 2007, p.185).

Newspaper circulation figures released for Australian newspapers for the March 2011-2012 year revealed a 13.5 percent drop in weekday sales of The Age (Dyer, 2012), a Melbourne broadsheet operated by Fairfax Media (3). The response by Fairfax Media was brutal. It included the axing of 1900 staff, the downsizing of its flagship newspapers to tabloids and the closure of two major printing presses (abcnews, 2012). In June, 2012, when The Age’s editor-in-chief, Paul Ramadge, resigned, he told his staff that the ‘most successful (newspaper) businesses will be those that

3. This compared to a 1.6 percent decline in The Australian’s sales and a 3 percent decline in the Herald Sun’s (Dyer, 2012).
work out how to respond to digital audiences’ (Levy, 2012).

Just as technology has profoundly altered the sub-field of print-journalism, it has also had effects on the educational policy field, transforming policy delivery. The policy investigated in this study utilised technology in new ways to deliver online information to a wide audience. It could be argued that this significant change subverted the traditional function of the press as a ‘resource for public knowledge’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.403). The Australian public did not need to wait for their morning newspaper to read about *MySchool*. They were able to access it electronically in exactly the same way as the press did. Despite this, and despite the many technological changes occurring in the field of journalism, the ways in which the policy was reported on in the three newspapers in this study remained largely unchanged. All three provided detailed coverage of the website in both 2010 and 2011, with multiple news reports, editorials, commentary pieces and letters to the editor. While some interactivity was evident in *The Age*’s invitation to readers to contribute to an e-poll (Perkins, 2010a); the *Herald Sun*’s to log on to their website and respond to the question ‘Are you happy with how your school rated?’ (Unauthored, 2010p) and *The Australian*’s to visit their website to ‘See how some of the country’s top schools rate’ (Ferrari, 2010v), this was largely peripheral.

While threats of declining newspaper circulation caused ‘by the new media platforms of the internet and mobile telephony’ (Franklin, 2008, p.3) have led some to predict that newspapers will be made redundant, newspapers in their traditional form are arguably still the main means by which ‘millions of citizens’ (West et al, 2010, p.16) continue to learn about education and education policy (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003) and continue to ‘play an important role in setting the news agenda for Australian politics’ (Errington & Miragliotta, 2007, p.20). Ramadge emphasized their importance when he commented ‘these are extremely challenging times for the media. As I leave *The Age* I am convinced that our nation needs *The Age* more than ever. It is an essential guardian of truth and fairness’ (abcnews, 2012).

1.4 Locating myself in the research

The significance of the researcher’s positionality within the research was emphasized by Bourdieu in his rejection of ‘epistemological innocence’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.48). As a member of the education field currently working as a classroom teacher, and in coordinating
support for refugee students and students with disabilities, I acknowledge that my analysis is partly informed by my ‘value stances’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, pp.48-9). I have, in Ladwig’s (1994, p.348) words, both ‘complicity and membership in the hierarchisation of the education field’. My past and present position in the field, and the dispositions I have acquired (Thompson, 1991), influence my value orientations.

I undertake this research as a practising teacher with more than thirty years’ experience, predominantly with students in the post-compulsory years in schools in Melbourne’s western and outer-western suburbs. The majority of my teaching experience has been, and is currently, in Year 12 (VCE) English. While Year 12 results are not yet reported on MySchool, my current school’s median Year 12 study scores have been reported in the Victorian press, along with those of all Victorian schools with Year 12 cohorts, since 1996 (Rowe, 2000, p.80).

According to these “league tables”, our results are consistently below the state mean. Recent efforts to address this, an inevitable response to a top-down, system-wide privileging of ‘what is counted (as) what ultimately counts’ (Lingard, 2010, p.135), have had the side-effect of placing teachers under extraordinary pressure to improve “performance”, with powerful effects on classroom practice. So, in my setting, “teaching to the test” drives Year 12 English teaching. All internally assessed tasks (SACS) take place under test conditions, to mirror the final examination. Students are no longer permitted to bring notes into their SACS, to better prepare them for the exam. An externally marked three hour exam now occurs at mid-year, with results and advice for improvement reported to parents. Teachers, myself included, frequently refer to their “residual” and discuss ways to “improve” it and “add value”.

My interest in the policy investigated in this study stems from this lived experience. With the publication of NAPLAN results on MySchool in 2010 and their extensive reporting in the press, sometimes as “league tables”, the conditions appear to have been created for the same kinds of curriculum-narrowing which increasingly operates in the post-compulsory years to resonate through all levels of school education. The sense of failure that students (and often teachers) feel when their “worth” is measured by performance on standardized tests and amplified by press reporting is, I believe, both demoralizing and damaging to the ‘wider purposes’ of education (Taylor et al, 1997). This value stance informs my research.
My work supporting young people with disabilities and refugee students, many of whom are “unsuccessful” in an education system which measures their “worth” on the basis of examination performance, has strengthened my view that education should be ‘linked to the concerns of social justice’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.19) and seek ‘to instill those capacities and qualities in students that help them to lead creative and fulfilling lives’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.19). This position, however, is at odds with current human capital approaches in education, exemplified in imposed, government-sanctioned testing and the publication of results. In a sense, then, my writing of this thesis is a form of ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989). As Canagarajah (1999, p.183) has said, it is by resisting dominant discourses that ‘one creates a space for one’s voice within that discourse. In order to talk back, however, one must understand and engage with the rules of dominant discourses’.

1.5 The study’s purpose and significance

The study investigates the preferred discourses on education which emerged in three major newspapers in their reporting on the MySchool website over a period of time. Located within a broader investigation of the interconnections between the fields of education, educational policy, politics and journalism and the effects of the intrusions of the latter on the fields of the former, the study seeks to identify the discursive effects on particular schools that were named in the media, from the principal’s view. In this, too, I have a personal investment and value stance. Like many teachers, I have grown accustomed to hearing about policy changes in education on morning radio, en route to school. The decision to abolish all mid-year VCE exams from 2013 is one such example. This policy shift, which had a significant impact on my setting, was the topic of heated debate and considerable outrage in the staffroom on the morning of its announcement in the media. The Chemistry teacher’s disgruntled “We’re always the last to know” summed up the sense we all had on that morning of being powerless to protect our boundaries from the intrusions of other fields (Blackmore, 2006).

This investigation has the potential to contribute to an emerging and still relatively limited body of research which explores the complex interrelations between the media and educational policy. As Thomson (2004, p.252) points out, ‘there has arguably not yet been a robust body of systematic investigations and theorizations’ about these complex and multiple interconnections,
so much so that this is ‘a landscape awaiting further exploration’. It is to this emerging landscape which the study seeks to contribute. In addition, its investigation of the effects of policy’s representation in the press on schools potentially offers new directions. While previous studies (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004; Rawolle, 2005; 2007) have explored the mediatization of educational policy through a focus on particular policy and the media’s co-construction of policy texts, this study’s investigation of the media’s influence in the policy implementation cycle offers a new direction. As Ball (1994) observes, policy ‘is what is enacted as well as what is intended’. It is the ‘wild profusion of local practice’ (Ball, 1994, p.10) onto which policies are mapped which completes the policy cycle. The study may also have relevance to future research which investigates the consequences for schools of imposed high-stakes testing and the publication of school attainment data. While this is not a focus of the research, these effects emerge in both the analysis of media texts and interviews with school principals.

1.6  Theoretical Framework

In developing a conceptual framework for this research, I have drawn on a range of theoretical perspectives, utilizing these as the ‘toolbox of diverse concepts and theories’ Ball (1993, p.10) advocates as useful for policy analysis. The chief theoretical perspective drawn on is Pierre Bourdieu’s theory of social fields and, in the close analysis of policy and media texts, Norman Fairclough’s (1995a; 1995b) critical discourse analysis (CDA). In the course of my research, I found the media sociology which emerged in France as a result of Bourdieu’s work on the field of journalism particularly useful, given its focus ‘on understanding the media as an institution within a wider social formation’ (Hallan, 2005, p.224), in contrast to research which has ‘tended to analyze the media in isolation from society as a whole’ (Hallan, 2005, p.224). To account for the interrelations between the social fields investigated in this study, I drew on the post-Bourdieuian framework of temporary social fields and cross-field effects developed by Rawolle (2007), his associated research into the mediatization of educational policy (Rawolle, 2005; 2007; Lingard et al, 2005a; 2005b; Lingard & Rawolle, 2004; Rawolle & Lingard, 2010; 2014) and wider research on mediatization (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1994; Fairclough, 2000; Couldry, 2008; Hepp et al, 2010).
1.7 Methodological Framework

The study tracks press reporting on the *MySchool* website in three Australian newspapers in January and February, 2010, coinciding with the launch of *MySchool*; March 2011, when *MySchool2.0* was released, and February, 2012, when *MySchool3.0* was released. It also tracks press coverage in the seven months prior to the launch of *MySchool* in 2010 and the eight months prior to the release of *MySchool2.0* in 2011, locating this coverage within each newspaper’s wider reporting on school education. In analyzing both the press and policy data, (ie., the ALP’s Education Revolution policy texts (Rudd & Smith, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; Rudd & Macklin, 2007) and National Reports on Schooling, 1996-2006), I utilized the tools of critical discourse analysis (CDA) developed by Fairclough (1995a; 1995b). The three dimensions of analysis which underpin CDA: ‘(a) analysis of text, (b) analysis of processes of text production, consumption and distribution and (c) sociocultural analysis of the discursive event’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.74) partly informed the overall choice of method: content and CDA analysis of media texts and of patterns reflected in the corpus; analysis of the wider context in which such texts are produced and received, and semi-structured interviews with journalists and school principals, reflecting processes of text production and consumption.

1.8 Chapter Outlines

Chapter One introduces and locates the study, defines the research question/s, contextualises the investigation, outlines the researcher’s positionality, describes the study’s purpose and significance and sketches its theoretical and methodological orientations. In Chapter Two, I outline the key theoretical perspectives drawn on to develop a conceptual framework for the research and, in Chapter Three, review the existing research literature on press reporting on education in Australia and in the comparable education systems of the U.K. and the U.S. Chapter Four provides an overview of the methodology employed in the study to analyse each of the three data sets: policy texts, print media texts and interview texts, while Chapter Five sitsuates the policy analysed in its policy context and provides a critical discourse analysis of the key policy texts which formed the ALP’s promised “Education Revolution”. Chapters Six-Eleven present the data related to press coverage of *MySchool*. Chapter Six identifies broad patterns of press reporting across the entire period and locates the data in each newspaper’s wider reporting on education. Chapters Seven-Eleven present the unfolding *MySchool* story and are organized
chronologically around each of the key periods analysed. Chapter Twelve presents the data drawn from interviews with school principals while Chapter Thirteen discusses the major findings of the study and outlines possible directions for future research.

1.9 Conclusion
This chapter located and contextualized the study. It provided a brief narrative account of the social context of the policy investigated, sketching its location in, and contribution to, an emerging national agenda in Australian education and its positioning within a global field of performance comparison (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). It outlined the significant changes affecting the newspaper industry in which the policy was reported on, discussed the researcher’s positionality within the research, explained the study’s purpose and significance and briefly sketched the study’s theoretical and methodological orientations before concluding with an outline of each chapter’s focus.
Chapter 2  
Social fields and field effects - theoretical perspectives underpinning the study

2.1  Introduction

This chapter outlines the concepts drawn from the theoretical perspectives utilized to develop a conceptual framework for the study and explains their relevance and application.

2.2  An outline of Bourdieu’s theory of social fields

Bourdieu’s field theory, which examines ‘the ways in which groups emerge in different fields and struggle for power and influence’ (Thompson, 1991, p.25), offered an appropriate conceptual framework and, simultaneously, a ‘tool kit’ (Thomson, 2005, p.743) for investigating and talking about the social fields which are the focus of this study. Further, the study’s focus on the discursive effects of policy’s re-presentation in the press, explored through interviews with school principals, gave attention to the ‘local particularities of …policy enactment’ (Ball, 1998, p.119), reflecting Bourdieu’s commitment to the study of ‘lived subjective practices’ (Ladwig, 1994, p.344).

Bourdieu (1993, p.162) defined a field as a ‘separate social universe’, a structured social space, a field of forces, a force field. It contains people who dominate and others who are dominated. Constant, permanent relationships of inequality operate inside this space, which at the same time becomes a space in which the various actors struggle for the transformation or preservation of the field (Bourdieu, 1998, pp.40-41).

In this conceptualization, society is made up of multiple, separate, ‘relatively autonomous and independent’ fields, each of which exerts ‘effects on the other’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.41). Each field is ‘marked by its own particular form of institutionalization’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.181) and peopled by agents ‘multiply positioned in a number of fields’ (Thomson, 2005, p.742). Bourdieu (1996, p.132) “imagined” fields as ‘social microcosms’, arguing, for example, that the journalistic field should be ‘conceptualized’ as such and ‘endeavours’ made ‘to understand the effects that the people engaged in this microcosm exert on one another’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.33) through ‘empirical attention to the field effects’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.132; Bourdieu, 1998, p.39). The political field was similarly conceptualized as a ‘microcosm set within the social macrocosm’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.32).
The idea of ‘struggles within fields for the power to impose the dominant vision of the field’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.36) is central to field theory as agents - Bourdieu’s (1995, p.31) ‘term for individuals that constitute the field’- struggle for its transformation or preservation (Bourdieu, 1998, pp.40-41). Agents in a field have different levels of power, depending on their position within the field and the ‘capital’ (symbolic, economic or cultural) that they bring and seek to acquire. Ladwig (1994, pp.343-4) explains the inherent tensions which characterize relations within a field through the dual analogies of a sporting field, typified by co-existing relations of competition and cooperation, and a biological field, where ‘harmonious ecological relations’ co-exist with ‘relations of Darwinian competition’. Rawolle (2007, p.51) uses the analogy of a magnetic field, while Thomson (2005, p.742) likens field relations to a game in which both the stakes and the instruments used to play are the different forms of capital noted above. As Bourdieu (1991, p.71) observed, ‘the capacity to manipulate is greater the more capital one possesses’ which means, as Thomson (2005, p.742) points out, that there is no ‘level playing ground in a field; players who begin with particular forms of capital are advantaged at the outset’. Bourdieu (1995, p.43) drew on Einsteinian physics to explain the effect of this, commenting that ‘the more energy a body has, the more it distorts the space around it’ so that ‘a very powerful agent within a field can distort the whole space’.

Agents within a field, even those in fierce opposition, ‘accept a certain number of presuppositions that are constitutive of the very functioning of the field’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.36). One of these is a belief ‘in the game they are playing, and in the value of what is at stake in the struggles they are waging’ (Thompson, 1991, p.14). Such beliefs arise from and form ‘habitus’, which enables agents to enter a field and engage in the game. Bourdieu (1977, p.18) described ‘habitus’ as the ‘modus operandi informing all thought and action’ and as being ‘laid down in each agent by his earliest upbringing’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.81), a notion I found useful in helping to account for the responses of school principals interviewed. It is ‘habitus’, a ‘product of history’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.54), which instinctively produces a ‘feel for the game’ (Bourdieu, 1990 ,p.66) and is the source of practices, strategies and moves, without necessarily being ‘the product of a genuine strategic intention’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.66). At the same time, habitus does not strictly determine practices or behaviour because it exists in a dynamic relationship with the ‘specific social contexts or settings’ (Thompson, 1991, p.14) within which individuals act. As
Bourdieu (1993, p.61) comments, the practices of agents ‘are the result of the meeting of two histories: the history of the positions they occupy and the history of their dispositions’.

2.3 Locating the educational policy field

Bourdieu’s (1996, p.132) argument that the ‘existence of field effects… is one of the chief indicators of the fact that a set of agents and institutions functions as a field, as well as one of the reliable instruments for empirically determining the limits of this field, which are simply the point at which these effects are no longer found’, suggests a relative clarity and ease in defining and locating fields. Yet, as Thomson (2005, p.754) points out, Bourdieu ‘was eclectic in his applications of field theory’, variously describing schooling, higher education, social science and education as fields in themselves. He referred to the literary or artistic “field” as well as to the field of cultural production (Bourdieu, 1993), to universities in the United States as forming a field (Bourdieu, 1996, p.132), to ‘the field of educational institutions’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.141) and to the ‘university field’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.212).

I was mindful of this eclecticism in attempting to locate educational policy in terms of its field membership, a question about which there has been some debate. Ladwig (1994, p.542), for example, described educational policy as a field in itself, given that it has ‘historically developed its own relative autonomy’ and carries ‘its own rewards’. Thomson (2005, p.754), in contrast, suggests that educational policy ‘might also be theorized as a sub-field of the political field or as some kind of permanent bridge between the political and other dominated fields’. Other research conceives of educational policy as a sub-field of a wider policy field. Rawolle (2007, p.83), for example, argues that the effects of the policy field which help to define it as a social field include its potential (and intent) to change ‘multiple institutions’. This conceptualization clearly separates educational policy from both the field of education, whose autonomy it seeks to alter, but which it nevertheless has specific connections with, and the political field, from which it largely emanates and with which it is closely connected. Indeed, as Lingard & Rawolle (2004, pp.365-6) point out, ‘without the flow of policy effects between different fields, the effect and meaning of policy would seem to lose purchase’, a theorization which implies the capacity of the policy field to exert effects on those fields it essentially requires to define its existence, so that it operates as a kind of dual carriageway or “bridge”. Moreover, the policy field shares ‘common
stakes’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.712) with the field of journalism, thus acting as a ‘permanent bridge’ (Thomson, 2005, p.754) between fields, the logics of which may also interfere with its autonomy (Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005b, p.665). Following on from Rawolle (2007), I see the policy analysed in this study as emanating from a wider educational policy field which, in turn, could be conceived of as a sub-field of a broader policy field intricately connected to the fields of education, politics and journalism.

2.4 Defining the field of journalism

Bourdieu’s (1998) highly accessible account of the journalistic field, *On television and journalism*, provided the overarching framework for my analysis of newspaper texts. Despite attracting some criticism (Hallan, 2005, p.236; Benson, 2005, p.99), the text comprehensively documents the ‘internal dynamics of the journalistic field’ (Benson, 2005, p.99), providing important insights into relations within the field which are typified, as Bourdieu (1998, p.36) observed, by ‘competition’ and ‘collusion’. Competitor newspapers are subjected to ‘permanent surveillance’, the object of which is to profit from their ‘failures by avoiding their mistakes, and to counter their successes by trying to borrow the supposed instruments of that success’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72) in a competition for ‘distinction within the field’ (Hallan, 2005, p.235). The effect of this internal logic means that ‘journalistic products are much more alike than is generally thought’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.23). While this “likeness” was apparent in the newspaper texts analysed, comparing re-presentations of education across different newspapers also revealed considerable variation, suggesting a need to be attentive to difference in discussing “the press”.

Bourdieu’s comments on journalists were also important in framing my research. He observed that “the journalist” is an abstract entity that doesn’t exist. What does exist are journalists who differ by sex, age, level of education, affiliation and “medium” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.23). Some journalists are clearly more powerful agents than others, depending on their position in the subfield of journalism and the relative position of the newspaper for which they write. Champagne (2005, p.57) alludes to this in arguing that ‘Generic discourse on the “journalist” is a major obstacle to understanding the field of relations within which this actor is situated and thus plays the game’. Analysis of newspaper coverage of *MySchool* revealed that some key journalists in some newspapers had a strong voice in the debate which was consistent over time, suggesting...
that these agents had a significant role in both communicating and constructing the preferred discourses on education which emerged in the debate around *MySchool*. This highlighted a need to be attentive in my analysis not just to ‘the relative position of the particular news medium’ but also to ‘the positions occupied by journalists themselves within the space occupied by their respective newspapers’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40). In some cases, senior journalists with significant cultural capital, such as the title of political editor, contributed commentary, reflecting the highly politicized nature of the debate, the strong connection of educational policy to the political field and the ‘intersection of journalism’ (Schudson, 2005, p.220) and politics. Their voices revealed the capacity of the journalistic field and powerful agents within it ‘to resist the impositions of the state’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44) or, conversely, to ‘act as a mouthpiece for the government’s agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71).

Tracking the voice of journalists, identifying political agents who entered the journalistic field and shaped ‘the journalistic agenda’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.70) and locating agents from the fields of education and educational policy who were (and were not) represented in journalistic products suggested to me that a ‘trial of journalistic selection’ occurs in education reporting which involves both ‘censorship’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.47) and strategies of ‘power and consecration’. This occurs partly through the inclusion or exclusion of agents. For Bourdieu (1991, p.138), ‘excluding certain groups from communication by excluding them from the groups which speak or the places which allow (them) to speak with authority’ is among ‘the most effective and best concealed censorships’. Fairclough (1995b, p.84) makes a similar point in referring to the ideological work performed by the ‘plethora of voices’ heard, or silenced, in news reports. Attention to the discursive effects of “voice” thus became a focus of the study. This included attention to the voice of journalists and external commentators who contributed direct commentary, as well as to the voices heard in news reports which frequently appear to operate as a ‘gaming space’ in which ‘agents and institutions possessing enough specific capital’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.264) confront each other.

Bourdieu’s writings on the journalistic field reveal the permeability of this field; its susceptibility to “intrusions” (Klinenberg, 2005, pp.174-5) by other fields, particularly the economic field. As Fairclough (1995b, p.42) points out, the press are ‘pre-eminently profit-making organisations’ and newspapers themselves are economic enterprises and ‘thus directly subject to economic laws
which often come into conflict with the imperatives of intellectual production’ (Champagne, 2005, p.52). A consequence of this, Bourdieu argued, is a change in the practices and products of the journalistic field; the dominance of an ‘audience ratings mentality’(1995, p.43) which leads journalists to “keep it simple”, “keep it short” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71) and produces a form of “mental closure”(Bourdieu, 1998, pp.24-5) which results in ‘profound similarities’ between newspapers (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44) and a state of permanent competition to appropriate or secure readership. Often, the means to do this is by securing ‘the earliest access to news, the “scoop”’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44), perhaps explaining why newspapers rushed the MySchool website following its 1a.m. release on January 28, 2010, and then provided saturation coverage for a brief period thereafter. It might also partly explain why, in 2012, when this story was no longer newsworthy, there was a relative MySchool silence in all three newspapers; a damaging censorship in itself which arguably contributed to policy entrenchment.

While Bourdieu (1995, p.44) emphasized the ‘profound similarities’ between newspapers, he also implied their potential for difference in commenting that ‘Cultural capital remains on the side of the “purest” journalists of the print press’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.42). His view that ‘intellectual discourse remains one of the most authentic forms of resistance to manipulation and a vital affirmation of … freedom of thought’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.11), tied as it is to relative position, perhaps explains the differences between the journalistic products of the newspapers in this study in their reporting on MySchool. While the tabloid Herald Sun published “league tables” of NAPLAN results in 2010, The Age which has, traditionally, a more “educated” readership, chose instead to celebrate the strong results of public schools in low SES areas; an act of resistance not, in this case, against government, but against the damaging choices made by competitor newspapers.

2.5 Beyond Bourdieu: Mediatization, temporary social fields and cross-field effects (Rawolle, 2007)

2.5.1 The limitations of Bourdieu’s theory of social fields in accounting for effects across fields

Bourdieu’s view of society as made up of separate and ‘partly autonomous though intricately linked’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.181) social fields provided the overarching framework for my investigation, enabling me to conceptualize the social fields which are the focus of the study. His
view that ‘a good part of ideological work consists in transforming the implicit categories of a
class, a stratum, into taxonomies that have a coherent and systematic air to them’ (Bourdieu,
1995, p.38) also provided the tools of this empirical analysis, informing the approach adopted of
systematically tracking and recording the products of print-journalism (ie., newspaper articles) in
relation to MySchool and school education stories more broadly.

Beyond this, however, there was a need to account for interconnections between fields. The
permeability of social fields and the potential of each field to exert effects on others was
‘nascent’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.708) in Bourdieu’s work. The capacity of the political field to alter
the autonomy of the education field, for example, was clearly conveyed in Bourdieu’s (1996,
p.377) claim that the ‘educational institution is …one of the authorities through which the state
exercises its monopoly on legitimate symbolic violence’, endowing the state with the capacity to
‘inculcate… the dominant “classification systems”’ (Benson, 2005, p.93). Even in the context of
neo-liberal globalization, Bourdieu emphasized the state’s continuing and active role in shaping
education (Lingard et al, 2005a, p.772).

Bourdieu (1995, pp.29-30) acknowledged that the political and journalistic fields each ‘exerts
effects on the other’, arguing that the latter exerts an increasingly powerful hold on the former, to
the extent that it is, increasingly, ‘imposing its constraints’ on this field (Bourdieu, 1995, p.41),
weakening its autonomy, as well as ‘the powers accorded (to its) representatives’ (Bourdieu,
1998, p.77). He pointed out (1998, p.2) that the journalistic field ‘produces and imposes on the
public a very particular vision of the political field’, having the capacity to “make” both
politicians and their reputations (Bourdieu, 1998, p.5) by directing ‘attention to the (political)
game and its players rather than to what is really at stake’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.4), but equally
emphasized the potential of the political field to exert effects on the journalistic field by referring
to the ‘exceptional symbolic power given to state authorities to define…by their ‘entry into the
journalistic field…the journalistic agenda and the hierarchy of importance assigned to events’
(Bourdieu, 1998, pp.69-70). Bourdieu (1995, p.34) also conceived of the political field as subject
to ‘constant control by its clientele (through the electoral mechanism)’ and the consequent need
to ‘appeal to groups or forces which lie outside the field’ (Thompson, 1991, p.28) and
highlighted the symbiotic relationship between media and government; the ‘mutual dependence’
of politicians and journalists in which they are ‘destined to collaborate on the production of
news’ (Champagne & Marchetti, 2005, p.116). He (1998, p.66) suggested, moreover, that ‘the structural pressure exerted by the journalistic field’ is not confined to effects on the political field but in fact ‘profoundly modifies power relationships within other fields (and) affects what is done and produced’ in them (Bourdieu, 1998, p.68). This sense of ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) was also implied in the view that the ‘sanction of the market and the economy’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.66) alters the autonomy of the journalistic field by forcing journalists to adopt ‘“audience rating standards”’ in their writing (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71), clear acknowledgement that the ‘relative autonomy of fields can be dramatically changed by influences from outside or by direct intervention’ (Thomson, 2005, p.749).

Bourdieu did not explore the role played by the press in supporting or contesting the state via representations of education and educational policy. In relation to the policy analysed, Thomson (2005, p.752) argues that dominant agents in ‘the state use student and school data’ as evidence of ‘effective government’ and represent this ‘as such to and in the media’. The ‘symbolic capital’ of such data is used in the political field ‘as currency to legitimate further policy intervention’ (Thomson, 2005, p.753), while also being ‘grist to the field of media’ enabling the development of ‘a whole new league table genre … to cater for the choosing parent and student market’, ultimately rendering the education field ‘unable to mount collective and unified opposition to agents in the field of media and politics’ (Thomson, 2005, p.753). Press ‘re-packaging of My School data’ has been presented by Rawolle & Lingard (2014, p.6) as the ““privatization” of publicly funded data”. While this conceptualization constructs the media as willing ventriloquists for the political field, transmitting ‘the views of the powerful as if they were the voices of “common sense”’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.63), and thus implies that they too may have the capacity to ‘inculcate … the dominant classification systems’ (Benson, 2005, p.93), my research suggests that in some cases, the press may also act as agents of resistance and dissent. In others, they become a ‘gaming space’ (Bourdieu, 1998), a site of struggle and resistance between fields, a playing field in which they adopt varied and shifting roles as corporate sponsors, commentators, players and, at times, umpires.

My research highlighted multiple complex intersections between the fields of politics, journalism, education and educational policy which could not be fully accounted for by Bourdieu’s theory of social fields alone. Indeed, other research has suggested the need for a
model to account for the effects of field interrelations and intrusions more broadly. Hallan (2005, p.240), for example, argues for an extension of Bourdieu’s field theory to examine ‘the nature of the relation between the political and economic fields, and the intersection of journalism with these fields’, while Benson (2005, p.93) suggests that consideration must be given to the potential all fields have ‘to exert cross-cutting heteronomous power in relation to each other, as well as over the journalistic field’. Blackmore (2006, pp.2-3) comments that education has, in the last two decades, ‘been recast as subordinate to the fields of economics, politics, and increasingly journalism’, while Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor (2005a, p.761) argue that, in the context of globalization, the educational policy field has been ‘subsumed in many instances as part of the field of economic policy, which seeks to mediate nationally the global economic field’, ultimately leading to ‘reduced autonomy, with enhanced cross-field effects in educational policy production, particularly from the fields of the economy and journalism’ (2005a, p.759).

As Lingard & Rawolle (2004, p.365) have pointed out, Bourdieu’s exploration of inter-field connections ‘was more descriptive than theoretically elaborated’ and he ‘did not offer a simple language set with which to describe these connections’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.88). To account for the multiple and complex interconnections between the fields investigated, I utilized Rawolle’s (2007, p.235) concepts of ‘cross-field effects and temporary social fields’. These provided both a framework and language set to discuss and account for the field interactions and effects which emerged as central in the MySchool story.

2.5.2 Mediatization or mediation?

Mediatization constructs the media as possessing colonizing power - as a change-agent, rather than an intermediary, as suggested in the more benign connotations of ‘mediation’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1994); media/tion (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003) or media-tion (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004), all of which position mass media as a ‘mediating or intermediary agent whose function is to convey meaning from the communicator to the audience’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.4). In contrast, mediatization refers more specifically to ‘processes involving the mass media where the processes change the way that other social fields operate’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.73). Its more active connotations capture the media’s potential as change-agent, encapsulating the role it plays in the ‘mediation of power’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.74). Using the concept of mediatization within the
theoretical framework of Bourdieu’s (1993) field theory enables, as Couldry (2008, p.377) suggests, an investigation of elements such as transformations in the authority and capital of agents which may occur as a consequence of media exposure. The concept of mediatization was also more appropriate to this study, given its exploration of ‘the reciprocal influences between media and other social fields’ (Hepp et al, 2010, p.227).

Research on mediatization has frequently focused on the mediatization of politics, defined as ‘politics that has lost its autonomy, has become dependent on its central functions on mass media, and is continuously shaped by interactions with the mass media’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.5). However, as these authors argue, this does not necessarily mean a media “takeover” of political institutions’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.3) but rather, the development of ‘a symbiotic relationship that is characterized by a mediatization of politics and, at the same time, politicians’ instrumental use of mass media for particular political goals’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.6); in essence the kind of simultaneous “irritation” noted by Luhmann (2000, p.7) and, indeed, by Bourdieu, in the former’s description of the ‘clear structural couplings between the media system and the political system’. Fairclough (2000, p.3) alludes to this in pointing to the ‘new relationship between politics, government and mass media’ which has emerged in recent decades whereby ‘many significant political events are now in fact media events’, leading to a “‘mediatisation’ of politics and government” (Fairclough, 2000, p.3). One consequence of this has been the ‘transformation of political leaders into media personalities’ (Fairclough, 2000, p.4).

While there is a significant body of research on the mediatization of politics, there is very little that deals specifically with the mediatization of policy (Rawolle, 2007, p.82) and, as Rawolle (2005, p.708) points out, ‘Bourdieu’s frame has been applied and tested only sporadically in the broad field of policy analysis and in piecemeal fashion in educational policy sociology’ (Ladwig, 1994’). In Rawolle’s (2007, p.84) view, the mediatization of educational policy involves the influence of the field of journalism on the educational policy field in such a way as to reduce the relative autonomy of the policy field. I saw the use of the term ‘autonomy’, connected as it is to Bourdieu’s view of society as being made up of partly autonomous but intricately connected social fields, as having application across the multiple fields investigated in this study. I used it to account for the discursive effects of press coverage on schools that were named in the media, from the principal’s view, by exploring the extent to which transformations in the authority and
capital of agents, (in this case, school principals), occurred as a consequence of media exposure (Couldry, 2008, p.377) and to gauge the extent to which principals believed the ‘relative autonomy’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.84) of their schools was altered by their being “named” in the press. The ‘muddy realities’ of ‘reciprocal influences between media and other social fields’ (Hepp et al, 2010, p.227) thus became my focus. To investigate these and explore the methods by which the processes of mediatization occur, I utilised Rawolle’s (2007, pp. 87-8) concepts of ‘temporary social fields’ and ‘cross-field effects’, as outlined below.

2.5.3 Temporary Social Fields & Cross-Field Effects (Rawolle, 2007)

Rawolle’s (2007) study of press coverage of the Batterham review into Australia’s science capability led to the development of a framework to ‘represent the relationships of two institutions that have previously been studied as separate social fields’–the media and the field of educational policy (Rawolle, 2007, p.705). This framework offers a ‘new set of language tools to Bourdieu’s theory of fields, under the general title cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.68). It advances the concept of temporary social fields which, emerging in the time-specific debate around policy in the media, are ‘broader than policy fields because they imply the interaction of agents from different social fields for some commonly agreed stakes: to name and influence the representation of particular social problems’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.87). ‘Cross-field effects’ are defined by Rawolle (2007, p.68) as ongoing effects which continue beyond the temporary social field produced by the interaction of agents from different social fields. Four different categories of cross-field effects associated with press reporting on the Batterham Review were identified—‘chains of policy themes and emerging themes, structural effects, event effects and knowledge effects’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.187). Applying this framework to press coverage of the Batterham Review over a period of time, Rawolle (2007, p.88) found that the ‘impact of the field of journalism on politics is to reduce politics so that it fits within the bounds and logic of the field of journalism’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.88). In ‘this conceptualization the mediatization of policy represented ‘the fusion of political, media and policy logic in one temporary social field’ which produced ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.68) for the political/policy field.

More recently, Rawolle & Lingard (2014) have extended this conceptualization, identifying two sub-processes which, in combination, define the mediatization of educational policy. These, ‘the shaping and changing of education policy to meet the needs of different forms of journalism’ and
the ‘shaping and changing of education policy by the emergence of new forms of communication technologies’ (Rawolle & Lingard, 2014, pp.2-3), suggest that the profound changes currently altering the journalistic field, as outlined in Chapter One, may have significant effects on the educational policy field.

Rawolle’s (2007) framework enabled me to “name” the debate around national testing and reporting as a temporary social field, while several of the language tools accompanying the model, coupled with the concept of “autonomy” as an indice of mediatization, became important analytical devices. However, while this study has a focus on the mediatizing power of the press, its concern is less with press re-presentations of policy text than with the preferred discourses produced by newspapers through their reporting on policy and the extent to which these supported or contested preferred discourses constructed by central government. Its investigation of the discursive effects of policy’s re-presentation in the press, explored through interviews designed to explore the extent to which principals believe their schools have experienced reduced autonomy as a result of their being named in the press, has the potential to extend the existing research on the effects of field interactions through a focus on policy reception.

2.6 Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and its application in the study

A significant component of this research focuses on the discursive and ideological role of language in print-media texts. In tracking patterns of press coverage of MySchool, the study identifies the policy stances adopted by newspapers and the way language is used to construct these. Fairclough’s three-dimensional CDA framework informed analysis of the policy texts associated with national testing and reporting; the media texts which reported and commented on the policy and the ‘consumption’ of those media texts in selected schools.

Fairclough (1995a, p.209) highlights the increasingly important role media texts play in exercising as well as negotiating and resisting social control and domination. An important principle in Fairclough’s model is the embedded nature of texts, and the need to avoid artificially isolating texts from the practices within which they are embedded. The connections CDA seeks to establish ‘between properties of texts, features of discourse practice (text production, consumption and distribution) and wider sociocultural practice’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.87) made
this approach particularly relevant to the study, as did CDA’s view of language as ‘socially shaped, but ... also socially shaping, or constitutive’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.131).

This conceptual view of the ideological power of language informed my focus on text, text production and text consumption/reception as key sites for the production of dominant ideologies and, potentially, for resistance. The three dimensions of analysis which underpin CDA partly informed the choice of method employed: interviews with journalists and school principals, reflecting processes of text production and consumption; content and CDA analysis of key media texts and of patterns reflected in the media texts as a corpus, and analysis of the wider context in which the texts were produced and received. Fairclough’s model ‘also facilitates the integration of “micro analysis” (of discourse) and “macro analysis” (Fairclough, 1995a, p.97), enabling fine-grained analysis of key texts as well as the broader mapping of themes and discourses across time to investigate text content and meaning as well as the “content of texture” – the “form” of texts’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.21).

While my original intention was to focus extensively on the micro-analysis of media texts, the sheer volume of data gathered in the course of the research made systematic application of this method impossible. I therefore utilized both micro and macro-analysis with the primary aim of identifying how texts were working ideologically (Fairclough, 1995b, p.14). This approach seemed consistent with Fairclough’s (1995b, p.15) view that language analysis should be seen ‘as one of a range of types of analysis which need to be applied together to the mass media, including complementary forms of analysis which can generalize across large quantities of media output’, such as content analysis.

In analyzing the policy texts which underpinned national testing and reporting and the newspaper texts reporting and commenting on MySchool, I utilized the following tools of micro-analysis from Fairclough’s (1995a; 1995b) framework:

- what is included and excluded in the text; what is informationally foregrounded and backgrounded (Fairclough, 1995b, p.4; p.119)
- absences and presences in the text. (Fairclough, 1995b, p.18)
- lexical choices and key words: the significance of ‘one word rather than another’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.18)
• choice of metaphor (Fairclough, 1995b, p.114)
• ‘the issue of which categories of social agent get to write, speak and be seen – and which do not’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.40)
• the embedding of earlier texts in later ones (Fairclough, 1995b, p.65)
• the ‘web of voices’ heard in news reports (Fairclough, 1995b, p.81); not just ‘what is said by the mainly public figures and organizations whose discourse is reported’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.64), and who is heard but also the ‘subtle ordering and hierarchization of voices’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.81).
• the ‘texture’ of a text (Fairclough, 1995b, p.33) – including its location, placement on the page and relationship with other texts.

Fairclough’s view that analysis of texts should also include analysis of the ‘institutional and discourse practices within which texts are embedded’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.9) is consistent with Bourdieu’s theoretical framework, given that Bourdieu (1991, p.106) opposed treating ‘language as an autonomous object’ and argued that analyses which focus exclusively on the internal construction of text/s ignore, to their detriment, the ‘social-historical conditions of (their) production and reception’ (Thompson, 1991, p.4). At the same time, Bourdieu (1991, p.105) also acknowledged the importance of examining ‘the part played by words in the construction of social reality’. And, as Neveu (2005, p.206) points out, field theory’s focus on ‘the conditions of production and reception of cultural and media products has never been accompanied by a refusal to pay close attention to the rhetoric of messages, to their “internal” properties’. Fairclough himself expressed openness to the adoption of more than one methodological framework in analysing the language of the media (1995b, p.15) and was mindful of Bourdieu’s criticism of analysis which focuses purely ‘on the utterances as such’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.177). It could therefore be argued that CDA offers an opportunity to analyse media texts from a field theory perspective – giving consideration to ‘the social condition of (their) existence and production’ (Neveu, 2005, p.203).

2.7 Discourse

Bacchi (2000, p.45) argues that while the ‘concept “discourse” has become ubiquitous in contemporary social and political theory’ it is ‘not always clear what different authors mean
when they use the term’. She also points out that ‘there is no single or correct definition of discourse; we define it to suit our purposes’ (Bacchi, 2000, p.55).

I use the term throughout the study in the sense of social rather than literary deconstruction (Bacchi, 2000, p.46), although the two are not necessarily mutually exclusive as some research suggests. Gee et al (1996, p.10), for example, separate social and literary discourse through denoting the former as ‘Discourse’ and the latter as ‘discourse’. They refer to ‘innumerable Discourses in modern societies’, each ‘composed of some set of related social practices and social identities (or ‘positions’). Each ‘contracts complex relations of complicity, tension, and opposition with other Discourses’ (Gee et al, 1996, p.10). This conceptualization reveals power, struggle, contestation and resistance as central concepts in discourse, as conveyed in Foucault’s (1972, p.49) definition of discourse as ‘practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak’ and his comment that:

Discourses are not about objects: they do not identify objects, they constitute them and in the practice of doing so conceal their own invention’ (Foucault, 1977, p.49).

Understood in this way, and as I use the term in this investigation, discourse is a constructing or constituting practice. As Fairclough (1992, pp.3-4) has commented, ‘Discourses do not just reflect or represent social entities and relations, they construct or “constitute” them. They are ‘about what can be said, and thought, but also about who can speak, when, where, and with what authority’ (Ball, 2006, p.48). This meaning, Bacchi (2000, p.51) suggests, ‘draws attention to both the power of discourse to delimit topics of analysis (e.g., effects) and the power to make discourse (e.g., uses)’. The constitutive practice and power of discourse is also conveyed by Ball (1993, p.14) in his comment that ‘We do not speak a discourse, it speaks us. We are the subjectivities, the voices, the knowledge, the power relations that a discourse constructs and allows’ (Ball, 1993, p.14). Foucault (1972, p.100) expresses the same concept in his view that ‘it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined together’. He also argues that discourse cannot be neatly divided into accepted and excluded discourse, or dominant and dominated discourse. Rather, there are ‘a multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies’ (Foucault, 1990, p.100). It is for this reason that I use the term ‘preferred’, rather than ‘dominant’, discourse in this study.
Central to an understanding of discourse is an understanding of the ideological potential of language; of its capacity to ‘construct, regulate, and control knowledge, social relations and institutions’ (Luke, 1997, p.51), rather than transparently mirror reality. Importantly, while discourses can be used for the ‘assertion of power and knowledge’ they can also be ‘used for purposes of resistance and critique’ (Luke, 1997, p.55). Fairclough’s (1995a, p.18) definition of discourse as it is used in language studies includes ‘discourse as social action and interaction’ and the Foucaultian view of discourse as ‘a social construction of reality, a form of knowledge’. Discourse, from this theoretical frame, ‘is the language used in representing a given social practice from a particular point of view’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.56) and, in a sense, unites Discourse and discourse (Gee et al, 1996). It relates ‘broadly to knowledge and knowledge construction’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.56) and has links to Gramsci’s concept of hegemony ‘as a theory of power and domination which emphasizes power through achieving consent rather than through coercion’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.67). While the text is the main ‘unit of analysis’ for critical discourse analysis (Luke, 1997, p.54) and becomes the investigative focus of the construction of ‘representations of the world, social identities and relationships’ (Luke, 1997, p.55) I have, in this study, used these conceptual understandings of the ‘ideological potential of language’ (Luke, 1997, p.51), the ‘assertion of power and knowledge’, ‘resistance and critique’ (Luke, 1997, p.55) and the ‘multiplicity of discursive elements that can come into play in various strategies’ (Foucault, 1990, p.100) more broadly. I concur with Rizvi & Lingard (2010, p.8) that discourses ultimately ‘help to position us –they speak us rather than us speaking them’.

2.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the key theoretical perspectives drawn on to provide a conceptual framework for the study. The chapter provided a brief outline of Bourdieu’s theory of social fields and explained the aspects of the theory to be applied to the research. It outlined the limitations of Bourdieu’s theory of social fields in providing a systematic approach to analyzing the inter-relations between social fields and explained the usefulness of Rawolle’s framework of temporary social fields and cross-field effects to overcome this problem. The chapter outlined the study’s use of ‘mediatization’ and explained the decision to use this term rather than ‘mediation’. It provided an outline of Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis and explained its
application to the study. The chapter concluded with a brief discussion of ‘discourse’ as it has been used in the study.
Chapter 3  Locating the study in the research

3.1 Introduction

Although this research has an Australian focus, it is as necessary to ‘world’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) a review of the literature investigating the media’s reporting on education as it is to contextualise the policy investigated and the newspapers in which it was reported. Given that the emerging national agenda in Australian school education has been influenced by similar agendas in both the U.S. and the U.K. (Alderson & Martin, 2008, p.4), and by an emerging ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18), I therefore include in this chapter an outline of the U.S. and U.K. research on press reporting on education, in addition to Australian research.

The earlier literature in all three countries presents two related versions of the press, both of which position education and the media as adversaries. The first version is of an organisation that compliantly reproduces conservative government agendas in relation to declining educational standards and the failure of the public education system. The second presents the press as actively mobilizing consent for those agendas by manufacturing a sense of crisis related to education’s “failure” (Ball, 1990; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; 1998; Kenway, 1990; Wallace, 1993; Jeffs, 1999). Moreover, as Gerstl-Pepin (2007, p.2) observes for the U.S., press representations of education have tended to ‘reinforce public perceptions concerning the causes of school failure as attributable to failing teachers and/or school structures rather than contextual factors’. Blackmore (2006) makes a similar point for the Australian context.

Given that my analysis of press and interview texts suggested that these themes continue to resonate and, moreover, contribute to principals’ negative perceptions of the press, this review emphasizes the earlier literature which presents the press as closely allied with central government in constructing discourses of failure around public education. These political-press alliances were apparent in both the U.S. and the U.K. in the 1980s and 1990s, when policy shifts in education reflected central government moves to present public education as failing by international standards, enabling policy solutions in the form of greater school and teacher accountability. Berliner and Biddle (1995) argue that the U.S. media were highly active in
manufacturing a sense of crisis around public education as failing following the publication of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 and the subsequent ‘eight major reports critical of public schools’ (Strickland, 1998, p.106). Discussions about declining standards were ‘grounded in concerns about the U.S. economy and the competitiveness of U.S. students relative to their peers in other nations’ (Hamilton et al, 2008, p.18). *A Nation at Risk* heralded the beginning of a high-stakes testing movement (Amrein & Berliner, 2002b, p.3) and formed the corner-stone of the bipartisan *No Child Left Behind* Act of 2001 (Stecher & Hamilton, 2002, p.1) which required ‘states to create high stakes testing systems that trigger(ed) steadily stronger interventions in chronically low-achieving schools and districts’, including ‘state takeover, school restructuring, and private management’ (Gill, 2007, p.2).

In the U.K., Thatcher’s neo-Liberal Conservative government emphasized declining educational standards and poor behaviour in schools, making ‘spurious links...between curriculum and social order’ in a process of ‘ideological preparation’ for its radical Education Reform Act (ERA) of 1988 (Wrigley, 2007, p.2). The ERA established a National Curriculum and introduced English and Mathematics testing for all students in non fee-paying schools at the ages of 7, 11 and 14, subjecting schools to ‘pervasive and often draconian structures of surveillance’ (Wrigley, 2007, p.2). The publication in the media of “league tables” ranking schools according to their examination results (Goldstein, 2001) and the introduction of a new external school inspection system (Rowe, 2000, p.75) were further performance-indicators, enabling the relative outputs of the education system to be measured and rendered more visible to governments and parents (Fitz, 2003, p.6). Moreover, open enrolment ‘marketised the governance of public education, by disconnecting schools from their geographical communities and establishing a quasi-market of parental choice’ (Wrigley, 2007, p.2), thus injecting ‘market principles into the provision of education’ (Ozga, 2000, p.9). The continued connection between U.S. and U.K. policy directions was highlighted by Fairclough (2000, p.70) who argued that both New Labour and the New Democrats used ‘the language of “investment”’ to discuss education and standards in schools.

While the earlier U.K. and U.S. literature emphasizes the role of the press in supporting conservative central government policies by constructing a sense of crisis around education, in Australia this pattern emerged later, perhaps because, until recently, ‘the schools domain’ was ‘jealously protected by the States as their responsibility’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.94). Attempts by
federal Labor to introduce national school policies in the late 1980’s, corresponding with similar moves in the U.S. and U.K., were defeated by shifts in the balance of power at the state level (Taylor et al., 1997, p.96). Despite this, as Blackmore & Sachs (2007, p.29) point out, a restructuring did occur in Australia during the 1990s; a ‘shift informed by, and in response to, “restructuring movements”’ in the U.S., the U.K. and New Zealand. Consequently, political rhetoric about ‘accountability, assessment, standards monitoring, performance, quality assurance and school effectiveness’ occupied ‘front and centre of the political and media stage with persistent regularity’ (Rowe, 2000, p.74).

While similar themes are evident in the earlier literature across all three countries, there are notable differences in approach. Australian and U.K. research, for example, appears to have a greater focus on micro-analysis (Falk, 1994; Kenway, 1990; Thomas, 1999; 2005; Pettigrew & Maclure; 1997; Macmillan, 2002; Warmington & Murphy, 2004). U.S. research has been criticised for relying on ‘negative case examples that may not be representative of the majority of media coverage’ (Darleen Opfer, 2007, p.166) and for the absence of ‘systematic and longitudinal research’ which operates within a framework (Darleen-Opfer, 2007, p.166). Gerstl-Pepin (2007, p.5) has also noted the relatively limited research undertaken in the U.S., pointing out that until recently, ‘the prevalent literature on educational policy and politics gave scant attention to media coverage of education and the politics associated with it’.

More recent research emerging from all three countries suggests the beginnings of the more ‘robust’ and ‘systematic’ investigation of the interconnections between media and educational policy that Thomson (2004, p.252) and others have called for. There is, now, greater focus on both ‘media processes and media impacts’ (Darleen-Opfer, 2007, p.166). More specific studies move beyond descriptive accounts of ‘discourses of derision’ (Kenway, 1990, p.191), where ‘the involvement of the media is viewed as an add-on rather than an integral or central part of policy processes’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.72), to investigate the complex intersections between journalism and other fields which position the media as policy-players. There is still, however, limited research ‘on the role that the media might play in shaping the public’s understanding of education policy’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007, p.2) and very little on the capacity of the journalistic field to alter the autonomy of the education and educational policy fields (Rawolle, 2007; 2005).
3.2 Media ownership

Research into the effects of concentrated media ownership and increasing media corporatisation also has relevance to this study. McChesney (2008, p.427) argues that the U.S. ‘media system has become increasingly concentrated and conglomerated into a relative handful of corporate hands’. Concentrated ownership and an orientation towards profit are two of a range of filters identified by Herman & Chomsky (1988) which, they argue, interact in the U.S. media to determine what the public ‘is allowed to see, hear and think about’ (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p.xi). In their view, it is the top tier of the media, made up of ‘large, profit-seeking corporations, owned and controlled by quite wealthy people’ which ‘defines the news agenda’ (Herman & Chomsky, 1988, p.5).

Media ownership in Australia is highly relevant in accounting for how the policy investigated was re-presented in the press although, as Rawolle & Lingard (2014, p.17) point out, the effects of concentrated ownership on education ‘have not been addressed in previous research’. Several studies of the Australian media document its increasingly concentrated ownership (Schultz, 2002; Errington & Miragliotta, 2007; Turner & Cunningham, 2002; Tiffen, 2002; Finkelstein, 2012; Harding-Smith, 2011; Pusey & McCutcheon, 2010). Finkelstein (2012, p.59) points out that ‘Australia’s newspaper industry is among the most concentrated in the developed world’. Australian government support for more concentrated media ownership in recent decades has also been documented (Tiffen, 2002, p.38), as has the ‘economic relationship between (Australian) governments and the press’ (Schultz, 2002, p.107) and the use of government rewards and sanctions for compliant and non-compliant journalists and media owners (Schultz, 2002, p.107; Errington & Miragliotta, 2007, p.86). The same patterns have also been shown in the U.K. under New Labour (Fairclough, 2000). Unlike Australia, however, the U.K. newspaper market has a ‘highly variegated character’ (Franklin, 2008, p.3) and includes eleven national daily papers. While Rupert Murdoch’s News Limited controls a sizeable portion of the U.K. press, there is greater diversity in U.K. press ownership. Despite this, there is research evidence demonstrating central U.K. government efforts to restrict press freedom (Franklin, 2004; Fairclough, 2000; Gewirtz et al, 2004).

Herman & Chomsky (1988, p.2) argue that news filters operate so naturally that many journalists quite genuinely believe ‘that they choose and interpret the news “objectively”’, a
view borne out in my interview with one senior education journalist who vehemently defended her objectivity, and her newspaper’s, in reporting on education (Kean, 2012). Blackmore & Thorpe (2003, p.592) similarly found ‘a relatively benign view’ among the Australian journalists they interviewed that the media merely ‘reports issues and reflects public opinion, providing impartial analysis’. A second interview I conducted, however, with a journalist who has worked for Rupert Murdoch’s News Ltd publications in both Australia and the U.K. revealed that newspaper ownership is highly significant in influencing journalistic choices and accounting for what makes news and how it is reported. Waterson (2014) referred to the ‘agenda being pushed by News Ltd... as to what presence they wanted in politics’ during the 2013 Australian federal election, and to the ‘direction’ the U.K. tabloid she worked for wanted to take during the general election when David Cameron was running for office. This was evident in the directions journalists were given by editorial staff, (‘see what you can drag up’), and in the fact that a negative story on Cameron ‘would be given quite a lot of prominence’ whereas a ‘positive story probably wouldn’t have run’. ‘Savvy’ journalists thus angled their stories to meet editorial demands which, in turn, reflected ownership bias (Waterson, 2014). The same journalist referred to News Ltd newspapers in Australia choosing ‘more stories with a global appeal when Rupert’s in town’ and, because he ‘loves Formula One racing’, ensuring they include ‘a Formula One story’ (Waterson, 2014).

3.3. U.S. research on the media’s reporting on education

3.3.1 Education as an absence in the U.S. media

A number of earlier U.S. studies reveal education to be both a qualitative and quantitative ‘absence’ in the US media. Kaplan (1992) attributed this to market pressures and the lack of prestige that the ‘education beat’ has, with this low status leading to a high rate of journalistic turnover (McQuillan and Tse, 1996 in DeMoss, 2009, p.40). In Australia, by contrast, the education round at both *The Australian* and *The Age* is perceived as ‘a fairly prestigious and important’ one (Kean, 2012). However, tabloids like the *Herald Sun* give education less prominence (Kean, 2012). There, education is considered a ‘softer’ round, with fewer opportunities to ‘snag a page one story’, unlike the more highly-sought rounds of ‘politics, crime and courts’ (Waterson, 2014) suggesting that, in the Australian context, the relative position of a newspaper in the journalistic field has effects on the status of education reporting.
In the U.S., the low status of education reporting has contributed to an uncritical acceptance of education reform agendas in the media and a lack of analysis of substantive educational issues (Kaplan, 1992). Editors and reporters argue that ‘there is simply no demand for education reporting’ (Doyle, 1998, p.52), a claim supported by De Moss (2009) who, in analysing U.S. broadcast news abstracts related to the P-12 education system, found that the total number of education stories aired in the 1990s accounted for just 1.3 percent of all stories; 1.12 percent in the 1980s and 1.15 percent in the 2000s (DeMoss, 2009, p.70). Maeroff (1998, p.223) suggests an absence of demand for education stories which do not have immediate “news value”, a point also made by both Kaplan (1992, pp.58-9) and Watson (1998), suggesting that an absence of coverage in the US media is potentially an effect of the field, produced largely by ‘competition for market share’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.17).

### 3.3.2 Crisis & failure: Media misrepresentation of education

Berliner & Biddle’s influential study, *The Manufactured Crisis* (1995) made a significant contribution to the now generally accepted view that U.S. media coverage of education is predominantly negative. While its focus is on dispelling what the authors argue are media-generated myths about declining educational standards, rather than systematically analysing the nature of the media’s reporting on education, it nevertheless provides compelling evidence to support the claim that, in the 1980s and 90s, the U.S. media actively supported a campaign of criticism by government of public schools. The authors describe this campaign as being ‘dutifully reported and endlessly elaborated upon by an unquestioning press’ (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, pp.3-4). Kaplan (1992, p.17) similarly argues that the U.S. media generally demonstrated a ‘meek’ acceptance of a ‘top-down agenda of national education goals’, with no attempt to question the ‘grip of credentialism, numbers and demonstrable evidence, such as test-scores, of educational accomplishment’ (Kaplan, 1992, p.17).

The impetus for this campaign emanated from the political field and was, according to Berliner & Biddle (1995, p.3), the publication in 1983 of the highly ‘incendiary’ *A Nation at Risk*, a ‘blistering attack on the quality of the nation’s schools’ (Ogle & Dabbs, 1998, p.90). Its claim that American students were failing in international comparisons of student achievement arguably marked the beginning, in the U.S., of education reforms driven by a ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). Moreover, the White House attempted
to explain the failure of American students as reflective of ‘systematic weaknesses’ in American school programs and of a ‘lack of talent and motivation among American educators’ (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p.3), thus constructing ‘a deficit view of teachers’ (Hattam, Prosser & Brady, 2009, p.164). The media’s subsequent ‘campaign of criticism’ is referred to by Berliner & Biddle (1995, p.4) as ‘the Manufactured Crisis’, made up of ‘myths, half-truths, and sometimes, outright lies’. While they blame the Reagan and Bush administrations for scapegoating educators as a diversionary tactic, they also argue that the ‘irresponsible actions of the media’ exacerbated the sense of crisis (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, p.4). Ogle & Dabbs (1998, p.90) similarly refer to an overwhelmingly ‘negative tilt’ in the media and to the allegiance of the press with ‘those who believe that public education has failed’ (Berliner & Biddle, 1998, p.27). Strickland (1998, p.112) argues that such reporting has ‘aroused the indignation of the public to the point of their demanding that teachers justify their output (students’ qualifications) in terms of the input (public monies)’. Her comment that ‘many believe that the media have led the way in turning the public’s attention towards new targets for testing – the teachers’ (Strickland, 1998, p.113) constructs the press as highly active in mobilizing consent for political agendas and potentially altering the autonomy of the education field.

There have, however, been a number of attempts to discredit Berliner & Biddle’s (1995;1998) claims. Doyle (1998, p.52) attacks The Manufactured Crisis (1995) as ‘errant nonsense’, citing Ron Wolk (1995, p.3) who dismisses the claims as ‘absurd’. Similarly, Watson (1998, p.16), an education editor with the Mercury News, takes issue with the view that there is a U.S. media conspiracy to report negatively on schools, although she concedes that such criticisms target the national press rather than ‘the nation’s 1500 daily newspapers, from which most readers get their news’. A more convincing repudiation (though not one targeted specifically at Berliner & Biddle’s research) is Darleen Opfer’s (2007, p.166) argument that much of the U.S. research on the media-education relationship relies on cross-sectional data and negative case examples that may not be representative of the majority of media coverage. The truth of this claim is illustrated by Kaplan’s (1992) analysis of press coverage of America 2000. He points out that while the ‘potent Wall Street Journal remained a staunch America 2000 backer’ (Kaplan, 1992, p.144), several newspapers, notably the New York Times, criticised the plan’s ‘most controversial core proposal: expanding parental choice to embrace private schools’, thus reinforcing the need for research to be attentive to differences in press reporting.
3.3.3 New directions in U.S. research

The formation of the Hechinger Institute on Education and the Media in 1996, specifically to ‘address issues involving the coverage of education by the press and broadcast media’ in the U.S. (Maeroff, 1998, p.vii), heralded the beginnings of an investigation into field interconnections, part of which involved a call for those in the education field to better understand the structural constraints of the journalistic field. *Imaging Education* (Maeroff, 1998), a collection of essays expressing the views of a range of stakeholders, including academics, practising and former journalists and statisticians with the U.S. Department of Education, reveals the ‘symbiotic relationship’ between education and the media (Maeroff, 1998, p.221). Importantly, it argues that while there is general consensus in the academic research that the media ‘perpetuate a negative image of American education’ (Maeroff, 1998, p.222), the ‘education establishment must show more respect for the public’s right to know and a greater understanding of the media’s role as an intermediary between the world of education and the public’ (Maeroff, 1998, p.223). Almost a decade later, Anderson (2007, p.105) made a similar point, commenting that ‘Educators and the general public need to better understand not only the extent to which the “reality” of educational reform and policy directions is constructed with the help of the media but also the sophisticated and subtle mechanisms that make it possible’.

Ogle & Dabbs (1998) argue that greater understanding of the field of journalism by the education community can influence journalistic products in ways that are advantageous for education, referencing a press conference held to release TIMSS results in 1996 at which educators provided journalists with an ‘accessible and rich set of data’ (Ogle & Dabbs, 1998, p.93) which prompted ‘extensive and thorough coverage’ in major national newspapers. The authors contend that ‘those who release test results must do a better job of explaining them’, while ‘reporters need to become better at interpreting the test results’ (Ogle & Dabbs, 1998, p.97). The responsibility of the media in this dual relationship is highlighted by Maeroff (1998, p.223) who comments that newspapers should ‘assign veteran journalists to the education beat and leave them there long enough to know a lesson plan from a curriculum unit’ (Maeroff, 1998, p.223). This call has not been heeded. In fact, concerns have been raised about the declining numbers of education reporters and editors now working at U.S. newspapers (West et al, 2010), as a result of a decade long process of severe cutbacks in response to declining circulation.
figures and advertising revenue which has seen the number of full time journalists at daily U.S. newspapers ‘fall from a peak of about 56,900 in 1989 to 41,600 in 2010’ (Federal Communications Commission, 2011).

3.3.4 Challenging perceptions of a passive public

Some research suggests that the media have minimal influence on public perceptions of education. Darleen Opfer (2007, p.169), for example, comments that there has been an underlying and not necessarily justified assumption in the research that the public respond ‘passively’ to media coverage of education. Macarff (1998, p.2) suggests that a mingling of readers’ past personal experiences of education with the images presented in the media makes it difficult to separate and quantify the strands of influence. A similar point was made for the Australian context in the Senate report A Class Act – Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession (SEETRC, 1998) which commented that most of the community and the media are ‘woefully ignorant’ about what it is that teachers actually do, ‘with views based on their own experiences of school more than thirty years ago’. Blackmore (2006, p.4) similarly comments that politicians and journalists are ‘self referential in terms of their own experiences of schooling’.

Wadsworth (1998) presents evidence from surveys and studies conducted by her organization, Public Agenda, to challenge the view that the media are responsible for shaping public perceptions of education. She (1998, p.67) highlights the extraordinary consensus among all groups surveyed that there is a ‘need for more rigor, higher standards, greater accountability, and, above all, a safe and civil environment conducive to learning (which) is neither the result of media coverage nor susceptible to manipulation by it’. Educators, she argues, ‘are mistaken and at risk if they continue to ascribe the public’s attitudes toward the schools to the bad news bias of the media’ (Wadsworth, 1998, p.68). Cuban (1998) similarly supports the claim of an ‘enduring constancy’ in public beliefs about what is most important in education, drawing on annual Gallup polls in education between 1969 and 1996, in which Americans repeatedly expressed their view that lack of discipline is “the biggest problem in local public schools”’ (Cuban, 1998, p.76). Stevens (1998) challenges this view, suggesting disagreement in the literature about the extent to which the press influences public perceptions of education.
3.3.5 The influence of field-effects on education reporting

As an assistant editor responsible for education coverage at the *San Jose Mercury News*, Watson (1998) provides the insights of a practising journalist. Her comment that most reporters would consider a story which raises ‘critical issues about schools that may lead to the improvement of education for children …a positive piece’ (Watson, 1998, p.19) provides an alternative reading of “negative” education coverage. Ultimately, Watson concludes (1998, p.25), journalists cannot allow themselves to be influenced by ‘consideration of whether a story will be good for the public image of schools. Their job is to tell the truth and help readers understand the challenges that society is facing’.

These comments suggest an awareness by journalists of the tension and mistrust that frequently characterizes relations between the journalistic and education fields. Watson’s (1998) references to the work of Kaplan and Berliner and Biddle reinforce this. While she acknowledges that some of their criticisms may be justified, she also reveals the constraints imposed by the ‘specific logics’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.39) of the journalistic field: that is, the ‘structure of the field and the mechanisms that operate within it’ (Bourdieu,1995, p.42). She acknowledges, for example, that ‘speed is essential in daily reporting’ and that because of this, journalists ‘do far too much of (their) analysis on the fly’ (Watson, 1998, p.16), leading to an inability to report adequately on complex stories on any topic. Interviews with Australian journalists not only confirmed this theme but suggested that recent technological changes have magnified the problem. Waterson (2014) commented that when she began working as a journalist, she was required to meet weekly deadlines. Now, ‘you might be at an event and the editor says “I need you to file online five minutes after you arrive, to write ten paragraphs in five minutes and then you’ve got to be constantly filing updates for the website and then at the end of it, producing something again for the paper’. Thus structural constraints may influence the media’s reporting on education, as U.K. authors Pettigrew & Maclure (1997) and Warmington & Murphy (2004) have also suggested.

Like Watson, Levin (2004) draws on his experiences in multiple fields to invite understanding of the ‘specific logics’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.39) of the journalistic field. A Canadian academic and former government minister, Levin (2004) acknowledges the negative and often sensationalist nature of press coverage of education, but also invites understanding of the ‘dynamics that drive
the media’, prime among them the fact that they are, in general, ‘businesses that have to generate income’ (Levin, 2004, p.273). The multiple fields in which they have had agency enable both Stevens (1998), a former journalist turned educator, and Levin (2004), to sketch for others the internal workings of the fields of journalism and politics and the constraints within which agents operate, enabling the research to move beyond a discourse of blame. Levin (2004), for example, concludes with positive suggestions to improve relations between media and government. Echoing Maeroff’s (1998) call a decade earlier, Moses (2007, p.150) also argues for greater inter-field awareness, commenting that if educational researchers had greater awareness of how the field of journalism operates, they could then find more effective ways of ‘disseminating (their) research to journalists and members of the public’.

3.3.6 Current U.S. research directions

More recent U.S. research highlights the complex interconnections between the fields of education, journalism and politics, notably focusing on specific instances and areas of press coverage to avoid making claims for all media. Killeen (2007), for example, investigates school consumerism, identifying a gap between what occurs in practice in education and what is presented by the press, concluding that ‘the media’s representation ... may exaggerate the effects of consumer and consumer behaviour in schools’ (Killeen, 2007, p.32). Anderson’s (2007) analysis of the ‘media frenzy’ that erupted following the Columbine High School shootings similarly identifies a media propensity to exaggerate. More systematic approaches and a growing interest in press involvement in the educational policy-making process are also evident in McDonald’s (2014) examination of the conservative movement’s use of the media and conservative think tanks to ‘gain entry to the field of education policy’ and influence public policy debates (McDonald, 2014, p.845). Cohen’s (2010) application of CDA to The Chicago Tribune’s coverage of education over the two year period of 2006-7 similarly suggests a new specificity in the research. Through micro-level analysis, she demonstrates how the newspaper’s discourse framed ‘teacher identity in terms of Accountability and Caring’, with Accountability ultimately gaining ‘authority over caring to shape education policy’ (Cohen, 2010, p.105).

This more recent research, which has also begun to investigate the transformation of education journalism into a new digital form (West et al, 2010), nevertheless confirms the view that the U.S. media, in its reporting on education, continues to largely be aligned with government and
has a negative bias. Goldstein (2011), for example, investigated how media framing in the *New York Times* and *Time* magazine presented a negative image of teachers. Cohen (2010, p.105) identified a ‘crisis discourse surrounding education’, while Gerstl-Pepin’s (2002) analysis of the major television, newspaper and radio coverage of educational issues in the final four months of the 2000 presidential election campaign found that media depictions of educational issues both ‘reinforce and reflect public assumptions that America’s education system is failing’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2002, p.38). However, her point that such coverage arises from the wider function of the media, and its predominant focus on stories with a conflict, rather than a cooperation focus (Gerstl-Pepin, 2002, p.43), moves the research beyond adversarial models of blame to a focus on how the internal workings of fields contribute to the construction of particular discourses.

3.4 U.K. research on the media’s reporting on education.

3.4.1 Introduction

Claims of an absence of research on the media’s reporting on education have also been made for the U.K. In 1993, Wallace (1993, p.322) argued that the ‘media have remained marginal to most British analyses of education policy’. A decade later, Warmington & Murphy (2004, p.287) referred to isolated papers such as those by Wallace (1993) as ‘rare excursions into a rather unknown land’. In their (2004, p.287) view, ‘discussion of the specific processes via which education news is structured remains minimal’ in the British research.

Jeffs (1999, p.157) suggests that education attracted significantly less media attention in the U.K. before the 1950s largely because education was then primarily the responsibility of local government. The distinction he makes between national and local press coverage of education, which is generally more celebratory in its coverage of schools, was echoed by Australian school principals. One principal commented that the ‘local media is a very different kettle of fish’; that his school gets ‘in the local media all the time’ and that the local media frequently celebrates the school’s diversity and culture (McGee, 2012). A second principal, whose school was named as one of the ‘worst’ in the state in a major newspaper’s “league table”, commented that following publication of the piece the school was contacted by the local newspaper who ‘wanted to help out’ (O’Brien, 2012).
Differing claims about the nature, effect and extent of the media’s reporting on educational issues in Britain are evident in the research. Some (Ball, 1990; Wallace, 1993) emphasises the collusion of media and government in constructing a ‘moral panic’ (Ball, 1990, p.26) about declining standards and poor behaviour. Other research makes an important distinction between the quality and tabloid press, arguing that for the latter in particular, reporting on education is habitually low, increasing and appearing on the front pages ‘only when events are sensationalized, frequently to convey an ongoing theme of social disruption’ (Macmillan, 2002, p.27; Baker, 1994) whereas in the qualities, education has greater prominence and there is also ‘a serious commitment to educational journalism’ (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004, p.303). Differing claims are apparent in Jeffs’ (1999) argument that U.K. newspapers have not published research which challenges the validity of testing as a measure of a school’s worth and Pettigrew & Maclure’s (1997, p.402) view that such research has, in fact, been widely reported.

3.4.2 Media compliance and agency in endorsing government policy on education

The view of a hostile, derisory press who promote the view that public education is failing is emphasized in the earlier U.K. research and is tied, as it is in the U.S., to policy directions in education. There is considerable U.K. research on the damaging impact of central government policies on education (Ball, 1990; Youdell, 2004; Ozga, 2000; Gewirtz et al, 1995). The pressure schools feel to produce good examination results because these are published in the press; the increasing need to focus on image and marketing; the exclusion of special needs students or students who may not perform well on tests, and the focusing of resources on students who will improve results at the expense of those who will not, have been convincingly demonstrated by research to be outcomes of successive government agendas informed by a discourse of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement (Wallace, 1993; Gewirtz et al, 1995; Warmington & Murphy, 2004; West & Pennell, 2000; Youdell, 2004).

Some U.K. research, while not necessarily focused specifically on the media, highlights media agency in supporting preferred government discourses on education. Myers and Goldstein (1997), for example, refer to the damaging effects of “league tables” published in newspapers in the wider context of a discussion of the reliability and validity of such testing. Goldstein (2001, p.436) similarly argues that published “league tables” lead to educationally undesirable attempts
to “play the system” whereby pupil progress becomes ‘a means of judging the performance of teachers’. Gewirtz et al (1995) emphasize the media’s complicity in promoting educational consumerism. They point to The Observer’s serialization of the Good State School’s Guide; the publicity accorded to “league tables” and the appearance, in 1992, of other newspaper ‘guides’ to schools which are now annual publications (Gewirtz et al, 1995, p.21). These authors reveal the image management which schools must now engage in to attract ‘consumers’, describing ‘communications with the press’ as a consequent “core” activity of schools (Gewirtz et al, 1995, p.127).

3.4.3 Discourses of failure and blame

Ball (1990, p.18) has been particularly influential in highlighting the role of the U.K. press in supporting the educational discourses of the New Right through the construction of a powerful ‘discourse of derision’. He argues that ‘the degree of impact achieved would have been inconceivable without the ideological support of the greater part of the media’ which enthusiastically constructed a “moral panic” (Ball, 1990, p.26) attached to comprehensive and progressive education, declining academic standards and the apparent link between ‘comprehensive schools and social disorder’ (Ball, 1990, p.25).

Both Jeffs (1999) and Wallace (1993) have highlighted the British media’s collusion with government in ‘articulating …particular myths’ about education and ‘bringing opposing myths into derision’ (Wallace, 1993, p.334). Wallace (1993, p.328) reveals the media’s role in generating the myth that low standards were directly attributable to progressive education, while Jeffs (1999) highlights the introduction of comprehensive schools in the 1960s as the catalyst for Conservative politicians to exploit parents’ concerns and fears. He documents the media’s decade-long collusion with this agenda in their presentation of ‘Pervasive messages of failure …sustained by negative reporting of events at specific schools’ (Jeffs, 1999, p.160) and scathingly describes ‘a slavish media’ employed by Conservative governments to ‘name and shame schools’ (Jeffs, 1999, p.162). In Jeffs’ (1999, p.171) view, the ‘press and television have done much to police the teaching profession and create a cowed workforce’. Myers & Goldstein (1997, p.11) similarly liken the media to inspectors ‘who judge schools’ while Baker (1994, p.286) singles out ‘the middle-market tabloids in Britain’ who ‘shape a perception of teachers and state schools that is mostly negative and derisory’.
Despite a ‘long-standing fatalism among British educationalists about the quality of education coverage in news media’ (Warmington & Murphy, 2004, p.286), some research notably disputes claims of widespread media subservience to central government’s attempts ‘to undermine the expertise and authority of teachers and educationalists’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.393). Pettigrew & Maclure’s (1997, p.392) study, focusing specifically on four daily and four Sunday papers, rather than seeking to cover the national press as a whole, also includes interviews with two correspondents from each of the selected newspapers, as well as six university education researchers whose work was reported in the press (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.393). Their investigation of the ‘rhetorical structure of press texts’ over a significant period of time (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.395) was, as they point out, a markedly different approach from comparable research which generally investigated, in detail, a relatively small number of texts, frequently over a relatively short time-span (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.395). While acknowledging that ‘discourses of derision’ (Kenway, 1990, p.191) do exist, these authors argue they do not apply to every case and, importantly, highlight ‘internal inconsistencies and contradictions in press reporting of education policy’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.392).

Mortimore’s (1991) account of press reporting on a major research study of school effectiveness similarly offers a variation on the theme of press hostility to education. He argues a tendency by the press to report superficially and indiscriminately on research, thus trivialising its often complex findings – a point also made more recently for the U.S. by Haas (2007).

3.4.4 New directions in the research

While the theme of a press hostile to public education continues to resonate in the British research - (Franklin (2004, p.256), for example, argues that journalists continue to explore ‘a predictable and narrow agenda including the publication of the perennial round of school league tables’) - more recent research often presupposes this negativity and moves beyond illustrating it to explore its construction and effects (see, for example, Macmillan, 2002).

Warmington & Murphy (2003, pp.289-90), like Blackmore & Thorpe (2003) and Thomas (2005) in the Australian context, supplement their analysis of press coverage of 2003 A-level and GCSE exam results with interviews with key figures who contributed to the coverage, thereby giving attention to text production. While acknowledging that media coverage was dominated by claims about falling standards, the authors argue that this is due ‘as much to
custom and format as to shaping by explicit agenda’ (Warmington & Murphy, 2004, pp.289-90). Their view (2004, p.297) that those working in education must better understand the ‘conventions, needs and imperatives that drive’ the media echoes similar observations in the U.S. research (Watson, 1998; Levin, 2004; Stevens, 1998; Moses, 2007).

The greater variety of areas explored in more recent research is evident also in Blackmore & Thomson’s (2004) comparative study of the creation of “star” and “maverick” heads in Australia and the U.K. U.K. head teachers’ active use of the media to ‘position themselves and also make a case for their school and their sector’ (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004, p.301) and, equally, the media’s individualistic representations and celebrations of head teachers who embody ‘government policy aspirations and desires’ (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004, p.310) reveals the processes of mediatization to be ‘always at least two-way’ (Couldry, 2008, p.380). Attention to educators’ active use of the media to promote their own agendas reveals how more recent research has moved the focus considerably beyond earlier views of the media as an often antagonistic entity, in the face of which education is powerless.

Gewirtz et al’s (2004, p.321) investigation of the ‘relationship between spin and policy’ explores the complex processes of the media’s reporting on educational policy is. Their three year study of English Education Action Zones (EAZ) policy suggests that mediatization was an influential factor in this policy’s demise. The authors argue that the policies of New Labour ‘and the spin that represents them to “the public” cannot be understood as distinct and separate entities because the policies cannot be neatly abstracted from the spin’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.327). In arguing the need ‘to focus on the constitutive role that spin plays’ …’the way in which spin is not simply “done to” a policy, but is also something which “makes up” a policy’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.327), this research reveals the complexity of the media-government-educational policy interface, revealing the media to be far more than ‘slavish’ (Jeffs, 1999, p.162) central government mouthpieces. Hammersley’s (2007) investigation of media coverage of a review of research on the education of ethnic minority children commissioned by the Office for Standards in Education echoes earlier calls in the U.S. for greater understanding of journalistic field constraints. Despite researchers’ complaints that their work is frequently distorted by the media, Hammersley (2007, p.342) argues that media reports of research are often a product of field-effects, involving ‘a trade-off between various degrees or kinds of accuracy and the likely
intelligibility and interest to the target audience of different interpretations of its message’, the same ‘sort of dilemma...faced by researchers as well’.

Fairclough’s (2000) study of New Labour’s relationship with the media also emphasizes the processes of mediatization. The ‘new relationship between politics, government and mass media’ (Fairclough, 2000, p.3) which emerged under Blair’s leadership had significant implications for education. One way this played out is explored by Franklin (2004, p.260) who investigates New Labour’s use of ‘publicly funded advertising and marketing to promote its policy ambitions’ (Franklin, 2004, p.260) in a systematic ‘packaging’ of educational policies for media presentation and public consumption. The ‘key ambitions’ of the National Year of Reading campaign, for example, were featured in peak-time soap operas, raising concerns about ‘marketing policy in a way which risks moving too closely in the direction of propaganda’ (Franklin, 2004, pp.264-5). Franklin (2004, p.265) observes that The Guardian ‘expressed few misgivings about the government’s plan to ‘mobilize all the propaganda weapons of popular culture to improve the nation’s reading skills’, thus acting as a ‘mouthpiece for the government’s agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71).

3.5. Australian research on the media’s reporting on education

3.5.1 A hostile, derisory press

There is also a widespread view in the Australian research that the Australian print media is hostile in its reporting on public schools and teachers. Research such as Kenway’s (1990) highlights a press emphasis on the failure of public schools which, in both mining and manufacturing public concern about declining standards in literacy and numeracy, advanced the interests of the private school sector. Taylor et al (1997, p.167) draw parallels between the U.S., the U.K. and Australia, commenting on regular ‘media-generated calls….for a “back to the basics” approach in all three countries, while the AEU (2008, p.5) refers to ‘perceptions of a supposed crisis in standards’ particularly in literacy and numeracy which ‘have gained currency in the media and apparent acceptance by some decision makers’.

Blackmore (2006, p.2) highlights a decade-long media culture of complaint and reprimand in the Australian press, ‘framed by a populist discourse of denigration … mobilized against teachers, teacher educators, educational bureaucrats and researchers’ and led by particular ‘journalists,
social commentators and newspapers (who) have been at the forefront of a ‘deluge of criticism …loaded against public schools’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2). Hattam, Prosser & Brady (2009, pp.166-7) argue that sections of the Australian media construct ‘deficit representations’ of schools and teachers which sustain the ‘backlash pedagogies’ of major political parties. They suggest that when the proponents of such pedagogies repeatedly provide unchallenged media commentary on educational issues, ‘the sense of crisis, logics of deficit and resentful pedagogies are perpetuated’. The view of an Australian press hostile to public education was also suggested in the report *A Class Act – Inquiry into the Status of the Teaching Profession.* (SEETRC, 1998) which acknowledged the view of teachers that not only is media coverage of education frequently ‘negative, misleading and ill-informed’, but that governments use ‘the media to denigrate teachers’ (SEETRC, 1998, pp.10-11).

Newspapers’ publication of Year 12 results has also attracted criticism in the Australian research. Rowe (2000, p.97) describes the information presented as ‘misleading’ and ‘irresponsible’. Blackmore & Thorpe (2003, p.592) refer to the *Sydney Morning Herald* and the Melbourne *Herald Sun* as taking ‘a particularly aggressive position’ in relation to their right to publish this data, ‘mobilizing arguments around parental choice’ and presenting their actions as ‘a justifiable public service’. And, despite research revealing selectivity and socioeconomic factors as key in ‘explaining differential school and student outcomes, the media and conservative commentators continue to argue for league tables, as if ranking will change or improve schooling’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.9). Meadmore (2001, p.27) argues that the effect of press publication of test results is ‘to open education to the public domain as a market’ and place the onus ‘squarely on schools, teachers and students to lift their game.’ More recently, Alderson & Martin’s (2008, p.24) study of the impact of NAPLAN testing on 11 independent schools in Western Australia reveals the pressure teachers and administrators experience as the press ‘report a familiar lament, the “failure” of students to achieve at an international level, “declining” standards, students who “cannot read and write” and teachers who are “underachieving”’. Their comment that ‘NAPLAN testing appears to be something else the media can and are using to undermine teachers and schools’ (Alderson & Martin, 2008, p.24) implies that testing data provides ammunition for an often hostile media to attack schools and teachers. Such attacks, argues Blackmore (2006, p.2), largely render the education field ‘powerless to protect its boundaries’. The media’s role in utilising testing data to support conservative government agendas is, Blackmore (2006, p.4)
suggests, strengthened by the over-representation of conservative social commentators in the opinion pages of some newspapers and their selective importation of debates, reports and research, largely from the U.S. to support the need for a return to ‘the basics in schools and standards in teaching’, highlighting the key role of “voice” in the construction of particular discourses. The identification of ‘five inter-connected story-lines’ in media claims about education, each with its own internal logic and policy solution (Blackmore, 2006, p.5), suggests a new focus on how such discourses are constructed.

3.5.2 Research revealing the media as key policy-players

While Australian policy studies research frequently references the media (Meadmore, 2001; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Alderson & Martin, 2008; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Lingard, 2010), few specific studies explore the links between media, politics and policy. Exceptions to this include the work of Falk (1994); Kenway (1990); Blackmore & Thorpe (2003); Blackmore (2006); and Thomas (2005). Rawolle (2005; 2007), Lingard & Rawolle (2004), Rawolle & Lingard (2010; 2014) and Hattam, Prosser & Brady (2009) are the only researchers I identified who deal specifically with the mediatization of educational policy in the Australian setting. These studies, in constructing the media as both policy-players and policy-makers, significantly advance understanding of the complex interrelationships between the fields of journalism, politics, education and educational policy and were influential in shaping this study.

Kenway’s (1990) study of press coverage of the ALP’s 1983 announcement of funding reductions to private schools constructs the press as a key site of struggle, an unequal ‘gaming space’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.264) which, in privileging the voice of powerful stakeholders, allows them to mobilize the media for their own purposes. She (1990, p.182) traces the private school lobby’s attempts ‘to marshal and promulgate an arsenal of argument against the Labor government policies on funding’ and reveals how this group was assisted by the Australian Council for Educational Standards, the “vanguard” of the conservative wing of the Educational Right’ (Kenway, 1990, p.186). This group, made up mainly of “conservative academics” (Kenway, 1990, p.186), made regular media appearances and their ‘public addresses were reported in detail by the media’ (Kenway, 1990, p.187). In describing the media as both amplifying these commentators voices and echoing them through the voices of particular journalists in particular newspapers and through editorial support, Kenway (1990, pp.186-7)
captures the ideas of reciprocity and symbiosis, implying a filtering process in which the voices privileged are those supporting a newspaper’s policy stance. Kenway (1990, p.187) presents the press as highly active in mobilizing a ‘myth of educational “crisis” focused on an ‘alarming’ decline in standards’ through the way they sought and voiced the views of industry, employer groups, and New Right think tanks (Kenway, 1990, pp.186-7). Accompanying the general panic about declining standards was ‘a sustained attack upon state school teachers and their unions, teacher education, educational reformers, and bureaucrats’ (Kenway, 1990, p.192). The discourses of the Right thus developed ‘a significant and insistent truth effect’ with ‘the prolonged and intense assistance of the media’ (Kenway, 1990, p.201).

Falk’s (1994) analysis of newspaper texts written over a four month period in 1983 similarly reveals that the press are important players in the policy-making process. While the focus of this research is on press reporting on political and economic issues, Falk (1994, p.11) illustrates how newspapers select, develop and present ‘for public consumption what the discursive themes of policy will be’ (Falk, 1994, p.11). His view that the media are highly selective in “dispersing” particular policy discourses (Falk, 1994, p.10) implies that they are far more than merely message-givers. Blackmore (2006, p.3) develops this theme in arguing that the Australian media has been ‘highly active in the neo-liberal restructuring of education’ by mediating the naming of policy problems and solutions. In her view, the print and digital media not only ‘identifies’, but also generates, crises, while government ‘proactively and strategically utilizes the media ... to manufacture consent for particular policy moves’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.3). Moreover, she argues, ‘Federal education policy is being generated and mobilized through the media’, creating ‘new ground’, given that education is constitutionally a state matter’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.13), a claim which has particular resonance for this study.

Blackmore & Thorpe’s (2003) study of critical incidents and representations about education in the Victorian print media over a seven year period (1993-1999) was particularly influential in shaping my research. This study notably focuses on newspaper texts and their production and reception. Through a content analysis of newspapers, the backtracking of ‘individual “critical incidents”’ in education ‘to their stakeholder sources’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.579) and interviews with a selection of public school teachers and journalists, the authors demonstrate the active use made of the media by the Kennett government to ‘construct policy “problems” and
then to promote policy “solutions”” (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.588). The view that the press play a ‘media/ting’ role in ‘privileging …some discourses and not others’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.580) supports Falk’s (1994) claim that the press ‘both ‘colonizes’ and ‘commodifies’ public awareness of educational policy by simplifying and mobilizing for public consumption complex, multiple and often conflicting policy discourses’ (Falk, 1994, p.2). Describing the media as ‘both the medium and the message for what policy is read to mean’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.580) captures the media’s duality – its informational and discursive role. The view that media messages ‘can possess a density which informs the actions of schools and teachers (and indeed policy developers)’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.590) further implies the potential of the media to produce ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2007).

Thomas’s (2005) study of the Wiltshire Review of the Queensland school curriculum also maps interrelationships between media, government and policy discourses. The study grew from the author’s observation that media coverage of educational issues was consistently negative and had a focus on the public, rather than private, education system (Thomas, 2005, p.17). It combines close analysis of 39 newspaper texts drawn from Queensland newspapers, analysis of the report *Shaping the Future* and several other associated policy documents, and interviews with members of the panel and journalists.

In analysing the discourses on education which emerged during four key stages of the Review in three sites of discursive practice, the Wiltshire Review, the government, and the press, Thomas (2005, p.295) found ‘congruences’ within the discourses constructed in each of these sites which ultimately ‘worked to construct a shared discourse on Queensland’s schools’ (Thomas, 2005, p.295), with increasing convergence between the press and government’s preferred discourse on education. While all three sites identified problems in Queensland’s schools, both the press and the government, in contrast to the Panel, ‘presented the problem as school “failure”’ (Thomas, 2005, p.298), positioning teachers ‘consistently as both the cause of, and the obstruction to the resolution of, the problem’ (Thomas, 2005, p.300). This preferred discourse of school failure was ‘at odds with that held by most members of the education community’ (Thomas, 2005, p.295).

account for field interrelations (see Chapter Two) and the more recent additions to this model (Rawolle & Lingard, 2014) provide precisely the kind of ‘systematic’ investigation of media involvement in the educational policy process that Thomson (2004) and others called for. Rawolle (2007, p.82) alluded to the need for this in his comment that earlier research has tended to ‘deal more broadly with the set of relationships that link media, politics and policy’, without necessarily revealing the ‘complex and systematic ways’ that ‘media involvement influences policy development’ and, conversely, that policy development influences media coverage’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.30). Hattam, Prosser & Brady’s (2009) examination of the public statements made about education by Australian Federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson (2001-2006) and “education expert” and regular Australian columnist, Kevin Donnelly, to illustrate how the Howard Liberal Government increasingly performed its ‘policy work through selected parts of the media’ is one example of this more systematic investigation of the processes by which education policy is mediatized.

3.6. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have identified common themes in the research on press reporting on education in Australia, the U.K. and the U.S. Chief among these is the view of a press that is hostile to public education and actively constructs derisory discourses attached to ‘standards’ and the failure of public education to meet them which mobilized support for greater school and teacher accountability. This, I have suggested, mirrored policy shifts in education tied to neo-liberalism and ‘the injection of market principles into education’ (Ozga, 2000, p.9).

I have argued that the earlier literature in all three countries, with its focus on the role of the press in constructing a sense of crisis around public education, reflects the tense and often antagonistic relationship between the fields of education and journalism, presenting an adversarial relationship which may, in part, have contributed to a sense of the media as separate from, rather than integral to, the educational policy process. I have argued that interviews conducted with Australian school principals reveal that this hostile relationship continues to have resonance.

I have suggested that more recent studies acknowledge the limitations of such an approach in accounting for the complexities of the policymaking process. These studies, which demonstrate
an increasing interest in the ‘specific processes via which education news is structured’ (Warmington & Murphy, 2004, p.287), advance the research in significant ways by revealing the complexity and dynamism of media processes. In highlighting the ‘constitutive role’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.327) that the media plays in the educational policy process, they were an important springboard for this study.
Chapter 4  Methodology

4.1 Introduction

In seeking to answer the key research question this project poses, I examined three data sets: policy texts, print media texts and interview texts. Each was selected to enable investigation of the four specific research questions which underpin the key research question (see Chapter One). The data collected, the methodology used to analyse and investigate each research question and the methodological orientations underpinning the research are outlined below.

4.2 Methodological orientations

The introduction of national literacy and numeracy testing and the publication of test results on the MySchool website marked a significant policy shift in Australian education. In investigating the preferred discourses on education constructed by the Australian Federal Government through this policy initiative; the preferred discourses on education produced by specific newspapers reporting on this policy and the discursive effects on particular schools named in the media, from the principal’s view, I drew on the research approaches of critical policy studies (Taylor et al, 1997); the work of Ball (1990, 1993, 1994) and Lingard (2010, 2014) in the field of policy sociology and Rawolle’s (2005, 2007) research into mediatization. More broadly, I drew on Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor’s (2005a, p.759) view that the theoretical and methodological approaches of Bourdieu ‘can be productively utilized in policy sociology in education’. The design and methods chosen in this study adopt, as a basis for understanding, a ‘policy cycle’ (Bowe et al, 1992) view of policy. This understands policy ‘as a process rather than an output’ (Ozga, 2000, p.42); as ‘both text and action, words and deeds… (as) what is enacted as well as what is intended’ (Ball, 1994, p.10). The methodological orientations underpinning the study were influenced by the concern policy sociology has with the key notions of power, struggle, contestation and resistance in the policy process, ‘played out in regard to whose voices are heard and whose values are recognised or “authoritatively allocated”’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p 29). Ball’s (1998, p 128) view that, in policy analysis, ‘we need to be asking the question, ‘whose interests are served?’” and his argument that policy analysis should ‘recognise and analyse the existence of “dominant” discourses’ (Ball, 1993, p 15) influenced the choice of topic and the research
questions investigated. I have earlier acknowledged my positionality in the research (see Chapter 1) and the influence of my value stances and lived experience in shaping the research. In so doing, I drew from the view of policy sociology that, while values ‘may be so well integrated into our thinking that they shape it in subtle and implicit ways’, clear acknowledgement and, indeed, articulation of values ‘may assist in developing coherence in the chosen project’ (Ozga, 2000, p.48). As Taylor et al (1997, p.19) argue, if ‘values cannot be avoided in policy analysis then …they ought to be declared and argued for up front’.

With the exception of some quantitative data used to illustrate patterns of newspaper reporting on education, this thesis primarily utilises the qualitative approaches advocated by policy sociology which Ozga (1987, p.144) describes as ‘rooted in the social science tradition, historically informed and drawing on qualitative and illuminative techniques’. Taylor et al (1997, p 41) provide further support for this methodological approach, commenting that while there is ‘a place for quantitative methods within critical policy research, either alone or in combination with qualitative methods’, qualitative approaches are ‘better’ at achieving the aim of policy research: ‘to unravel the complexities of the policy process’.

The research utilises Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to explore the discursive orientations of both newspaper and policy texts, as outlined in Chapter 2. A longitudinal examination of newspaper texts and a critical discourse analysis of the policy texts underpinning national testing and reporting aims to understand and unpack the ‘struggle and strategy’ (Ball, 1990, p.15) that marks the policy process, while also acknowledging the importance of locating fine-grained analyses within ‘a broader context, including an historical context’ (Taylor, 1997, p.32). Further, interviews with school principals reflect the centrality of policy enactment in the policy cycle; the ‘“wild profusion” of local practice’ (Ball, 1994, p.10) onto which policies are mapped. In adopting this methodological approach, I sought to work within a methodological frame which argues the need to connect the ‘“bigger picture” of global and national policy contexts to the ‘smaller pictures’ of policies and practices within schools and classrooms’ (Vidovich, 2007, p.285) and thus, to ‘interrogate policy from conception to implementation’ (Humes & Bryce, 2001, p.334). This reflects an understanding of policy as a whole process (Vidovich, 2007).
4.3 Policy texts

To investigate and account for the preferred discourses on education constructed by the Australian Federal Government in the context of an emerging national agenda in education, I conducted a content analysis of Annual National Reports on Schooling in Australia in the period 1996-2006. During the course of my analysis, it became apparent that there was a need to locate the investigation in a global context. It appeared to be of particular importance, for example, that Australian students participated in international literacy and numeracy testing programs both during (and before) the period analysed; notably PISA tests commencing in 2000 and TIMSS testing in 1994. I therefore expanded my research to examine trends in education in the U.S. and the U.K., given that Australia, the U.S. and the U.K. are the only OECD nations to have introduced full cohort testing (Alderson & Martin, 2008) in designated years of schooling.

I selected the period 1996-2006 for analysis in order to trace the emergence of a national agenda in education over a period of time. It also allowed me to locate the point at which national testing and reporting emerged on the national policy agenda and therefore to establish whether this policy approach was specific to, or indeed transcended, political party interests. 2006 was the end point for analysis as I moved to consider four key policy texts released by the ALP at the beginning of 2007 as part of its federal election campaign (Rudd & Smith, 2007a;b;c; Rudd & Macklin, 2007). When the ALP formed government at the end of 2007, it implemented its vision for an ‘education revolution’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.3), as outlined in these policy texts. Part of that vision involved the introduction of national testing in 2008 and national reporting in 2010.

Utilising the tools of critical discourse analysis, I conducted both a content and micro-analysis of the ‘education revolution’ policy texts to identify preferred government discourses on education.

4.4 Print-media texts

To investigate and account for the preferred discourses on education produced by *The Age*, the *Herald Sun* and *The Australian* in their reporting on *MySchool* and the ways in which these discursively positioned and represented education and schools, I collected newspaper articles about school education and the *MySchool* website from each newspaper in three periods: June, 2009-February, 2010; July, 2010-March, 2011, and February-March, 2012, comprising twenty months in total. The data comprised
• 1,298 items in the *Herald Sun*, totalling 338,263 words;
• 1,493 items in *The Age*, totalling 659,387 words;
• 1,312 items in *The Australian*, totalling 584,435 words.

The periods selected coincided with the release and re-release of the *MySchool* website over a three year period. Specific periods for close analysis included the initial launch of the website in January, 2010; its re-launch as *MySchool2.0* in March, 2011 and the release of *MySchool3.0* in February, 2012. Two extended periods were also investigated: the seven months prior to January, 2010 and the eight months prior to March, 2011. The first period of pre-policy-release ‘back-tracking’ enabled me to investigate how the newspapers in the study reported on *MySchool* prior to its launch. In its second year, *MySchool* included new information about school funding and finance. The inclusion of this data, fiercely contested by the private school sector, appeared to profoundly alter the nature of press coverage. Selecting a second extended period for analysis (July, 2010-March 2011) enabled me to capture and reflect on this contestation. These extended periods were also important because they included the release of NAPLAN results, which *MySchool* reports on.

My initial intention was to track press coverage of *MySchool* over its first two years (2010 and 2011) and to record coverage in the months prior. This was broadened to include analysis of *MySchool3.0* in February, 2012 to enable more substantive comparisons to be made. Significant events in the political and educational policy fields also made 2012 an important period for discussion, as outlined in Chapter 1. For practical reasons, I did not re-trace the previous seven months of newspaper coverage prior to March, 2012, as I had done for 2010 and 2011, given that I had sufficient data in the earlier tracking of two extended periods to draw conclusions about the preferred discourses on education constructed by the three newspapers in the study.

The newspapers analysed in the study were selected for particular reasons. Including *The Australian*, a national broadsheet and the ‘only daily national newspaper in Australia’ (Hattam, Prosser & Brady, 2009, p.161), enabled consideration to be given to how the press reported on national testing and reporting across the states. *The Age*, a quality broadsheet and the *Herald Sun*, a tabloid, are Melbourne newspapers. The selection of one national newspaper and two diverse state-based newspapers enabled investigation of the importance of geography in the
construction of stories. Including a tabloid newspaper allowed me to consider intended readership and relative position in the field of journalism as factors in accounting for what makes education news and how it is reported on.

Ownership was also a factor in newspaper selection. As Bourdieu (1998,p.16) observes, the ‘facts’ of media ownership produces ‘consequences through a whole series of mediations’. Both The Australian and the Herald Sun are owned by Murdoch’s News Corporation Ltd; The Age by Fairfax Media. Both organisations were originally family businesses. The Age has been published in Melbourne since 1854. Originally owned by the Fairfax family, it was acquired by a consortium in the 1980s and, as Chapter 1 outlined, underwent significant changes in the period analysed. Murdoch’s News Corporation Ltd, now one of the largest media companies in the world, had its origins in the ownership of an Adelaide newspaper (Schultz, 2002, p.101). The rules of foreign media ownership were changed by Malcolm Fraser’s Liberal Government in 1981 to accommodate Murdoch’s non-Australian residency and then non-Australian citizenship (Harding-Smith, 2011). In the 1980s, ‘Murdoch’s News Limited moved from being the smallest newspaper company’ in Australia ‘to publishing more than 60 percent of the nation’s newspapers and holding a monopoly in four capital cities’ (Schultz, 2002, p.110).

Many accusations of ‘proprietor-driven bias’ (Tiffen, 2002, p.43) have been made against the Murdoch press. In 1975, ‘Rupert Murdoch’s vendetta against the federal Labor government’ ‘provoked an unprecedented strike by News Ltd journalists during the election campaign’ and, as a result, the professional standing of Murdoch’s publications ‘among journalists fell considerably, and in particular his quality daily newspaper, The Australian, struggled editorially and in circulation for the next several years’ (Tiffen, 2002, p.43). At the same time, as Tiffen (2002, p.43) points out, ‘it is likely that’ the victorious Fraser Liberal Government ‘treated News Limited more favourably in the coming years’ as a result. The importance of press ownership was also revealed in 1997 when Fairfax journalists waged a public campaign against the Howard Government’s proposed removal of cross-media ownership restrictions, a campaign driven by journalists’ fear of the ‘consequences of the Packer family acquiring papers such as ...Melbourne’s Age’ (Errington & Miragliotta, 2007, p.154). The idea of ‘proprietor-driven bias’ (Tiffen, 2002, p.43) was important in accounting for the preferred discourses on education emerging in the data. There were, for example, significant differences in the editorial stances
taken by *The Age* and *The Australian* on national testing and reporting, and similarities between *The Australian* and the *Herald Sun*, while the extensive anti-BER campaign run by *The Australian* amounted to a sustained attack on the Rudd Labor Government, reflecting historic anti-Labor bias.

Articles were collected manually from the three newspapers and filed on a monthly basis. While laborious, this method of collection enabled the texts to be studied authentically, as they were produced, rather than as online versions of texts which had, essentially, lost their original ‘texture’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.33). Articles about school education and government policy on school education were collected from the main news section of each newspaper, the letters and opinion pages and from the education supplements each newspaper produces. Articles about overseas education policy as it relates to school education, such as the release of PISA results, were also included, as were advertising supplements, such as those promoting private or public education. Items directed at students, such as studies of VCE texts, or resource material for junior students, were excluded.

Rather than narrowing my focus to items about national testing and reporting, I decided to collect articles about school education more broadly in order to locate each newspaper’s reporting on *MySchool* within the broader context of its education reporting. Locating the specific investigation within this broader context was important in enabling the key and specific research questions to be fully investigated. The more general tracking of education reporting sought answers to the following questions:

(i) What were the main education stories reported on in each newspaper?
(ii) What were the main education stories commented on?
(iii) Which journalists reported on education in each newspaper?
(iv) Which journalists commented on education?
(v) Who were the external commentators who commented on education and what were their stakeholder sources?
(vi) What ‘made’ education news?
(vii) What differences exist between the quantity and focus of each newspaper’s coverage of education and how can these be accounted for?
After collecting and filing the articles, I re-read them and constructed a table for each month of the study, recording, for each item and each newspaper, the author, date, page number, title, text type, number of words, subject and brief content summary. Text types were classified as editorials, letters to the editor, news reports, features, commentary pieces, interviews, cartoons, advertising features, supplements or ‘other’ (eg., photographs). I then used the Newsbank database to access the articles electronically to record word counts. I also cross-checked content listings on Newsbank to ensure no items had been inadvertently missed in the manual collection of texts.

Using the monthly summaries created for each newspaper, I then created an Excel spreadsheet for each month of the study and recorded, for each newspaper, the number of items about school education published in that month, the total number of words, the number of items written about MySchool, NAPLAN testing, the publication of “league tables” and associated stories and the numbers of each of the text types, as listed above. I also recorded the contributors or ‘voices’ heard in each newspaper; that is, the writers or creators of each item and, where indicated, their stakeholder sources. I recorded the issues reported on; the issues commented on and what was advertised or presented as a supplement.

Recording this information enabled identification of ten broad categories which appeared to account for the majority of education news across all three newspapers. These were:

(i) major government education initiatives/new or existing education policies
(ii) academic/government/overseas or private research reports or experts’ views
(iii) recurring educational problems or issues which tap into wider discourses around education
(iv) newsworthy events or incidents
(v) annual school calendar events
(vi) events affecting schools which have their genesis in other social fields
(vii) celebratory texts acknowledging student, school or teacher achievement
(viii) legal issues
(ix) pedagogical/wider educational issues
(x) other
While there was some overlap between these categories, I nevertheless found them a useful device to make sense of the data. Having identified them, I went back to the monthly tables I had set up and classified each item according to the category it seemed to best fit, then re-entered this data on an Excel spreadsheet.

This enabled me to make comparisons between the three newspapers in the study. It allowed me to see which stories were reported on by all three newspapers and which were not and to identify particular stories which were taken up at length by some newspapers which appeared to reflect an explicit stance or position. In collating and recording this data, I created a series of sub-categories as stories emerged, based on whether they were the subject of multiple news items. So ‘Building the Education Revolution’ became a sub-category of ‘Major government initiatives/new or existing education policies’, while articles about student (mis)behaviour were identified as a sub-category of ‘Recurring educational problems or issues which tap into wider discourses around education’. The category “Newsworthy events” included events such as a school fire, or a cluster of suicides which occurred at a Geelong school. Annual school calendar events included the commencement of the school year and the release of Year 12 results. News reports on, for example, events such as new bushfire policies for Victorian schools in the wake of the Black Saturday Royal Commission, or a review of Victoria’s Equal Opportunity Act which had implications for religious schools, were classified as ‘Events affecting schools which have their genesis in other social fields’. ‘Celebratory texts’ acknowledging school or student or teacher achievement included awards and commendations received by schools, students or teachers. Litigation against schools, teachers, or education departments was classified as ‘Legal issues’. ‘Pedagogical or wider educational issues’ were generally found in the education supplements, while a final ‘other’ category enabled texts which did not fit neatly into the identified categories, such as texts about overseas education stories, to be recorded.

Having recorded this data, I used it to inform my analysis of MySchool coverage. I returned to and re-read the texts specifically related to MySchool and its associated discourses. These included texts about NAPLAN testing, state government policy responses to national testing and reporting and items about international test results such as PISA. My purpose here was to identify the preferred discourses on education constructed by each newspaper and the ways in which these discursively positioned schools and teachers in each of the key periods investigated.
I achieved this by analysing this sub-corpus according to text type, utilising the tools of CDA outlined in Chapter Two. In analysing news reports, I recorded the subject of each report, the voices directly quoted and reported on and their positioning in the text and the covert biases apparent in informational backgrounding and foregrounding and in particular lexical choices. I recorded the location of each report in the newspaper and the report’s relationship to other associated texts. For each editorial analysed, I recorded the point of view expressed and whether it supported or contested preferred government discourses on education. I identified the voices included (and excluded), the information foregrounded and backgrounded and the effect of lexical choices, such as key words and metaphors, which conveyed the newspaper’s stance on national testing and reporting. Similar approaches were used in analysing commentary pieces by journalists and external commentators. With the latter, however, I also recorded the stakeholder sources represented. In analysing letters to the editor, I used a slightly different approach. After recording the authors of each letter, I identified letter writers who produced multiple letters. In some cases, letter writers’ voices were heard across newspapers and this was recorded. I identified the point of view expressed in each letter in relation to national testing and reporting and grouped the letters accordingly. I then analysed the letters in each newspaper as a corpus, according to whether they offered support for, or opposition to, MySchool. This exercise identified the letters pages as an important site of resistance in some newspapers and raised interesting questions about letter selection, readership and potential filtering processes by newspapers.

I then wrote detailed summaries of my findings for each period of data analysis. Mapping the data in this way, according to text type, enabled me to identify the preferred discourses on education produced by each newspaper in their reporting on MySchool in the context of their reporting on other education stories. It allowed me to map changes occurring in a newspaper’s stance and to identify an emerging narrative, which I referred to as the MySchool story. Developments in this narrative were partly connected to the inclusion of new information on the website (in its second year, for example), but also to other education stories being reported on, such as the Gonski review into school funding (Gonski et al, 2011) or the release of PISA results and to wider events, notably in the political field, such as state and federal elections.
At the end of this process, I wrote a detailed account of each period analysed, using the key text types to organise the material. I found, however, that word limit restrictions made it impossible to include all of the fine-grained analysis I had completed. This led to difficult decisions about what to include and exclude and, ultimately, to a re-shaping of the material. I decided to include only some of the fine-grained analysis, as exemplars of the work done, and to condense some sections which were very long, such as the analysis of letters. Similarly, although my original intention was to include an analysis of the visual material used to present the MySchool story (notably cartoons), I found that the sheer volume of data collected made that impractical and thus excluded this material from the close analysis. I did, however, make reference to photographs accompanying articles in some places as part of the ‘texture’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.5) of the text.

4.5 Interview texts

4.5.1 Interviews with school principals

To investigate the discursive effects on particular schools that were named in the media, from the principal’s view, I conducted semi-structured interviews with six principals whose schools were named in the newspapers analysed. I acknowledge that retrospective interviews with school principals may provide a limited picture of the discursive effects on particular schools of being named in the media. That is to say, it may be difficult to draw general conclusions about the wider discursive effects of one instance of press coverage on a school on the basis of one retrospective interview with a principal alone, given that this provides only one perspective. The interview data therefore investigates discursive effects from the principal’s view, acknowledging that this is a leadership or managerial view and is one view only. At the same time, there is value in giving voice to people’s lived experiences in the ‘wild profusion of local practice’ (Ball, 1994, p.10) onto which policies are mapped. Moreover, it could be argued that the principal has ultimate responsibility for leading his/her school’s response to central government policy, a point supported by the Rudd Government’s allocation of $50 million to ‘empower principals to better manage their schools to achieve improved student results’ (COAG, 2008, p.9).

Eleven school principals were contacted for interview. All were selected on the basis of their schools having been named in the newspapers in this study in their reporting on MySchool. In selecting principals, I sought to give representation to a range of schools and school sectors, including primary and secondary schools and public and private schools. For practical reasons, I
largely selected schools in the Melbourne metropolitan region that had been reported on in either the *Herald Sun* or *The Age*. While I did contact two schools in rural Victoria, both principals declined to be interviewed.

I initially contacted each principal by telephone. In all cases, I spoke to the principal’s secretary and was advised to email my request to them so that it could be forwarded to the principal. In three cases, I also wrote to principals after not receiving any contact after the initial e-mail request. This included the principal of one rural school and the principal of one private school “named” in all three newspapers in the study. I received no response to these letters.

Six school principals agreed to be interviewed. One of the principals was in an acting role while the principal was on leave. Four of the principals were male; two female. All six had been teaching for an average of thirty years and were highly experienced educators. Four of the principals were in their first principalship; two had been principals at multiple schools. One principal had been in the role for just 15 months, another around three years, and a third for nine years. One principal had led his school for 25 years.

After consent was given and an interview time arranged, I posted the Plain Language Statement (PLS) and Consent Form to each principal. The PLS explained the purpose of the research, emphasized that participation was voluntary, stated that data collected would be non-identifiable and indicated that participants would be able to review the interview transcript. Consent forms were collected at the commencement of each interview. Interviews were voice recorded, then later transcribed by hand and typed. Copies of each interview were saved to disk and stored securely with the transcript. Copies of transcripts were also sent electronically to each principal for corrections or amendments. No alterations were required as a result of this follow-up contact.

Prior to each interview, I photocopied the newspaper article/s which named the school and used them to frame specific interview questions. Articles were presented to each principal at the beginning of the interview. I also consulted the *MySchool* website and each school’s website beforehand to gather information and glean something of each school’s history, philosophy and mission.

In the introductory phase of each interview, I invited the principal to talk about the school and about their background as an educator; information I considered important in establishing the
principal’s ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.56). I then focused questions specifically on the newspaper article in which the school had been named to ascertain its effect. Common questions/prompts across all interviews included whether principals felt pressured to improve their school’s NAPLAN results; their own stance on national testing and reporting and their views on media generated “league tables”.

The interviews ranged from 45 minutes to one hour in duration. All were held in the principal’s office. All six principals were welcoming, generous with their time, passionate about education, interested in my research and willing to express strong views on national testing and reporting, and on the way the press reports on schools.

The principals of four primary schools were interviewed. Three of these schools were public schools. The fourth was a Catholic school. The principals of two secondary schools were interviewed. Both schools were community schools, were relatively small in size and catered for students who, for a range of reasons, were unable to succeed in a mainstream setting. Both had been ‘named and shamed’ in one newspaper’s “league tables”. Five of the six schools experienced significant disadvantage according to MySchool’s ICSEA (www.myschool.edu.au). One school, according to this measure, was a highly advantaged school. Three of the six schools were located in Melbourne’s outer north; the fourth in Melbourne’s outer east, the fifth in Melbourne’s inner east and the sixth in the inner west. They thus represented quite diverse communities. Five of the six schools had received negative press coverage in relation to their NAPLAN results on MySchool. One school received positive press coverage.

After transcribing the interviews, I developed pseudonyms for each principal and school, wrote up a summary of background information about each school and summarized the press coverage each received. I then re-read the transcripts to identify, from the principal’s view, the discursive effects of being “named” in the media. For each interview, I identified key substantive points and grouped these into categories using an analysis grid (Gillham, 2000, p.64). Categories identified included, for example, fears that enrolments would drop because of negative press coverage; negative effects on staff morale, effects on principals at bureaucratic level and changes in practice at schools as a result of press reporting. I re-read the transcripts again to examine the silences heard in interviews and to explore ‘latent meaning’ – that is, ‘judgements about what people meant by what they said’ (Gillham, 2000, p.69). Using the theoretical framework of
Bourdieu’s field theory and Rawolle’s (2007, p.73) conceptualization of mediatization as ‘processes involving the mass media’ that ‘change the way that other social fields operate’ I also explored whether transformations in the authority and capital of agents (in this case, school principals) occurred as a consequence of media exposure (Couldry, 2008, p.377) and the extent to which the ‘relative autonomy’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.84) of school principals and, by implication, their schools, was altered by their being named in the press.

In constructing the first draft of the interview analysis, I encountered an ethical dilemma when I realised that discussing and citing press coverage of each school could potentially identify the school and the principal. To overcome this, I developed pseudonyms for the newspapers in which the schools were named and removed specific references to newspaper articles and journalists. The writing of this section of the thesis was therefore partly shaped by ethical considerations.

**4.5.2 Interviews with journalists**

I interviewed two journalists, one of whom had a significant voice in the coverage of *MySchool* in one newspaper in the study. The second journalist had an editorial position at another newspaper in the study and provided general insights into the newspaper industry and its current challenges.

Both journalists were approached by email. PLS and Consent Forms were forwarded electronically prior to interview. One interviewee requested that the proposed interview questions also be sent electronically. Prior to this interview, I collected and photocopied examples of the journalist’s writing in relation to *MySchool* and framed my questions accordingly. The interview, held at 8 am in the newspaper’s coffee shop, was voice recorded and later transcribed. A copy was sent electronically to the journalist but no changes were requested. The interview was quite brief – less than thirty minutes. The venue was noisy and crowded, the journalist was on her way to morning conference and it simply wasn’t possible to ask many of the questions I had planned. While I again confronted the fact that ethical considerations made it impossible to use the data about particular stories referred to in a non-identifiable way, some useful general information was provided in the interview about attitudes to education reporting; how a newspaper might prepare for the launch of an education story like *MySchool*; the emergence of data journalists and data units and the increasing use made of the *MySchool*
website by journalists to inform other news stories. These insights confirmed observations I had begun to make in analysing the newspaper texts.

I pursued more general themes in the second interview. This took place in the journalist’s home and ran for 1 hour and 20 minutes. It provided frank and fascinating information about the nature of the journalistic field, relations between newspapers, the importance of newspaper ownership in determining the stories a newspaper reports on and the many changes produced by the digital age. The transcript was sent to this journalist after the interview. She made one change to correct an error I had made in recording the newspaper’s circulation figures, but also asked whether specific references to the newspaper she worked for would be removed in the final write-up in order to preserve her anonymity. I assured her that they would and took care when including this data to ensure that comments were non-identifiable.

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined the methodological orientations underpinning the study and explained the methodology employed to analyse each of the data sets used to investigate the four specific research questions which underpin the key research question. I have explained the ethical dilemmas faced in the writing up of interview data and outlined the ways in which these were overcome.
Chapter 5  Locating the Policy

5.1  Introduction
This chapter situates the policy analysed in its historical context. It examines an emerging national agenda in Australian education, as revealed in Annual National Reports on Schooling in the period 1996-2006, and investigates the securing of this agenda by the ALP through a critical discourse analysis of the key policy texts which formed the ALP’s proposed “Education Revolution”. The subsequent construction of a preferred government discourse of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement, following the ALP’s election to government in 2007, is revealed through analysis of Education Minister Julia Gillard’s (2008b) announcement of the introduction of national reporting and the ‘policy borrowing’ (Phillips & Ochs, 2004, p.776) suggested therein.

5.2  An emerging national agenda in school curriculum
The case for a national curriculum for Australian schools was put forward in February, 2007 in an ALP Directions paper which outlined the ALP’s commitment, if elected, to securing ministerial agreement to a national curriculum by 2010 (Rudd & Smith, 2007a ,p.19). The Rudd Labor Government won office in November, 2007. Less than five months later, the required agreement had been reached.

While the introduction of a national curriculum was a specific achievement of the Rudd Government, national curriculum consistency had been pursued in Australia by both major political parties for several decades. As early as 1968, the difficulties experienced by children who moved from one state to another were cited to support calls for greater national curriculum consistency (Reid, 2005, p.16). In the 1980s, under a Federal Labor government, Education Minister John Dawkins actively pursued ‘a range of national school policies’ (Taylor et.al, 1997, p.96). Labor dominance at both federal and state levels, a pattern reproduced in 2007/8, allowed Dawkins to overcome the states’ jealous protection of school education as their responsibility (Taylor et al, 1997, p.94) and secure agreement, in 1989, to a set of Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (MCEECDYA, 1998, ch1).
The view that establishing national curriculum consistency was the necessary first step in implementing a performative approach to education, underpinned by the view that ‘everything that matters can be measured’ (Kenway, 2007, p.3), seems supported by the establishment, in 1988, of a working party to investigate a national approach to monitoring student achievement. The national education agenda was further advanced by Ministerial agreement to develop statements of ‘the knowledge and skills to which all students are entitled’ in key learning areas (Curriculum Corporation, 1994, p.43). This led, in 1991, to the establishment of the AEC Curriculum and Assessment Committee to manage the development of statements and profiles. Thus central government, in this period of Labor dominance, began to exercise control over key areas of curriculum and assessment which were, formerly, the domain of the states. Two years later, however, a shift in the balance of power at the state level led to the defeat of Dawkins’ national education agenda (Taylor et al, 1997, p.96), ultimately leading to a compromise position in which the national curriculum statements and profiles were to be pursued not at Federal level, but by the States in their own ways (Taylor et.al, 1997 ,p.96). So the ‘most ambitious attempt at national collaboration in Australia’s history … foundered on the old rock of State-Commonwealth suspicion’ (Reid, 2005, p.18).

Federal Labor nevertheless pursued this national agenda until its defeat in March, 1996 (Taylor et.al, 1997 ,pp.96-7), as did subsequent Liberal/Coalition governments (Hattam, Prosser & Brady, 2009, p.166). Indeed, at the July, 2003 MCEETYA meeting, following the federal Liberal government’s renewed calls for a national curriculum (Reid, 2005, p.19), agreement was reached to develop statements of learning in four key areas (Reid, 2005, p.20). This was made palatable to the states by again constructing the concept of “national curriculum consistency”, allowing them ‘to stave off the spectre of a national curriculum’ (Reid, 2005, p.20) with its inherent threat to their sovereignty over education. Given this history of contestation, the Rudd Government’s success in introducing a national curriculum in 2008 was remarkable. It demonstrates the ‘importance of the confluence of a large number of State Labour governments with a federal Labour government to the achievement of … national policies in schooling’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.96) in Australia. It was, symbolically , an important political victory for federal Labor over its predecessor, the Howard Liberal Government – a win which dramatically strengthened federal control over the states and their education systems.
5.3 An emerging national agenda of performance measurement in education

5.3.1 The National School English Literacy Survey -1996

The introduction of national literacy and numeracy testing in Australia in 2008 also has a bi-partyisan history. While most states and territories had introduced primary years’ literacy assessment programs by the mid 1990s, significant methodological differences between these programs made it impossible to draw reliable conclusions about national literacy levels (DEETYA, 1997, pp.1-2). This, coupled with growing employer concern that the English literacy skills of school leavers were inadequate for the increasingly complex requirements of the workforce (DEETYA, 1997,p.1), led the 1993 House of Representatives report, The Literacy Challenge, to argue that it was ‘unacceptable that the actual numbers of children with literacy problems or special literacy needs are unknown’ (DEETYA, 1997, p.2). Subsequently, in 1994, the Commonwealth Government announced its decision to collect, by the end of 1996, ‘reliable national data on the literacy levels of school students at three significant stages of schooling’ (DEETYA, 1997, p.2) via a National School English Literacy Survey (NSELS).

Undertaken by ACER(1) in 1996, the survey’s aim to obtain base-line data to establish national benchmarks (DEETYA, 1997, p.iv) signified a new emphasis on target-setting and performance, a necessary first step in a policy shift to ‘post modern performativity’ (Lingard, 2003, p.36).

Surprisingly, the finding of the NSELS, which surveyed four thousand students at Year 3 and Year 5 and involved one thousand teachers and literacy consultants across all States and Territories (DEETYA, 1997, p.9), appeared to challenge this emerging discourse, (and, indeed, current policymakers’ ready ‘seduction by quantitative evidence’ (Blackmore, 2002, p.264)) in concluding that ‘common tasks and student best work relevant to classroom learning programs are the best context for valid assessment of student achievement’ (DEETYA, 1997, p.iii). The Survey’s assertion of the reliability of teacher judgement of student achievement (DEETYA, 1997, p.iii) similarly privileged the classroom teacher as expert. In finding a ‘wide range of

(1) ACER, a not-for-profit organization independent of government ‘generates its entire income through contracted research and development projects and through products and services that it develops and distributes'(www.acer.education.au). In 1998, Geoff Masters was appointed Director of ACER. He continues as its CEO today. ACER undertook the 1996 National School Literacy Survey. The Survey Report was co-authored by Masters (DEETYA, 1997). Kenway (1990, p.186) described ACER as the ‘vanguard’ of the conservative wing of the Educational Right.
literacy achievement’ among the Australian school children surveyed, it concluded not that schools and teachers were failing underachieving students, but that the ‘breadth of this range of achievement (was) indicative of the complexity of the teachers’ task in providing appropriate learning opportunities for all students in a class’ (DEETYA, 1997, p.v). This conclusion constructed a supportive discourse around teachers rather than, as might be expected currently, a discourse of blame for underperformance.

5.3.2 Annual National Reports on Schooling in Australia: 1996-2006

5.3.2.1 1996-1999

Despite ministerial agreement in 1996 that the ‘great majority of students tested were functioning at or above the expected level for their age’ (MCEECDYA, 1996, 10.3), concern was nevertheless raised at the absence of a common assessment instrument or methodology across the States (MCEECDYA, 1996, 10.3). The implementation of a National Literacy and Numeracy Plan (NLNP) focused on the crucial early years of schooling and mandating a comprehensive assessment of all students by teachers as early as possible in the first years of schooling (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10.1), together with the development of national benchmarks for years 3 and 5 in 1997, suggested a growing political focus on improving standards. A subsequent proposal to extend the national benchmarks to years 7 and 9 (MCEECDYA, 1997,10.4) was couched quite explicitly in the language of accountability. Indeed, their stated intention was ‘to improve national educational accountability, inform Australian governments, parents and the community about student achievement in literacy and numeracy and support improvements in programs and school performance’ (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10).

From 1998, Year 3 students were to be assessed against the benchmark. While states continued to use their own assessment procedures (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10.1), the recommendation that there be ‘progress towards national reporting … against the year 3 and year 5 benchmarks, with reporting in 1999 on 1998 results, using data comparable by State/Territory’ (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10.1) significantly advanced a national assessment agenda. Moreover, in 1998, Year 3 results were subjected to an agreed equating process’ (MCEECDYA, 1998, ch1) so that, ‘for the first time in the history of Australian schooling, students underwent assessment designed to
enable national reporting of literacy achievement against agreed national benchmarks’ (MCEECDYA, 1998, ch1).

An increasing emphasis on target setting and performance monitoring was strengthened in 1999, when it was agreed that a new set of national education goals would provide a framework for the national reporting of comparable education outcomes in six priority areas (MCEECDYA, 1999, ch1). The language of business was clearly attached to education in the establishment of a National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce to produce key performance indicators and national targets and benchmarks for each of the six priority areas (MCEECDYA, 1999, ch1). Moreover, in 1999, Australian Year 5 and 7 students sat existing state-based literacy and numeracy tests in which, for the first time, there were common questions (Meadmore, 2001). This was reported in celebratory language as an historic move, an event that had occurred for ‘the first time in the history of Australian schooling’ (MCEECDYA, 1999, ch1), language also used in the 1998 report.

5.3.2.2 2000-2006

Two events in 2000 were significant in the construction of an emerging discourse of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement in Australian education. The first was the completion of nationally agreed performance standards at Years 3, 5 and 7 which, according to Meadmore (2001, p.20), were embedded in a ‘discursively produced panic about allegedly unacceptable and failing literacy and numeracy standards’. The second was the participation of Australian students for the first time in the PISA assessment of reading literacy (MCEETYA, 2000, ch1).

12,500 Australian nine year olds had already participated in TIMSS in 1994 (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10.7). Their results were reported positively in the national report, albeit in language which discursively constructed education as a competition. So, in mathematics, in ‘the upper grade, Australia effectively tied in seventh place with five other countries and in the lower grade, tied with eight others in fifth place’ (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10.7). ‘In science, Australian nine year old students performed significantly better than their counterparts in two thirds of the countries taking part’ (MCEECDYA, 1997, 10.7), an assessment which implied an acceptance of being in the ‘top third’ and the ‘seventh’ and ‘fifth’ ‘place’ which more recent policy documents perceive
as totally inadequate (see Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.17). Clearly, while a discourse of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement was *developing* in the nineties, it was not preferred.

The reading performance of Australian students on PISA was described with approval. Repeated references to “Australia’s” performance conveyed the rapidity with which international testing became a vehicle through which countries compete for capital, and by which federal and state governments ‘measure their success nationally and internationally’ (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p.38). ‘Australia had one of the highest percentages of students performing at the highest level, behind only New Zealand and Finland. (MCEETYA, 2000, ch1). Australia ‘also did very well on mathematical literacy’ and in scientific literacy was ‘outperformed’ by only two other countries, Korea and Japan’ (MCEETYA, 2000, ch1). Data provided for each state’s PISA results (MCEETYA, 2000, ch6) similarly utilised the language of competition in phrases such as ‘outperformed’ and ‘tied with’, and constructed education as a race for political worth, pitting the states against each other, a pattern later picked up by the newspapers in this study in their reporting on NAPLAN results. The provision of each state’s data further suggested that the dominant assumption beginning to inform policy at this point was that ‘we must mirror global competition by enhancing competitiveness in our schools’ (Ozga, 2000, 47).

The establishment of the Performance Measurement and Reporting Taskforce (PMRT) in 2001 ‘to advance the national agenda on schooling’ and to report ‘nationally comparable outcomes of schooling’ (MCEETYA, 2001, ch1) signalled a further ‘shift of power to the centre’ (Humes & Bryce, 2001, p.332). The reduction of federal government ‘interest in schooling to one of performance measures’ (Lingard, 2003, p.36) was also evident in the endorsement by all States and Territories of an Agreed Measurement Framework for National Key Performance Measures and a proposed eight year Assessment Cycle, from 2002 until 2009 (MCEETYA, 2002,ch1). That ‘significant use’ (MCEETYA, 2003, ch1) was made of the OECD PISA program to inform the Framework accentuates the influence of this international testing program on Australian education; the emergence of a ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18) and the constitution of ‘a new global space in educational policy’ (Lingard et al, 2005, p.774).
Significantly, a chapter titled ‘Measuring the Performance of Australian Schools’ appeared for the first time in the 2002 Annual Report. Reference to ‘a commitment to collaborate in setting explicit and defensible standards … by which the effectiveness, efficiency and equity of schooling can be measured and evaluated’ in order to increase ‘public confidence in school education’ (MCEETYA, 2002, ch4) evoked the market and presupposed a lack of ‘public confidence’ in education “standards” that could only be restored through their ongoing management and measurement by central government.

Discourses of transparency and accountability were also evident in a 2003 ministerial agreement that, from 2004, individual reports to the parents of year 3 and year 5 students would show a student’s results against national literacy and numeracy benchmarks (MCEETYA, 2003, ch1). For the first time, then, the ‘position’ of students relative to a national standard became not only measurable but transparent to parents, so positioning them as choosing consumers in an education marketplace (Thomson, 2005, p.753), as suggested by the statement that ‘an enhanced national reporting framework…enables better informed choices by students and parents’ (MCEETYA, 2003, ch1). Thus education was constructed as a ‘commodity to be bought and sold in an education market where schools compete and are expected to win a market share’ (Reid, 2010).

In emphasizing the low literacy and numeracy achievements of ‘7 percent of Year 3 students; 10 percent of Year 5 students, and 20 percent of Year 7 students’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, pp.20-21), the 2004 National Report constructed a discourse of failure which demanded a national response. The passage through parliament in 2004 of the *Schools Assistance (Learning Together-Achievement Through Choice and Opportunity) Act 2004* (DEST, 2004) mandated a new regime of school accountability and performance measurement. The Act required ‘reporting against common instruments for the assessment of literacy and numeracy’; extension of the literacy and numeracy assessment and reporting to encompass year 9 and development of nationally comparable measures for attendance and incorporation of TIMSS and PISA ‘into the measurement framework’ (MCEETYA, 2005, ch1). Moreover, a DEST (2004) Discussion Paper tied school funding to the requirement that schools report annually ‘the results of current annual full-cohort assessments in literacy and numeracy at Years 3, 5 and 7’ (DEST, 2004, p.6).
On March 11, 2004, Prime Minister John Howard announced that the ‘key element’ of the Australian Government’s schools package for 2005-2008 was ‘a strengthened performance framework’ which would ‘enable parents to make informed decisions and critical choices about their children’s schooling’ and ‘promote greater transparency and accountability for school performance’ (DEST, 2004, p.3). That discourses of educational failure located in a global context enabled and legitimized this performative approach was suggested when, on September 15, 2005, Education Minister Brendan Nelson commented in the House of Representatives on ‘a headline in The Australian newspaper entitled “Students unable to write a sentence” and a story in The Age that VCE English was being “dumbed down” to argue that the ‘battle for international competitiveness’ would ‘be fought and won or lost in Australian schools’ (Nelson, 2005). A year later, agreement was reached that full cohort national literacy and numeracy testing in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 would commence in 2008.

5.3.2.3 Preferred government discourses of school and teacher accountability & performance measurement

A strengthening of Federal control over both curriculum and assessment clearly occurred in the period 1996-2006. Annual National Reports on Education reveal the increasing appropriation of the language and thinking of business to talk about education: ‘benchmarks’; ‘minimum acceptable standards’; ‘performance targets’; ‘annual reporting of progress towards the achievement of these targets’; ‘nationally agreed performance standards’; key performance indicators; ‘explicit and defensible standards’. This evolving discourse mirrored similar movements in other OECD countries, notably the U.K. and the U.S., coinciding with the rise of NPM and the success of political discourses demanding ‘improved accountability of public service…in terms of performance’(Power, 1997, p.44). Thus the ‘disciplinary technologies of standards, benchmarks, performance indicators and the audit’ (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p.47) were legitimimized in a decade long process which strengthened federal control over education and sidelined the states by tying funding to new accountability requirements. The entitlement of ‘citizens as consumers of public services … to monitor and demand certain minimum standards of performance’ (Power, 1997, p.44) was reflected in the marshalling of evidence to demonstrate educational failure, enabling a move to national testing, while the development of benchmarks, minimum standards, performance targets and performance indicators signified a more
‘regulatory role’ for government through ‘accounting, audit and other instruments’ (Power, 1997, p.52).

This emerging discourse of performativity had the side-effect of reconstituting education policy as a source of federal government legitimacy. It enabled the federal government to be seen to “perform” by providing quality and choice in the market and, equally, to be seen as accountable to the electorate by demonstrating efficiency and effectiveness (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p. 581). Responsibility for implementing this agenda would soon be ‘devolved to school sites’ (Lingard, 2003, p.40) in a ‘steering at a distance approach’ (Lingard, 2003, p.40) which required and relied on performance data.

5.4 The ALP’s “Education Revolution”

5.4.1 Introduction

Four education policy papers published in February, 2007, as part of the ALP’s election campaign (Rudd & Smith, 2007a; 2007b; 2007c; Rudd & Macklin, 2007d) significantly expanded the discourses of performativity developed over the previous decade. Central to Labor’s vision for an ‘education revolution’ was a human capital view of education which, in positioning education as the chief mechanism to achieve future productivity growth, foregrounded the economy and constructed education as a ‘key commodity’ in a ‘post-industrial, knowledge-based’ economy (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p.2). Education was constructed as the ‘driver’ of productivity growth and economic wealth, existing to serve the economy but also, by implication, perceived as part of the economy, its chief role being the ‘production of human capital’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.23). The ALP’s education revolution not only reflected the government’s harnessing of education to “efficiently and effectively” serve the “national interest” in the global marketplace’ (Vidovich, 2007, p.288), but also revealed a desire to tighten ‘the connection between schooling, employment, productivity and trade’ by exerting ‘more direct control over curriculum content and assessment’ (Ball, 1998, p.122).

5.4.2 “Investing” in education

That the ALP’s ‘education revolution’ reflected the ‘economizing of education’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18) and positioned education in a relationship of exchange with government is
suggested by its privileging of the Business Council of Australia’s view that ‘If we get this part of the economy right, most other things ought to fall into place’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.25) and its argument that ‘There is now incontrovertible evidence that education should be understood as an economic investment and not simply a social expenditure’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.24).

In all four policy texts, the language of ‘crisis’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.3) is utilized to appeal to the Australian public’s fears. Repeated warnings, including that the resources boom will slow in the second decade of the 21st century, affecting Australia’s prosperity; that an ageing population will reduce workforce participation rates and that the rise of China, India and other industrializing nations (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.6) will produce far-reaching global effects, work in conjunction with a series of recurrent metaphors which construct a discourse of economic failure derived from a global field of economic performance comparison. The statement that ‘We cannot allow Australia to simply become China’s quarry and Japan’s beach’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.4) constructs a disturbing image of powerlessness and exploitation, while the striking use of a hunt metaphor suggests a race which Australia is currently losing on multiple fronts: “Australia cannot afford to be part of the trailing pack of nations – it must be up there with the leading handful in every major area’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.27). Numerous unfavourable comparisons with OECD ‘competitors’, coupled with the warning that Australia’s productivity growth is continuing to ‘lag behind competitors’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.24), argue a powerful case for change.

The foregrounding of the economy also occurs through the repetition of key words, phrases and metaphors across the four policy texts, contributing to a ‘message density’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003) which heightens the need for action. The ‘China’s quarry and Japan’s beach’ metaphor not only appears in all four policy texts (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.4; 2007b, p.4; 2007c, p.3; Rudd & Macklin, 2007d,p.3), but its placement early in each text informationally and lexically foregrounds the economy and heightens readers’ fears of potential economic disaster. Phrases directly quoted from external sources with significant economic capital are used repeatedly in the umbrella policy document and are appropriated and interwoven throughout the remaining Directions papers, where they appear as fact. The Chairman of the Productivity Commission’s view that what ‘is needed is not just a higher level of investment in education, but
an assurance that our investment in education is used efficiently’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.6), for example, is quoted and sourced in the umbrella text, but appears in the Directions paper as fact.

The solution offered to the problem of declining economic prosperity is a ‘revolution’ on two fronts. The first is in ‘the quantity of (Australia’s) investment in human capital’ and the second the ‘quality of the outcomes that the education system delivers’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.3). As Bessant (2002, p.96) points out, “human capital” … equates human beings and learning as units measurable in terms of their monetary value’ and ‘assumes a relationship between investment in education and fiscal growth’. The implications of this transaction for education are clear. More money invested in education (inputs) requires greater accountability for a return on that investment in the form of ‘outcomes’ (outputs) to ‘position Australia as a competitive, innovative, knowledge-based economy that can compete and win in global markets’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.3). The claim that ‘what is needed is not just a higher level of investment in education, but making sure that investment is used efficiently’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.9) attaches the corporate ideals of value for money and profit to education and constructs education as a business endeavour to be “managed” by central government.

At a number of points in these policy texts, education is defined according to the ‘benefits’ it provides. Inevitably, these privilege the economy. In addition to its ‘macroeconomic benefits’, education helps ‘individuals to better their own lives, to broaden their employment options and find more satisfying work, enjoy greater job security and earn more money’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.26). It allows ‘people to get better jobs that pay more’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.2). This instrumentalist view extends even to early childhood education. That this is also perceived as an economic transaction is evident in a reference to international research which ‘demonstrates that earlier investment yields a higher rate of return’ (Rudd & Macklin, 2007, p.3). While there is acknowledgement that the ‘economic dividends to be derived from education are separate from the social dividends which flow from significant investment in this sector’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.5), the language used to convey the latter is derived from the world of business. ‘Dividends’, whether social or economic, denote a financial transaction. Used in collocation with ‘investment’, this lexical choice frames education in economic terms.
Such framing had significant implications for policy directions. Improving Australia’s global economic performance required an improvement in educational standards, so much so that the stated purpose of the proposed national curriculum became the ‘lifting (of) all educational standards across each of the States and Territories’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.13) because there is ‘an escalating need for our educational outcomes to remain competitive in a globalised economy’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.14). Reference to countries like Japan and Singapore, who ‘are making substantial investments in education as a means of driving the quality of children’s educational outcomes’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a,p.4), and to Singapore’s ‘reaping’ of ‘considerable benefits’ from ‘a national approach that locates education squarely within a broader economic policy framework’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.6), highlight the underpinning of Australia’s education revolution by a discourse of global competition, a point made by Buchanan et al (2012) who observe that the policies of the education revolution ‘are not only driven by a desire to develop workers for the global economy, but also correspond to education trends globally’.

### 5.4.3 Multiple discourses of failure

Discourses of failure constructed in all four policy texts convey the view that Australia is losing the economic and education ‘race’. The repeated use of the key word ‘compete’ and its derivatives, coupled with ‘win’, constructs a powerful race metaphor that is applied to both the economy and to education. Australia must become a ‘competitive, innovative, knowledge-based economy that can compete and win in global markets’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.3). The ‘increasingly intense competition’ created by ‘the rise of China and India as superpowers’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.4) is presented as a threat couched in the language of crisis and urgency-(Australia is facing ‘a mounting crisis’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b,p.3))- which can only be addressed by new education policies which will allow Australia ‘to compete in global markets and win’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.5). The repetition of ‘falling behind’ and ‘not keeping up’ in relation to both the economy and education has a similar effect - (‘we are not doing as well as we could’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.4), are ‘being left behind by other nations’ and are falling ‘short of (our) competitors and (our) potential’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.4) - as does repeated unfavourable comparisons of Australia’s productivity levels with those of other OECD nations (see Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.12,13,14).
Australia’s poor performance on international testing programs is also marshalled as evidence of
the need for an “education revolution”, supporting Braun’s (2008, p.1) argument that both PISA
and TIMSS testing have achieved significant influence on education policy in many nations. A
sense of outrage and shock is apparent, for example, in the use of ‘even’ in collocation with
‘Tunisia’ in reference to the World Economic Forum’s annual report on global competitiveness
which ranked Australia’s science and maths education as ‘29th in the world, behind nations like
Singapore, France, India, the Czech Republic and even Tunisia’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.4).
Results from the same report place ‘Australia’s education ranking overall below competitor
countries’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.17); while TIMSS results reveal that ‘15 countries
outperformed Australia’s Year 4 maths students and 13 countries outperformed Australia’s Year
8 students’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.17). The poor rating of Australian universities ‘compared
with their counterparts in North America, Europe and East Asia’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b,p.22) is
also highlighted, as is Australia’s ‘weak’ performance in early childhood education ‘by
international standards’ (Rudd & Macklin, 2007, p.7), conveying the view that in all areas of
education, Australia is failing in the ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard,
2010, p.18).

Four pages of New Directions for our schools: Establishing a national curriculum to improve
our children’s outcomes (Rudd & Smith, 2007a) are devoted to PISA and TIMSS results.
Extensive reference to the 2002 TIMSS study makes the point that over an eight year period
‘Australia’s performance fell against our international competitors’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.9).
Indeed, ‘All States and Territories fell considerably short of the highest achieving country,
Singapore’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.11), positioning readers to accept that ‘more work needs to
be done to ensure greater national consistency’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.12). In New directions
for maths & science (Rudd & Smith, 2007c) significantly more space is devoted to the poor
performance of students on TIMSS in 2002 than to the more positive 2003 PISA results (Rudd &
Smith, 2007c, p.5), suggesting the selective use of international evidence to support a policy
agenda. Although the 2002 TIMSS performance of Australian children ‘remained statistically
similar to their 1994/95 test results’, it is argued that this was a ‘marked contrast to a number of
competitor countries, which had made substantial improvements over the same period and raised
their position against that of Australia’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007c, p.5). In this way, a discourse of
failure was extended to encompass a failure to improve, made explicit in the statement ‘By
standing still in our educational attainment in maths and science, we are falling behind our international competitors’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007c, p.6).

Ultimately, these multiple discourses of failure enabled an argument for strengthened federal control over school curriculum and assessment. So the key feature of the national curriculum was ‘curriculum rigour’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.2) because, in order to ‘be the world’s best educated and trained nation, we must have rigorous education standards in place’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007a, p.4).

5.4.4 ‘Voices’ heard & values recognized

Taylor et al (1997, p.29) suggest that policy analysis should consider ‘whose voices are heard and whose values are recognized or “authoritatively allocated”. Ball (1990, p.14) similarly points to the construction of policy discourses as being at least partly about ‘who can speak, when, where and with what authority’. As Table 1 demonstrates, the majority of voices heard in the key ‘education revolution’ policy text (Rudd & Smith, 2007b) are associated with the economic field.

| Table 1: Sources referenced in The Australian economy needs an education revolution (Rudd & Smith, 2007b) |
| Organisations/Groups | Individuals |
| ~-OECD | ~-Princeton economist Paul Krugman |
| ~-World Economic Forum | ~-Former US Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan |
| ~-Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study | ~-Chairman, Productivity Commission, Gary Banks* |
| ~-Dusseldorf Skills Forum | ~-RSA Governor, Glenn Stevens* |
| ~-Times Higher Education Supplement | ~-ANZ Chief Economist Saul Eslake* |
| ~-Shanghai Jiao Tong University’s Institute of Higher Education | ~-CSIRO Chief of Mathematical and Information Science* |
| ~-Productivity Commission* | ~-President of the Australian Deans of Science* |
| ~-Commonwealth Treasury* | ~-John Rice and Engineers Australia president-Rolphe Hartley* |
| ~-Government of SA: Dept of Further Education, Employment, Science & Education* | ~-ANU economist Steve Dowrick* |
| ~-Business Council of Australia* | ~-Former Reserve Bank Governor, Ian MacFarlane* |
| ~-Australian Bureau of Statistics* | ~-BIS Shrapnel senior economist, Matthew Hassan* |
| ~-Australian Industry Group* | ~-Treasurer, Peter Costello* |
| ~-Australian Vice-Chancellor’s Committee* | ~-Access Economics* |
| ~-Prime Minister’s Science, Education and Innovation Council Working Group on Asia* | ~-Reserve Bank* |
| ~-Human Capital in a Global and Knowledge-Based Economy | ~-Human Capital in a Global and Knowledge-Based Economy |
| ~-Productivity growth: 2004 to 2024*, Department of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts* | ~-Productivity growth: 2004 to 2024*, Department of Communications, Information Technology & the Arts* |
| ~-Literacy scores, human capital & growth across 14 OECD countries, Statistics Canada | ~-Literacy scores, human capital & growth across 14 OECD countries, Statistics Canada |

Scholarly references


The OECD, described by Field (2000, p.251) as one of ‘the temples of human capital thinking’, is the most widely quoted source in the text, referred to seventeen times, with extensive reproduction of quantitative evidence from the OECD’s ‘Education at a Glance’ reports. This over-reliance on the OECD as the chief source of research evidence both reflects and contributes to its position at the centre of a ‘new global policy community in education’ (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p.31). It also provides evidence of the ALP’s subscription to that position. Other international sources referenced define education in relation to test performance or system rankings, or as an investment in human capital which has the potential to boost productivity growth. Scholarly references are largely derived from the economic field, as are the majority of individuals whose voices are heard. Members of the field of education have a limited voice and those heard largely represent the disciplines of mathematics and science. This selective use of evidence drawn from the economic field not only systematically silences the social and welfare purposes of education, but re-frames education as ‘subject to exchange value criteria’ (Ball, 1998, p.126). Ultimately, the ‘voices heard’ in this policy text ‘authoritatively allocate’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.29) the values of the market.

5.5 A ‘revolution’ in reporting

The ALP’s ‘education revolution’ policy texts largely assigned responsibility for “Australia’s” poor performance on international testing measures to previous governments by arguing the former’s ‘inefficiently low’ (Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.11) investment in education. When the ALP assumed government in 2007, it injected $19.3 billion into education (Gillard, 2008b, p.2), thus removing government as the source of the “problem” of failure and shifting responsibility for its solution to schools and teachers. This shift was made apparent in Education Minister, Julia Gillard’s, speech to the ACER Research Conference in Brisbane on August 11, 2008, in which she announced the introduction of national reporting.

Gillard remained on “education revolution” policy message throughout this speech, emphasizing current underperformance in Australian education which, she argued, must be addressed to achieve ‘higher productivity, prosperity and social progress’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.2). Evidence of a new discourse of improvement emerged in statements like: ‘we can and should do better’ and ‘slippage in our performance’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.3), presented as particularly perilous ‘at a time
when we know standing still is equal to falling behind’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.3). The solution offered, ‘nationally available data school by school’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.4) would enable the ‘nation’ (ie., the government) to track attainment ‘knowing that we are in the powerful position of comparing like schools with like schools’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.4).

While the Rudd Government is presented by Gillard as admirable in having the ‘political courage’ to ‘put a spotlight’ on vital information about schools (Gillard, 2008b, p.4), in the statement:

‘If two schools have comparable school populations but widely varying results we would be able to ask the question why and ascertain the answer’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.4), central government (‘we’) assumes a new ‘surveillance and monitoring’ role (Meadmore, 2001, p.25), while accountability for student performance is re-located to teachers and schools. The centrality of teachers in this new transactional relationship is conveyed in Gillard’s announcement ‘that teachers will be “armed” with ‘improved national curriculum, more effective classroom instruction methods; better facilities and good school leadership’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.4), while new policies will ensure that ‘high-achieving graduates’ are attracted to teaching and that ‘quality teaching’ is rewarded (Gillard, 2008b, pp.3-4).

5.6 Global influences on policy- McKinsey, Klein & the OECD

Ball (1998, p.126) describes national policy making as an inevitable ‘process of bricolage’; of ‘borrowing’ and ‘cannibalizing’, while Phillips & Ochs (2004, p.776) argue that ‘Policy borrowing … implies influence, and so a borrowed policy may ipso facto demonstrate that the borrower country has been influenced by ideas from elsewhere’. Gillard’s (2008b) speech suggested policy borrowing at a number of levels.

Her comment that ‘we must refuse to accept that low socio-economic status makes it OK for poorer children to fail school’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.3) referred specifically to the McKinsey Report’s key finding that ‘the best education systems leave no one behind’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.3). Similarly, there are clear links between Australia’s decision to introduce national testing and reporting and the McKinsey Report’s finding that ‘the top-performing systems recognize that they cannot improve what they do not measure. Monitoring outcomes allows them to … hold schools accountable for their results’ (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Oddly, the fact that
Australia is listed in the ‘world’s top-ten best-performing school systems’ in the McKinsey report is not mentioned by Gillard, although she does concede that ‘It’s true that Australia ranks highly in terms of test results’ (Gillard, 2008b, p.3), suggesting that ‘discourses of omission’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997) occur not just in press reporting on education, but also in politicians’ re-presentations of educational issues to both the public and the press. The McKinsey Report’s findings that ‘the main driver of the variation in student learning at school is the quality of the teachers’ (McKinsey & Company, 2007); that top-performing school systems are consistently able to attract ‘more able people into the teaching profession, leading to better student outcomes’ (McKinsey & Company, 2007), and that the quality of teaching can be improved by strategies such as coaching by expert teachers (McKinsey & Company, 2007) were clearly heard by the Rudd Government. Its June, 2009 Mid-Term Report announced a suite of changes which echoed these recommendations for improving performance. These included an investment of $550 million ‘to help attract the best and brightest into teaching, and to help retain quality teachers and leaders in schools’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p.29); the introduction of ‘new staffing classifications for high quality teachers’; ‘rewards for high quality teachers’ to act as ‘instructional leaders and/or mentors for other teachers within their school’ (COAG, 2008, B-19) and entry ‘testing for new teaching recruits to identify suitability and professional development needs’ (COAG, 2008, B-20).

Both the McKinsey Report (2007) and the OECD’s ‘Improving School Leadership’ (OECD, 2008a, p.2) highlight the important role played by school leaders in improving school outcomes. In a media statement on August 29, 2008, Julia Gillard (2008c) made direct reference to the OECD report. The Australian Government subsequently allocated $50 million to ‘empower principals to better manage their schools to achieve improved student results’ (COAG, 2008, p.9).

The policies implemented by Joel Klein, Chancellor of the New York City Department of Education, clearly influenced the ALP’s decision to introduce national testing and reporting. Gillard (2008b) referenced Klein in her speech, commenting that while his initiatives could not simply be transported to Australia, they should nevertheless be closely examined. Just three months later, Klein was invited to Australia by the Rudd Government after an earlier visit to New York by Gillard. His speech to the National Press Club in Canberra, on November 25,
2008, outlined the actions his administration had taken to improve ‘standards’ in New York City schools and transform ‘a culture of excuse to a culture of performance’ (Klein, 2008). This transformation, ‘built on the backbone of accountability’ (Klein, 2008), included allocating each of New York’s 1500 schools an A-F grade and then comparing them to identify schools “moving forward” and others “moving backward” (Klein, 2008), enabling the introduction of a system of rewards and punishment, including an additional $25,000 a year in salary for principals of high-performing schools (Klein, 2008) and, conversely, the right of the administration to terminate principals in F and D schools and to close down underperforming schools (Klein, 2008).

The influence of American policy on Australian education was further demonstrated by Julia Gillard’s comment, following her 2009 visit to Washington, that ‘We are so much on the same page as the leading thinkers in America about the nature of our school reform agenda’ (Harrison, 2009c) and by her signing, during that visit, ‘a deal with … Education Secretary Arnie Duncan, to foster greater policy collaboration between the two nations on education reform’ (Harrison, 2009c). The voices not heard by the Australian Government are equally telling. Professor John Hattie, for example, whose research has influenced current policy approaches in many Victorian schools, is an absence. His claim that it ‘is what students bring to the table that predicts achievement more than any other variable’; that teachers account ‘for about 30 per cent of the variance’ (Hattie, 2003, p.2) in student achievement and that ‘dependable and credible ways to capture these achievement effects and attribute them to teacher effects’ (Hattie, 2003, p.9) have not yet been developed (2) clearly contradicted Gillard’s (2008b, p.4) enthusiasm for ‘tracking attainment’ and therein ‘ascertain(ing) the answer’ to under-performance

It is significant too, given the emphasis on financial ‘investment’ as the basis for improving educational outcomes in the Rudd government’s ‘Education Revolution’, that the McKinsey report argues that financial investment in education does not necessarily improve student outcomes. In fact, Australia’s expenditure on education between 1970 and 1994 is listed in the Report as having increased by 270 percent, with a decline in student achievement in the same period of -2 (McKinsey & Company, 2007). Despite this, the Rudd Government’s June, 2009

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2. One school principal interviewed (Van Poppel, 2012) commented on his region’s focus on Hattie’s research. Van Poppel’s (2012) view was that Hattie ‘hasn’t got much time for NAPLAN’, a view he believed was shared by a number of people from the region, including coaches. His comments suggested that the impact of national policies may be mitigated by existing state-based approaches, and by resistance at the bureaucratic level.
Mid-term Report highlights a doubling of ‘investment in Australian schools to $62.1 billion from 2009 to 2012’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p.28). This discordance suggests the highly selective use of sources by the Rudd Government, coupled with the omission of oppositional voices, to marshal support for discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement.

5.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have traced the evolution of a national agenda in Australian education (Lingard, 2010). Through analysis of Annual National Reports on Schooling in Australia in the period 1996-2006, I have revealed a steady bipartisan movement toward this discourse as preferred. I have argued that the introduction of national testing in 2008 and the publication of results for the first time on the MySchool website in 2010 have a long bipartisan history which is firmly (albeit selectively) located in global educational policy directions, notably those in the U.S.

I have shown, through a content and critical discourse analysis of the ALP’s “education revolution” policy texts, that the discourses developed in these texts foregrounded the economy and positioned education as the central mechanism to achieve future productivity growth via a “human capital” approach requiring strengthened federal control of education, formerly a state responsibility. I have argued that this discourse was later extended to encompass school and teacher accountability via performance measurement. While the “education revolution” policy texts construct a widespread discourse of failure and causally connect underperformance in education to underperformance in the economy, subsequent statements and policy directions (notably Gillard’s ACER speech) explicitly position responsibility for this underperformance with schools and teachers, thus removing central government as the source of the policy problem. I have shown the significant influence of the McKinsey Report, Joel Klein and the OECD in constructing a discourse of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement in Australian education and the selective use of international ‘evidence’ to privilege the market. Ultimately, I have illustrated in this chapter how the Australian federal government’s stance on education in recent decades has reflected a shift ‘to post-modernist performativity’ (Lingard, 2003, p.36).
Chapter 6    Locating the *MySchool* story

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the data derived from tracking press coverage of *MySchool* in the context of press reporting on education more broadly. It has a focus on the ‘macro’ aspects of the analysis, accounting for peaks and troughs in *MySchool* coverage, examining the ways in which the website was reported on in the months leading to its launch in January, 2010, and identifying field and ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) as important factors in accounting for different emphases in each newspaper’s reporting.

6.2 Field-effects and their influence on *MySchool* reporting

The ‘internal dynamics of the journalistic field’ (Benson, 2005, p.99) clearly influenced how the policy investigated in this study was reported on in the three newspapers analysed. Influential logics included the ‘relative position’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40) of each newspaper in the journalistic field and, as a corollary, whether the newspaper provided ‘serious journalism’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.42) or the ‘tried and true formulas of tabloid journalism’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.51). The ‘political leanings’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004, p.59) of each newspaper, potentially connected to its ownership, were also important, as were geographical factors. The data further suggested that how each newspaper reported on *MySchool* was also influenced by, and located in, its broader reporting on education. The practices of the field, such as the ‘pressure to get a scoop’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.20); the uniformity produced by competition (Bourdieu, 1998, p.73); the operation of ‘permanent surveillance’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72) and the search for the ‘newest news’ (Bourdieu, 1998:) also had effects.

In the period investigated, *The Age* gave most focus to education reporting, with 1493 items published, totalling 659,387 words. While the *Herald Sun* published 1298 items about education, roughly comparable with *The Australian*’s 1312 pieces, these stories amounted to 338,263 words, considerably less than *The Australian*’s 584,435 words, reflecting a tabloid focus on shorter stories; a “‘keep it simple’, “keep it short’”(Bourdieu, 1998, p.71) approach.

The main categories of non-*MySchool* related stories which accounted for the majority of this education news, as listed in Figure 1 and outlined in Chapter 4, indicate quite different emphases
in each newspaper’s education reporting. *The Australian*, for example, had a significant focus on federal government policies, reflecting its status as a national newspaper and its emphasis on political affairs. This was illustrated in August, 2010, during the federal election campaign, when a “peak” in *MySchool* coverage in that newspaper reflected the attention it gave to education policy announcements by both parties (see Figure 3). In contrast, the *Herald Sun* gave greater emphasis to the categories ‘Annual School Calendar Events’, ‘Newsworthy Events’ and ‘Recurring Educational Problems’. In general, the education stories given prominence in this newspaper, and those which most often generated multiple reader responses, were “salacious” pieces which frequently tapped into recurring ‘discourses of derision’ (Kenway, 1990, p.191) around poor student behaviour and teacher “standards”, contributing to the construction of a ‘moral panic’ (Ball, 1990, p.26).

![Figure 1: Categories of education stories, excluding MySchool, in The Age, The Australian and the Herald Sun: June,2009-February,2010; July,2010-February,2011; February-March,2012.](image)

In July, 2009, for example, a *Herald Sun* report that Victorian teachers had ‘been told to smarten up their sloppy dress standards’ (Drill, 2009c) generated seven letters to the editor, but was not covered in either *The Age* or *The Australian*. A vicious attack on a schoolboy at a Melbourne school led to eight items in the *Herald Sun* in October, 2009 – one news report and seven letters, a story not covered in either *The Age* or *The Australian*. In March, 2011, 36 percent of the *Herald
Sun’s education coverage was devoted to the story of a 15 year old boy who fought back against a 12 year old bully during a school-yard fight, 12 percent more than the coverage given to MySchool2.0 by that newspaper. Neither The Australian nor The Age covered the story. Likewise, a Herald Sun news report about Victorian state school principals’ calls for ‘cooling off centres’ to deal with violent students (Masanauskas, 2009f) generated an editorial and eight subsequent letters to the editor but was not covered in The Age, despite both being Melbourne newspapers with a strong focus in their education reporting on state affairs. Instead, The Age reported on proposed ‘massive increases in federal funding’ for Victoria’s wealthiest private schools (Tomazin, 2009z), prompting an editorial (2009q) critical of the increase and seven subsequent letters. Indeed, The Age’s strong campaign against perceived public school funding inequities was apparent throughout the entire period investigated, most notably in its reporting on the Gonski Review and the release of school funding and finance data on MySchool2.0. These different emphases in reporting, produced on the one hand by the ‘tried and true formulas of tabloid journalism’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.51) and, on the other, by ‘serious journalism’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.42), suggest that readers of different newspapers receive quite different understandings about what matters in education.

The Herald Sun’s more extensive reporting on ‘Annual School Calendar Events’ focused, predictably, on stories about starting and ending school, including ‘Muck Up Day’, or end of Year 12 celebrations; ‘Schoolies Week’ and VCE examination results. In October, 2009, 16 items were published in the Herald Sun after students from several Melbourne schools were suspended following ‘Muck Up Day’ celebrations: two news reports, twelve letters, one editorial and a cartoon. The same story generated two news reports in The Age, but no letters to the editor. It was not covered in The Australian. Similarly, in October 2011, the Herald Sun’s ‘highly selective’ sampling of newsworthy events (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.5), or what Bourdieu (1998, p.47) refers to as the ‘trial of journalistic selection’, was evident in that newspaper’s focus on “Muck Up Day” pranks involving ‘elite’ private school students from two Melbourne schools. These stories received no coverage in The Age. In November, 2011, the key “education” story covered in the Herald Sun, generating sixteen items, related to a ‘Schoolies’ brawl involving Victorian students at Byron Bay in NSW. Indeed, the Herald Sun dispatched one journalist to Byron Bay and the Gold Coast, where he filed on-the-spot reports throughout schoolies week, reflecting a tabloid preference for ‘scandal’ and ‘sensational news’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.51; p.17).
Only one item was published in *The Age* about Schoolies, and no mention was made of the Byron Bay brawl. *The Australian* provided no coverage of Schoolies.

Readers of the *Herald Sun* were thus largely left in ignorance of significant policy developments in education but kept well informed about student misbehaviour and teachers’ ‘sloppy dress standards’ (Drill, 2009e). In contrast, *The Age* gave greater attention than either *The Australian* or the *Herald Sun* to wider pedagogical issues around education. In part, structural features enabled this. *The Age*’s weekly *Education Age* supplement features detailed, carefully researched pieces written by a small stable of dedicated education journalists. In contrast, resource and advertising material dominates the *Herald Sun*’s weekly *Learn* supplement, while *The Australian*’s weekly *Higher Ed* supplement focuses largely on issues related to tertiary education, with occasional pieces on schools. And, despite the accepted view in the literature that press reporting on education is predominantly hostile and derisory, particularly around public education, the data provided evidence that both *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* endeavour to celebrate the achievements of schools, students and teachers, as evidenced by the category ‘Celebratory Texts’, a notable absence in *The Australian*’s reporting.

The general lack of consistency between the three newspapers in their selection of education news can be partly accounted for by the ‘relative position’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40) of each newspaper in the field, and by geographical factors. In general, consistency occurred around the release of new policies, particular newsworthy events and stories related to private schools and their fees. In January & February of 2010, for example, the only common “education” stories reported on by all three newspapers, apart from *MySchool*, were the tragic death of a 12 year old at a Brisbane school; the release of the draft national curriculum and proposed private school fee rises. On March 4, 2011, the day of *MySchool2.0*’s launch, all three newspapers reported on the death of a Victorian teacher as he attempted to save students caught in a rip (Butler, Tatnell & Mawby, 2011; Beck, Hagan & Topsfield, 2011; Akerman, 2011b). Not surprisingly, this story received more coverage in the two Victorian newspapers in the study. While ostensibly a national newspaper, *The Australian*’s Sydney location means that it often has a focus on NSW events, as evidenced by its coverage of the NSW legislative ban on league tables in 2009; the NSW election in March, 2011 and the replacement of the head of the NSW Department of Education following the victory of the Coalition party (Cleary & Ferrari, 2011). A further
illustration of the importance of geographical factors in accounting for education news was evident in March, 2011, when news that the Victorian state government had reneged on its election promise to make Victorian teachers the highest paid in Australia received coverage in both the *Herald Sun* and *The Age*, but not in *The Australian*.

At other times, newspapers’ particular ‘interests’ or stakes appear to influence their selection and coverage of education stories. *The Australian’s* focus on the poor NAPLAN results of indigenous students in March, 2011 (Hughes & Hughes, 2011) reflected ongoing interest in indigenous education, with coverage of indigenous education stories amounting to 17 percent of *The Australian’s* school education stories in that month (see Kochs & Elks, 2011). The influence of field-specific practices and a newspaper’s ‘stakes’ was also evident in July, 2009, when a cluster of suicides at a Geelong school, reported on in both *The Australian* and the *Herald Sun*, became an opportunity for the latter to promote its anti-bullying stance as it launched ‘a campaign to find solutions to the menace of internet bullying’ (Editorial, 2009v). *The Age* initially chose not to report on this story. That this silence was commented on disparagingly by *The Australian* (see Rintoul, 2009) suggests the operation of ‘permanent surveillance’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72). Moreover, *The Australian* editor’s (2009x) observation that *The Age’s* refusal to cover the story reflected an outdated ‘universal’ view in the media that such reporting could ‘encourage other young people to end their lives’ and that this was a view *The Australian* ‘no longer shares’ (Editorial, 2009x) appeared to be ‘a strategy of product differentiation’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.53).

### 6.3 Peaks and troughs in *MySchool* coverage

Table 2 records numbers of items published about *MySchool* and associated stories in the period investigated; items published about education more broadly and word counts of *MySchool* stories. These measures provide an indication of the extent to which the *MySchool* website garnered press coverage in the period analysed, revealing peaks and troughs in coverage and similarities and differences in the extent of each newspaper’s reporting.

The claim that policy release has ‘become synonymous with media release’ (Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005a, p.768), appears largely supported by the data presented in Table 2. The significant peak in *MySchool* coverage in January, 2010, for example, coincided with the government’s launch of the website, a contrast to the relative absence of coverage in the
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preceding seven months. A similar, though less dramatic, peak was also evident in March, 2011, coinciding with the launch of MySchool2.0 and following a lengthy trough in coverage in preceding months. In contrast, MySchool3.0’s release in February, 2012 received minimal press coverage. One journalist accounted for this by pointing out that in 2012, the website had a ‘soft launch’. In fact, as she recalled, there was no ‘formal launch’ by the Federal Government in that year (Kean, 2012).

While a range of factors contributed to this dearth of coverage in 2012, the idea of policy being ‘launched’ (or not) in particular ways by the political field suggests that not only does a ‘tightly delimited set of official and otherwise legitimized sources’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.49) have a significant influence on the way policy is reported in the press, but the way in which those sources choose to convey themselves to the press, and thus control their relationship with them (Fairclough, 2000, p.200), is an important mechanism by which the political field exercises control over both the field of education and the field of journalism. One outcome of the relative absence of press coverage of MySchool in 2012 was that the policy was ‘bedded in’ as ‘part of the educational landscape’ (Kean, 2012).

In contrast, the launch of MySchool in 2010 was clearly a ‘hard launch’. That the website went live at the end of January, 2010 makes the extent of coverage in that month quite extraordinary. MySchool stories accounted for 47 per cent of the Herald Sun’s education coverage in January,
57 per cent of *The Age's* and 84 per cent of *The Australian's*. In February, this declined to 27 percent, 38 percent and 67 percent respectively. Table 3 indicates that the actual number of words written about the policy varied considerably across each newspaper, with the *Herald Sun's* less detailed coverage again reflective of a tabloid preference for shorter stories (Waterson, 2014).

Table 3: Patterns of *MySchool* coverage: January-February 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Herald Sun</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>January, 2010</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items about school education</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>15,720</td>
<td>22,422</td>
<td>26,387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of items about <em>MySchool</em> &amp; related stories</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>6,186</td>
<td>12,728</td>
<td>22,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>February, 2010</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items about school education</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>16,397</td>
<td>38,324</td>
<td>25,321</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of items about <em>MySchool</em> &amp; related stories</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of words</td>
<td>4,884</td>
<td>10,008</td>
<td>16,468</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coverage of the website’s launch in all three newspapers was intense but relatively short-lived, mainly occurring over just four days, from January 28-31, when 22 of the *Herald Sun’s* 31 pieces and 45 of *The Australian’s* 66 pieces were published. That 21 of *The Age’s* 40 *MySchool* pieces were published in this period suggests that the timing of the policy launch was a less significant driver in this newspaper. The story dominated education coverage in the *Herald Sun* until February 7th, after which only two further references occurred. *The Australian’s* coverage continued until February 12th, after which four further stories occurred, together with a series of associated pieces which generated significant discussion (and derision) about education “standards” in the letters pages (Ferrari, 2010ee; Huddleston, 2010a; 2010b). *The Age’s* *MySchool* coverage dominated until February 9th, though 9 of its 32 *MySchool* stories in February occurred after this, suggesting more sustained exploration of the issues arising from national reporting.

When *MySchool* was re-launched in 2011, it included new information about school income, government funding levels and capital works expenditure. It also enabled comparisons to be made between the performance of students tested in 2008 and again in 2010. However, while
March, 2011 represented a second peak in coverage, that coverage was reduced, accounting for 50 percent of *The Australian’s* education stories in that month; 36 percent of *The Age’s* and 22 percent of the *Herald Sun’s*. Even with the inclusion of new data and a government launch, it appeared that *MySchool’s* ‘newsworthiness’ had declined – possibly an effect of the field which ‘assigns value to news according to how new it is’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72).

It was, moreover, the ‘newsworthy’ aspect of the policy’s second version; that is, stories about school funding and finance data, which dominated 2011 coverage. These stories prevailed, particularly in the *Herald Sun*, at the expense of coverage of the broader issues around national testing and reporting. 15 of the *Herald Sun’s* 20 *MySchool2.0* articles published in March, 2011 focused on funding and finance data, as did roughly half of *The Australian’s* coverage in the same period. In contrast, only 12 of the 38 articles published in *The Age*, or 31 percent of that newspaper’s coverage, focused on this area. As a consequence, readers of each newspaper received different understandings of what was most important about the policy in 2011. Only 5 of *The Australian’s* 31 articles, for example, focused on the NAPLAN results of specific schools and the consequences for schools of national testing and reporting, as did 5 of the *Herald Sun’s* 20 stories. In contrast, 15 of *The Age’s* 38 pieces investigated this key issue.

While the absence of *MySchool3.0* stories in all three newspapers in 2012 may be partly accounted for by the absence of a launch and the fact that the website no longer had news value, it could also be seen as a ‘cross-field consequence of particular events’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714). In this case, greater press attention was given to the “launch” of two significant reports associated with education which coincided with the release of the third version of the website. The *Gonski Review of School Funding* (Gonski et al, 2011) and the Grattan Institute’s *Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia* (Jensen et al, 2012), both released just before *MySchool3.0*’s launch on Friday, February 24, 2012, provided the ‘scoop’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.6) *MySchool* no longer offered, as Table 4 demonstrates. And, as Chapter 1 noted, events occurring in the federal political arena had significant ‘effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) on press coverage of all three policies, curtailing discussion about both Gonski and Grattan, and removing education altogether from the pages of all three newspapers.
### Table 4: Patterns of education reporting in the Herald Sun, The Age & The Australian -February, 2012

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Herald Sun</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of items about school education</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>147</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>21,317</td>
<td>60,972</td>
<td>39,433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items about MySchool</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>2174</td>
<td>552</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items about the Gonski Review</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>4421</td>
<td>18,949</td>
<td>17,326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of items about Grattan Institute Report</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of words</td>
<td>1007</td>
<td>4127</td>
<td>6953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 6.4 The press as policy censors

While the majority of MySchool press coverage coincided with the release of the policy by government to the press, various ‘events’ (Rawolle, 2007) also triggered coverage in the months leading to the launch and re-launch of the website (see Figures 2 and 3). These included the NSW legislative ban on “league tables” which dominated The Australian’s July, 2009 coverage; the release of NAPLAN results in September 2009 and 2010; the Victorian State Government’s November, 2009 launch of its School Performance Summaries (a state ‘version’ of MySchool which used value-added measures rather than raw scores); calls by the AEU for the return of school inspectors, which dominated The Australian’s December, 2009 coverage; the Federal election in August 2010; the release of PISA results in December, 2010 and, in the same month, the release of a Federal Government briefing paper which outlined plans to give decision-making power to public schools, a story which dominated The Australian’s January, 2011 coverage. ‘Pick-ups’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71) of these events by the newspapers in this study varied, as Figures 2 & 3 suggest. There were, moreover, notable differences between The Age and The Australian in the stories they chose to report on, reflecting their ‘political leanings’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004, p.59). During the Federal election campaign in July/August, 2010, for example, The Australian gave extensive coverage to Gillard’s promise to give parents and principals greater control over their schools, and to calls by primary principals for a system that would simplify the process of removing underperforming teachers, magnifying the first story’s
importance with a supportive editorial (2010g); an opinion piece by education writer Justine Ferrari (2010c), and a further opinion piece by external commentator Kevin Donnelly (2010a). The Age instead focused on Gillard’s appeasement of the private school lobby with a promise to guarantee existing school funding arrangements until 2013 (Murphy & Harrison, 2010). The newspaper’s opposition to this was evident in explicit editorial and journalistic comment. The headline of senior columnist Kenneth Davidson’s (2010) commentary piece, ‘Public schools sacrificed for a win at any cost’ reinforced the editor’s (2010d) view that the school-funding formula was indeed the ‘elephant in Labor’s policy room’.

In the period June-December, 2009, the Herald Sun published just 26 items related to MySchool and associated stories. The Age, in contrast, published 69 pieces and The Australian 111. Readers of the Herald Sun thus received limited information about MySchool prior to its launch, other than incidentally. In The Australian, references to MySchool in the seven months prior to the website’s launch were largely made in news reports, commentary pieces and editorials about the NSW legislative ban, with very few pieces devoted specifically to the website. Of the 44 MySchool related items published in The Australian in July, 2009, for example, 33 focused
specifically on the NSW legislative ban. The first piece to focus exclusively on *MySchool* was a news report in August (Franklin, 2009a) which highlighted the growing conflict between the government and the AEU, followed by a second piece in September (Ferrari, 2009j) with a similar theme. While a further piece in November (Ferrari, 2009r) gave reasonably detailed information about the website, in the main *The Australian*’s reporting on *MySchool* in this period was both incidental to, and encompassed by, its reporting on the NSW league table ban, suggesting the capacity of the press to present its own version of a policy and thus create a new policy text (Ozga, 2000). In part, this coverage also reflected the importance of geographical factors in accounting for education news. Despite having a national focus in its education reporting, *The Australian*’s Sydney location clearly influenced its coverage given that, as a NSW newspaper, it was directly affected by the ban.

While the *Herald Sun*’s limited and incidental coverage of *MySchool* in this period suggests the operation of ‘discourses of omission’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.402) which excluded its readers from policy knowledge, thereby operating as a form of censorship (Bourdieu, 1991, p.138), *The Australian*’s exclusive focus on the right of newspapers to publish league tables might also be viewed similarly, effectively ‘hijacking’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.720) the debate around national testing and reporting and transferring it, at least in that newspaper, to a debate about press freedom. Thus, it could be argued, readers of *The Australian* were prevented from
developing informed knowledge of MySchool, despite the apparently extensive coverage given to it.

6.5 The role of the ‘quality press’ in acting as a resource for public knowledge (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.403)

In contrast, The Age’s more consistent and thorough coverage of the Federal Government’s reform agenda in the seven months leading to the launch of MySchool suggests the capacity of the quality press to act as a ‘resource for public knowledge’, thus enabling readers ‘to build informed judgements’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.403) about policy. One way this was achieved was simply by informing readers about what the policy was. News reports which dealt specifically with the proposed website appeared consistently over this period. Four pieces were published in June (Tomazin, 2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2009u); one in July (Tomazin, 2009d), two in August (Tomazin, 2009f; 2009g); two in September (Tomazin, 2009h; 2009i,) and three in November (Tomazin, 2009j; 2009m; Harrison; 2009e), in addition to reports published about the Victorian School Performance Summaries which referenced the proposed national reporting system (Craig, 2009a).

Beyond this, The Age was notable in its rigorous investigation of the issues emerging around national testing. Its privileging of the voice of educators, rather than the central ‘source’ of government, enabled readers to understand educators’ concerns and allowed for the Federal Government’s online reporting system to be examined and, frequently, critiqued in ways not apparent in the other newspapers in this study. In part, this was facilitated by structural aspects, notably a series of Education Age features (Milburn, 2009b; Milburn, 2009a; Harrison, 2009a; 2009c). Such coverage suggests the way in which the practices and products of the ‘pure’ press’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.53); that is, ‘intellectual discourse’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.11) and ‘investigative’ rather than ‘populist’ journalism (Blackmore, 2006, p.4), may in fact reduce the control of the political field over the education agenda by providing readers with the means to know about education policy (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.578) not only well before the official release of that policy, but from a wider range of sources other than the ‘official’ sources’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.49) generally drawn on.
While it might be difficult to advance a claim for the discursive effects of reporting which is largely written ‘for the sector’ (Kean, 2013), several mainstream features published in *The Age* arguably reached a wider audience. Education editor, Farrah Tomazin, for example, explored the ‘devastating’ effects on a Melbourne school when a Melbourne newspaper ranked it as one of the worst performing in the state’ (Tomazin, 2009u). The Principal’s ongoing reservations ‘about the Rudd Government’s push to make schools more accountable’ (Tomazin, 2009u); Tomazin’s reference to the league tables created in the preceding month by the *Hobart Mercury* and *Brisbane Courier Mail* (actions explicitly approved of by the editor of *The Australian*: see *Editorial*, 2009d) and the comments of former University of Melbourne education dean, Brian Caldwell that ‘unless something is done to stop the spread of league tables, Australia is setting itself up for potential “disaster”’ (Tomazin, 2009u) were balanced by the pro-testing and reporting views of Geoff Masters, chief executive of ACER, (which raises significant funds from testing as government support reduced), and a national government-commissioned survey of almost 2000 parents which found that 83 percent ‘wanted more information about individual schools to be publicly available’ (Tomazin, 2009u). Such pieces reflected journalistic balance and objectivity.

Further triggers for *MySchool* related news reports in the seven months prior to the website’s launch generally emanated from the political field, highlighting the ‘mutual dependence’ of politicians and journalists in collaborating ‘on the production of news’ (Champagne & Marchetti, 2005, p.116). The ‘source’ of *The Age*’s reporting on *MySchool* was predominantly Julia Gillard - she released information about the proposed website at the November principals’ summit (Harrison, 2009e) where she also commented on principals’ concerns (Tomazin, 2009i). Her speech to the Brookings Institute in Washington (Tomazin, 2009b), and her comments about the government’s reform agenda on radio station 2UE (Tomazin, 2009d) and on SBS’S Insight program (Tomazin, 2009f) also became the source of stories and an opportunity for Gillard to promote the Government’s agenda. Set against this apparent control of the education agenda by the political field, achieved through the privileging of government as the central source of policy information, was the space *The Age* gave, in reports primarily sourced from the Education Minister, to educator and union criticisms of *MySchool*.

That the media are not ‘mere passive channels for political communicators and political content’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.3) was suggested also in *The Age*’s publication of reports
emanating from other sources which implied criticism of the proposed reporting system. These included coverage of Professor Brian Caldwell’s highly critical ‘report card’ on the Federal Government’s education priorities (Tomazin, 2009j); unsourced information about the Government’s inability to ‘force schools to fully disclose their income’ (Tomazin, 2009i); ‘leaked documents’ which revealed the omission by Education Ministers of a crucial “ethical” clause from the rules governing the reporting of student performance data (Tomazin, 2009s) and the results of a national poll of 1000 private school families which suggested significant criticism of the Federal Government’s proposed ‘similar schools’ approach (Tomazin, 2009c).

6.6 The role of the Letters pages in magnifying a policy’s importance

The major text types represented in each newspaper’s coverage of education, including MySchool stories, (see Figure 4) reveals a stronger focus in The Australian on commentary, with more editorials and commentary pieces published than in either The Age or the Herald Sun. The higher number of letters to the editor published in The Age suggests that its readership has a significant voice in its education coverage, a marked contrast to The Australian with its greater emphasis on news reporting and newspaper-controlled commentary.

Analysis of letters to the editor revealed a strong connection with ‘the wider editorial content of the newspaper’ (Richardson, 2008, p.63). In all three newspapers, letters published were predominantly in response to published news reports, editorials or commentary pieces. This pattern frequently magnified a story’s importance by enabling a kind of ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.195) of the same education news. Conversely, when ‘discourses of omission’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.402) operate in a newspaper’s coverage of policy, letters are rarely written. Only eight MySchool related letters were published in the Herald Sun in the seven months from June-December, 2009, for example, compared to twenty nine letters in The Age and thirty in The Australian, reflecting the way public debate is silenced when readers are excluded from policy knowledge.

Wahl-Jorgensen (2002, p.73) has pointed out that ‘regular citizens’ attempts at introducing their own topics to the (news) agenda will almost invariably fail’. The data provided few examples of letters which generated a newspaper response. When these did occur, they were invariably written by individuals endowed with significant social or linguistic capital. In a letter written to
The Age by Associate Professor Margaret Wu (2009) in September, 2009, for example, she drew on her expertise as a statistician to challenge the reliability of NAPLAN data. The subsequent release of a research paper by Wu led to a feature in the Education Age (Harrison, 2009b) and to a page one report in The Australian (Ferrari, 2009). A letter written to The Australian by George Palmer, Emeritus Professor, School of Public Health & Community Medicine, University of NSW in July, 2009 referred to the ‘recent illuminating discussion of school leagues tables’ in The Australian to argue the case for ‘similar league tables for Australian hospitals’ (Palmer, 2009). This letter generated an editorial published the next day (2009c) which directly referenced Palmer (2009) and supported in principle the idea of league tables for hospitals.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have documented peaks and troughs in MySchool coverage throughout the period investigated, arguing that these provide evidence that policy release is largely ‘synonymous with media release’ (Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005a, p.768) and that this is an
important mechanism by which the political field seeks to exercise control over the fields of education and journalism. I have argued that the ways in which the MySchool website was reported on by the newspapers in this study were partly determined by factors specifically related to the field of journalism, and that these factors also account for how each newspaper reports on education more generally. To illustrate this, the chapter “located” MySchool reporting in the context of broader reporting on education stories, offering an account of the chief categories which made up education reporting in the newspapers in this study and highlighting different emphases in each newspaper’s reporting. The field-specific factors identified in this chapter as crucial in accounting for how policy is re-presented in the broader context of education reporting influence, I have argued, a newspaper’s “value stances” on policy. These value stances and their discursive effects are revealed through close analysis of the products of the field: the focus of the following chapters. Moreover, as the following chapters reveal, events and field ‘intrusions’ (Klinenberg, 2005, pp.174-5) interact with field-specific factors so that press re-presentations of policy are ultimately a complex combination of field-effects, events and ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706), revealed through close analysis of the products of the field and the events which frame them.
7.1 Introduction

'No federal government in recent times has grabbed control of education reform from the states like this one has' (Milburn, 2009a)

National reporting and the testing which underpins it evolved from a struggle for power in the political field. Fiercely contested by sections of the education field, its evolution was also shaped by events arising from multiple, complex interconnections between the political, education, educational policy and journalistic fields, including a number of ‘intrusions’ (Klinenberg, 2005, p.174-5) into the field of education by the political and journalistic fields, the effect of which seemingly rendered education ‘powerless to protect its boundaries’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2). This powerlessness was intensified by the response of the states in the months leading to the website’s launch, resulting in a rapid succession of state government policies which tightened school and teacher accountability, thus producing further ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) which were partly derived from altered autonomy in the political field.

In this chapter, I seek to untangle and make explicit the interconnections which shaped the MySchool story in the first extended period investigated: June-December, 2009. This process highlights the policy’s connection to the ‘ideological and political climate’ and the ‘social and economic context’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.16) in which it was released, while simultaneously revealing that ‘even seemingly self-contained school based policies’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.16) do not exist in a policy ‘vacuum’ but interact with policies within the broader policy field.

7.2 MySchool as part of a “reform package” (Ball, 2003) for Australian education

The Federal Government’s ‘prescriptive’ and tight control over an increasingly narrow education agenda (Knight & Lingard, 1997, pp.32-3) had important effects on the states who were, increasingly, an ‘absence’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.58) in decision-making about education. The National Partnerships Agreement on Improving Teacher Quality, signed off by PM Kevin Rudd in January, 2009 (COAG, 2008), secured state compliance by tying funding to “performance”. It
offered the states and territories ‘reward payments’ linked to ‘the achievement of reform milestones’ (COAG, 2008, p.13), among them ‘Performance and development systems and cultures in all schools’ (COAG, 2008, B-20). The states’ swift response was evident, in the months before MySchool’s launch, in a series of initiatives which sought to improve “performance” while simultaneously shifting responsibility for raising standards to schools and teachers, effectively implying their responsibility for their state’s poor academic performance. So, in Queensland, ‘flying squads’ of teachers and principals were dispatched to the state’s worst performing schools on NAPLAN to improve results (Fraser, 2009), while plans were announced to test primary-teaching job applicants for literacy and numeracy proficiency (Parnell, 2009). Performance-pay schemes were unveiled in both NSW and Victoria (Ferrari, 2009bb; Tomazin, 2009cc); Western Australia announced plans for 30 public schools to become self-managing (Perpitch, 2009) and Victoria devised the Teacher Career Transition Program to entice underperforming teachers to leave the classroom (Tomazin, 2009x). These initiatives, a direct response by the states to central government intrusions, clearly altered the autonomy of the education field.

The Australian’s reporting on these initiatives utilised discourses of blame and crisis attached to teacher performance, enabling the newspaper to advocate not just for the publication of school performance data, but also for performance pay for teachers and a return to “the basics”. A Queensland program to improve students’ reading skills, which required participants to make bug-catchers, was savagely derided. In contrast, initiatives seen as likely to improve student performance by returning to the ‘canon’ (Blackmore, 2006) received praise. The NSW Government’s literacy teaching guides mandating phonics teaching were, for example, given prominence in a page 1 report (Ferrari, 2009z). Space given to the positive comments of educators with significant capital, coupled with the headline, ‘Only one state makes right sounds on learning to read’ demonstrated The Australian’s support for the initiative. A later editorial (2009j) effusively commended Gillard’s ‘vision, determination and political skill’ in ensuring that ‘phonics, essential for teaching reading, is on the way back’.

The plethora of performance-based policies released by state governments in response to the intrusions of central government highlighted the political field’s power over policy processes (Taylor et al, 1997, p.27) as ‘policy as numbers’ became the ‘reductive norm’ (Lingard, 2014,
p.28). The colonization of education ‘by an audit process’ which held teachers ‘more publicly accountability for their performance’ (Power, 1997, p.95) was enabled by the ‘ministerialisation and politicisation’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.37) of education and facilitated by the release of performance data on MySchool. Indeed, The Age’s Associate Editor implied that the website was a mere political tool, part of a ‘strategy’ in which the ALP was using a new emphasis on the basics to secure power by appealing ‘to exactly the cohort of voters’ who previously supported the former Liberal government (Carney, 2010b). By the end of February, 2010, The Australian editor (2010p) described the Rudd government as having ‘won the battle over national testing’.

7.3 The ‘cross-field consequences’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714) of political interference in the journalistic field

In the months preceding MySchool’s release, concerns about the potential harm to public education created by the publication of school performance data created unprecedented unity between often adversarial stakeholder groups within the education field, notably teacher unions and school principals’ associations, as both sought to ‘protect the boundaries of their field’ (Blackmore, 2006) from journalistic and political interference. The sector’s fears that media outlets would use MySchool data to “name and shame” schools, and their calls on the federal government to “protect” them, highlighted their belief that the press had the power to intervene in the policy-making process. The assumption was that those schools “named and shamed” by media-generated “league tables” would be disadvantaged public schools. The AEU’s unanimous decision to boycott the NAPLAN tests scheduled for May, 2010, unless the federal government acted to protect students and schools from the harmful effects of “league tables” (Gavrielatos & Robinson, 2010), was a clear attempt by the education field to ‘mount collective and unified opposition to agents in the field of media and politics’ (Thomson, 2005, p.753).

Tensions arising from the policy’s specific connections to the press were heightened by events in the political field in NSW. In June, 2009, a legislative ban imposed on the publication of “league tables” of student results in that state was met with outrage in The Australian. This perceived political interference in the journalistic field had significant effects on MySchool’s representation, not only in The Australian, but also in the other newspapers in this study, through the operation of ‘pick ups’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71). Lingard (2010, p.130) has commented on the strong support offered by the Murdoch press for the MySchool website when it was released,
describing it as ‘fulsome in its praise’ and arguing that the government used this support ‘to circumvent teacher union opposition to the publication of NAPLAN data’. This trajectory, I believe, commenced well before the website’s launch and had its roots in The Australian’s strong support for ‘the market, managerialism and performativity’ (Ball, 2003, p.215) in education while also being a cross-field consequence of the struggle for power produced by the ‘intrusions’ (Klinenberg, 2005, pp.174-5) of the political field in the journalistic field, as occurred in the specific ‘event’ of the NSW legislative ban.

Attacking the Greens and the NSW Opposition who initiated the ban, and mobilising recurring derisory discourses, The Australian mounted a spirited campaign intended to discredit both the law and the political agents associated with it, while simultaneously advocating for press freedom; a strategy aimed at countering a reduction in the autonomy of the journalistic field, to thus preserve its power (Bourdieu, 1996, pp.264). A side-effect of sowing the ‘seeds of a range of “panics” through the language of crisis’ (Kenway, 1990, p.199) was vigorous advocacy for the Federal Government’s policy reforms, exemplified by MySchool.

This ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) occurred in multiple ways. The legislation was explicitly attacked by Australian journalists who condemned it as ‘sinister’ (Salusinsky, 2009a), an ‘outrage’ (Editorial, 2009a) and a ‘“big brother” law (Ferrari & Kelly, 2009). Covert support for NSW Premier, Nathan Rees, whose condemnation of the ban offered support for The Australian’s stand, was apparent in news reports presenting Rees in a favourable light (Clayfield, 2009; Ferrari & Salusinsky, 2009). Conversely, other pieces either implied or overtly expressed criticism of the ban’s ‘architect’, Opposition Leader, Barry O’Farrell (Salusinsky, 2009c; Albrechtsen, 2009; Editorial, 2009b; Callaghan, 2009) in what became a ‘symbolic lynching’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.52) highlighting the journalistic field’s capacity to become a ‘“caucus” ...responsible for “making”’ (and breaking) ‘both politicians and their reputations’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.5).

The Australian’s anger at the political and education field’s perceived interference in press freedom, including press freedom to act as the Fourth Estate (Schultz, 1998), was apparent in the newspaper’s refusal to accept ‘the democratic process’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.3) by publishing two provocative “league tables” of school results in O’Farrell and Rees’ electorates.
(Ferrari, 2009b; 2009e) in deliberate defiance of the ban. Used to reinforce the point that “league tables” did not stigmatise disadvantaged schools, they vindicated The Australian’s right to publish them. The same tactics were used in November, when the release of the Victorian School Performance Summaries became an opportunity for The Australian to advance its own agenda on the right of the press to publish school performance data, and their ability to do so responsibly (Ferrari, 2009u).

Beyond these attacks on the political field, the legislative ban also became an opportunity for The Australian to advance its own agenda on education, enabling that newspaper to attack teachers’ unions, question the competence of teachers and present the education system as failing. These attacks (Albrechtsen, 2009; Costa, 2009; Ferrari, 2009a) were couched ‘in the language of condemnation and censure’ (Kenway, 1990, p.192). Teacher unions were accused of seeking ‘to protect their vested interests and influence in a system that has long covered up school failure and teacher incompetence’ (Albrechtsen, 2009), while union concern about protecting disadvantaged students in underperforming schools was dismissed as ‘rhetoric’ marshalled to conceal the ‘reality’ that ‘officials do not want their worst members called to account’ (Editorial, 2009c). Education unions were accused of doing ‘more damage to the economy than thugs on building sites’ (Costa, 2009) and their ‘unreasonable’ campaign against “league tables” was cited as evidence that they had missed ‘the central issue: parents and taxpayers have a right to know how their children and their schools are performing’(Costa, 2009). The views of constitutional experts who branded the legislation ‘stupid’ and ‘fundamentally misconceived’ (Salusinsky, 2009b) were also enlisted, furthering The Australian’s condemnation through the privileging of authoritative voices.

The Australian’s strategy of contrasting the Rudd government’s ‘transparent reporting of school results’ (Ferrari & Kelly, 2009) with the concealment operating in NSW (Salusinsky, 2009b) advanced MySchool as a praiseworthy and necessary initiative to overcome a union conspiracy to conceal the current failure of schools, evident in the claim that ‘Schools will no longer get away with low expectations for poor students if governments can point to similar schools with better results’ (Ferrari, 2009a). Explicit support offered for Gillard’s attempt to shine ‘a light in the dark corners of the education system’ (Ferrari, 2009a) simultaneously advanced the Education Minister’s capital. The Age’s Farrah Tomazin (2009g) used a similar metaphor in commenting
that ‘we can no longer afford to hide from harsh truths or protect systems that perpetuate failure and inequality’, juxtaposing connotations of secrecy, conspiracy and concealment, the ‘dark corners’ hinted at by Ferrari (2009a), with powerful moral appeals connected to truth.

*The Australian*’s use of a battle metaphor to suggest that the ‘value’ of the data to be provided on the MySchool website would be to ‘arm’ parents with the information to assess schools for their children and hold them accountable (Ferrari, 2009c) constructed parents as clients in a market-driven system (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007). Editorials similarly advocated for choice in education and performance pay for teachers (the data will make it ‘possible to ... ask difficult questions’ of underperforming teachers (Editorial, 2009c); a ‘revolution’ is needed ‘in which teachers are accountable, with the good ones rewarded and the rest encouraged to improve’ and where ‘all parents have the right to choose the school for their children and are well informed about standards and outcomes’ (Editor, 2009e)). Reference to MySchool as the approach of ‘crunch time, when principals and teachers will be held to account for their students’ performances’ (Editor, 2009d); the telling comment that ‘the best way to work out how teachers are performing (my italics) is to look at the performance of students from schools in similar circumstances’ (Editor, 2009k) and the statement that the My School website, as ‘a mechanism to measure school and student performance ... will be hard to beat, especially as it means all teachers can be held to account for their performance’ (my italics) (Editor, 2009k) reveals *The Australian*’s re-working of this policy to suit its anti-teacher-union agenda, driven perhaps by a sense of grievance produced by the political field’s attempts to reduce journalistic autonomy.

This strong opposition to the NSW legislative ban shaped *The Australian*’s coverage of MySchool and profoundly altered the policy’s re-presentation to its readers. In mobilising discourses of educational failure, along with associated discourses of conspiracy and concealment to argue the case for the right of newspapers to publish performance data, and in apportioning blame to both teacher unions and “underperforming” teachers, *The Australian* garnered support for greater school transparency and accountability and simultaneously acted as a mechanism to ‘reform teachers’ (Ball, 2003, p.217). The newspaper’s increasing use of the Federal Government’s proposed reforms as a shining example of transparency not only influenced readers’ understandings about what the Federal Government’s reform agenda entailed, but mobilized support for ‘new national accountabilities’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130), thus
operating as a form of mediatization which ultimately produced ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.88) which were advantageous for the Federal Government and for its most visible agent in the media, Julia Gillard, who was accorded both ‘the power of mobilization’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.194) and ‘a kind of oligarchy’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.34) through the newspaper’s stance.

Moreover, the debate around “league tables” led to ‘pick-ups’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71) by the other newspapers in this study, effectively ‘hijacking’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.723) the debate in the sense that discussions around national testing and reporting became discussions about the publication of that data in newspapers (1). That this had in fact occurred was acknowledged by Age education editor, Farrah Tomazin (2009g), who used the term ‘dominated’, rather than ‘hijacked’, to argue that the debate around the construction of league tables by media outlets had prevented discussion of ‘more important matters’. This narrowing of press coverage reduced the opportunity for readers (particularly readers of The Australian) to be fully informed about the Federal Government’s reform agenda, thus operating as a form of mediatization (Rawolle, 2007, p.84). In effectively constructing another version of the policy, The Australian’s coverage potentially reduced the autonomy of the educational policy field and thus produced cross-field effects (Rawolle, 2005, p.706).

7.4 Press representations of the AEU boycott

The ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) emerging from the NSW “league table” ban played out in multiple and complex ways in the press, influencing coverage of the AEU’s controversial boycott of the 2010 NAPLAN tests which was, in itself, a response to the threat of media generated “league tables” and thus to perceived media intrusions. It also represented a wider power struggle (Bourdieu, 1996, p.264) between the education union and the federal government for control of the education policy agenda, a point acknowledged by both The Age’s associate editor, Shaun Carney (2010a), and political editor, Michelle Grattan (2010) who described the ‘battle’ over the MySchool website as ‘a struggle between the Government and what has been a core Labor constituency: teachers’. Against this back story, the AEU’s proposed NAPLAN boycott was presented by the press as an attack on the media by the teacher’s union,

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1 In The Age, political editor Michelle Grattan (2010) argued that the NSW league table ban was ‘an outrageous interference with freedom of the press’. In the Herald Sun, journalist Allan Howe (2010) described it as a ‘Stalinist abuse’ of power.
expressed by Carney (2010a) as the ‘union’s unshakeable conviction...that the media could not be trusted with the information about school performance’. Efforts to re-assert autonomy were evident in the Sydney Morning Herald’s defiant publication of ‘league tables’ following the release of MySchool. That they did so without legal sanction was reported on by all three newspapers in this study.

Both the Herald Sun and The Australian were highly critical of the AEU boycott. Their support for the ‘full disclosure’ (Editorial, 2010q) of student performance data on MySchool was partly a reflection of their historical anti-teacher-union stance and their tendency to report the ‘activities of teachers’ unions ... in the language of condemnation and censure’ (Kenway, 1990, p.192). This was particularly evident in an Australian editorial (2010f) presenting MySchool as a transparency tool that would ‘shake up the cosy arrangement that allows peak union officials and public servants to run schools without interference’. Both newspapers presented the conflict between the government and the AEU as a battle, ‘a major brawl’ (Packham, 2010; Unauthored, 2010g) which the union deserved to lose. In both, the government was “represented” by Gillard and the “battle” became a triumphant test of her strength. She ‘stared down the union threat’ (Ferrari, 2010t; Robinson, 2010b); ‘refused to rule out a bitter industrial fight’ (Packham, 2010) and ‘would not rule out tough action on teachers’ (Unauthored, 2010g). Gillard’s evoking of discourses of transparency (‘I am going to be crystal clear on this’ (Unauthored, 2010g); I ‘will not be deterred ...from delivering this school transparency’ (Hannan & Rout, 2010) set against (according to the Herald Sun and The Australian) the union’s concealment (see Howe’s (2010) description of AEU teachers as ‘keepers of secrets’) presented the government as morally justified in taking charge of education policy.

In contrast, and in spite of the views of influential Age journalists Carney and Grattan, The Age editor (2010r) argued the legitimacy of the AEU’s position. The comment that ‘many teachers fear “league tables”’ precisely because of the way the media reports on them, and the invitation to view the issue from a teacher’s perspective, to envisage the headlines many teachers can ‘see’ – ‘“Our worst school”, “Schools of shame”, “Bottom of the class” (Editor, 2010r), not only endowed The Age with a ‘profit of distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.55), but also revealed significant discursive differences in the way newspapers report the same story, as well as the ‘contradictions and inconsistencies’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997) within the same newspaper’s
reporting. *The Age* editor’s (2010r) comment that ‘Sadly, only if the process is public can one reasonably expect governments to provide anything like the funding and support needed by underperforming schools’ implied opposition to national reporting, but also suggested it was necessary to hold governments accountable, a vastly different position to *The Australian* which consistently presented MySchool as a school and teacher accountability tool.

The different ways in which readers of *The Age* and *The Australian* were discursively positioned in relation to this debate was also illustrated in the ‘web of voices’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.81) heard in news reports. Unlike the *Herald Sun*, which confined its coverage largely to the views of key players, Gillard and Gavrielatos (Packham, 2010; Unauthored, 2010g; Rolfe, 2010), both *The Age* and *The Australian* sourced a range of commentary. News reports in *The Australian* largely featured the views of stakeholders who opposed the AEU’s ban, including a Melbourne public-school principal (Rout, 2010) and powerful agent Chris Sarra, an Aboriginal parent and executive-director of QUT’s Stronger Smarter Institute, who flatly rejected the AEU’s view that ‘underperforming schools will be damaged or humiliated’ (Robinson, 2010b). *The Australian* also reported on the apparent anger of NSW public school parents with the NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens’ support for the AEU (Robinson, 2010c). In contrast, *The Age* quoted the views of the President of ACSSO who stated his organisation’s opposition to ‘the ability of the My School website to be able to generate league tables’ (Craig & Peatling, 2010). In the same piece, Parent Victoria’s Elaine Crowle expressed her fear that publishing NAPLAN data could promote teaching to the test (Craig & Peatling, 2010). Likewise, the *Sunday Age* conducted its own poll of 247 parents prior to the release of *MySchool*, reporting that 63% of those surveyed opposed the creation of “league tables” by the media (Craig & Peatling, 2010).

### 7.5 Struggles for political power embedded in a discursive web of failure

While the introduction of national testing and reporting led to a significant alteration in the ‘balance of power’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.37) between central government and the states, it also altered ‘the balance of power in educational policy making so that policy is now steered at an increasingly vast distance from schools’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.37). In part, the logics of practice of the journalistic field contributed to this by strengthening the ‘policy authority’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.32) of particular politicians, notably Julia Gillard who, as the voice of *MySchool*, used the opportunities provided by press reliance on the political field as an
information source to present a particular version of education to the public: an ‘accountant’s view of curriculum’ underpinned by the view that ‘everything that matters can be measured’ (Kenway, 2007, p.3). Australian education, in Gillard’s view, was failing and therefore in need of reform. In June, 2009, in a speech to the Brookings Institute in Washington, she commented on the underperformance of Australian schools (Tomazin, 2009b). In November, she accused critics of the MySchool website of wanting to produce ‘happy, illiterate, innumerate children’ (Ferrari & Bita, 2009) and, in December, pointed out that ‘underperformance had been a feature of the education system for too long’ (Tomazin, 2009p). Comments such as ‘the Rudd government believes it is time we stopped averting our eyes from poor performance’ (Walker & Rout, 2009); Australia is “undoubtedly” failing its students and unless schools were forced to be more transparent about their results, this trend would continue’ (Tomazin, 2009f) and ‘Australian schools were not performing as well as they should’ (Tomazin, 2009b) were widely reported in all three newspapers, positioning the public to support greater school and teacher accountability.

Additionally, the space Gillard was given in press reports in all three newspapers strengthened her ‘policy authority’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.32), transformed her into a media personality (Fairclough, 2000, p.4) and significantly advanced her capital in a ‘consecration’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.102) which was advantageous in her later quest for political power. She was presented in the media as exercising admirably tight control over the education agenda. Frequently presented as being on a ‘collision course’ with educators (Tomazin, 2009f) and headed for a ‘showdown’ (Tomazin, 2009h), her determination to action the government’s agenda for schools, despite fierce opposition, constructed her as a strong and decisive leader, particularly in The Australian where she was described as set to ‘crash through’ opposition (Franklin, 2009a) and overcome a ‘chorus of complaint’ (Ferrari & Bita, 2009). Against the discourses of conspiracy and concealment constructed around teacher unions, Gillard emerged as admirable in her determination to ‘shine a light in the dark corners of the education system’ (Ferrari, 2009a) and ensure ‘that a spotlight is on every school’ (Tomazin & Harrison, 2009). It was, moreover, Gillard who ‘lifted the veil’ (Harrison, 2009e) of secrecy surrounding school performance. She received explicit editorial support in The Australian for championing policies which matched the newspaper’s own ‘quasi-market emphasis on efficiency in delivery of services, product accountability and outcome measures’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.34). Applauded in an editorial (2009b) as having ‘the pragmatism to embrace the transparent, rigorous education philosophies
of New York education chief Joel Klein’, and given ‘credit’ for ‘demanding’ that ‘state governments sign on to a national agreement on individual school performance’ (Albrechtsen, 2009), she was explicitly commended for her ‘pragmatism and determination in facing the challenges in Australian education’ (Editorial, 2009i).

The increasing ‘ministerialisation and politicisation’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.28) of education was also apparent in the way state politicians were presented in the press in other stories in this period. The comments of Victorian Education Minister, Bronwyn Pike, for example, at the launch of the Victorian government’s School Performance Summaries in November, 2009, presented her as, like Gillard, exercising tight control over the policy agenda. Her tough stand on school accountability and transparency was evident in her provocative comment that ‘It is unacceptable that you can read about the full contents of Vegemite on its jar, or can know more about the performance of your air conditioner than the progress of your local school’ (Tomazin, 2009a). She ‘made no apology for putting schools under higher levels of scrutiny’ or ‘making teachers more accountable for students’ results’ (Tomazin, 2009a).

Press reporting on the release of NAPLAN results in September, 2009, was also firmly embedded in a discursive web of failure based around a ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 2002, p.1) associated with declining literacy and numeracy standards. While some reports in The Australian acknowledged nationwide improvements in student results (Ferrari, 2009h; Koch, 2009), the prevailing emphasis was on failure (Ferrari, 2009i; Buckingham, 2009a). The potential for this data to be misused by the press to support their own policy agendas was evident in The Australian editor’s (2009m) attack on a QTU pay rise claim. According to the editor, the union had no case, given that QLD ‘ranked second last in the NAPLAN tests last year’. The Herald Sun’s ‘exclusive’ analysis of NAPLAN data similarly constructed Victorian education as failing, even when the evidence suggested otherwise. Victorian students, for example, had ‘slipped behind in spelling and arithmetic over the past 12 months’, despite ‘still’ being ‘ahead of most other states for academic performance’ (McManus, 2009). Victoria’s secondary school system was, moreover, ‘letting children down’ with a tripling of ‘the number of students falling below the minimum standard in Victoria for writing ... between year 3 and year 9’ (Drill, 2009a). While The Age’s reporting on NAPLAN results also emphasized that almost ‘one in ten Australian students are failing to reach the most basic standards in reading, writing and maths’ (Tomazin &
Harrison, 2009) (2), this newspaper appeared to make a conscious effort to avoid discourses of
denigration (Blackmore, 2006) attached to teachers and, equally, to avoid the suggestion that
public education is failing, with education editor Farrah Tomazin (2009m) pointing out that
‘Most underperforming schools face complex challenges that are difficult to overcome despite
teachers’ efforts’ (Tomazin, 2009m).

In emphasizing the performance of the states, press reporting on NAPLAN results constructed
education as an ‘activity’ of government, and a measure of governments’ worth, thus endorsing
policies based on the ‘ethics of competition and performance’ (Ball, 2003, p.218). The
privileging of the ministerial voice in news reports also advanced or diminished the capital of
ministers according to their state’s “performance”, with newspapers duplicating aphorisms which
emphasized competition. Victorian Education Minister, Bronwyn Pike, for example, was
reported in the Herald Sun as ‘crow(ing)’ about the ‘strong results’ of Victorian students
(McManus, 2009), while high performing states were described in The Australian as ‘crowing
about their beautiful sets of numbers’ (Ferrari, 2009i). NSW, Victoria and the ACT were
described as ‘still topping the nation’ (Ferrari, 2009h), with their governments in a ‘three way
tussle’ to ‘claim the crown as the top performing school system’ (Ferrari, 2009i) and NSW
‘itching to claim (the) crown’ (Ferrari, 2009i). In contrast, the government of Queensland, the
‘worst performing state in NAPLAN’ was described as ‘bracing’ itself (Fraser, 2009), forcing its
Education Minister into a defensive position (Ferrari, 2009h).

In this period, The Australian’s privileging of the voice of both government and business
presented the view that Australian education is failing as fact, thus strengthening the case for the
imposition of a ‘system of performance indicators upon the education market’ (Gewirtz, Ball &
Bowe, 1995, p.1). In July, 2009, it reported on an Australian Bureau of Statistics report which
revealed the declining maths and science skills of Australian students (Maley, 2009) and in
September, revealed the WA Chamber of Commerce’s view that the education system was not
producing the outcomes business needs (O’Brien, 2009). In the following month, The Australian
reported on the COAG Reform Council’s announcement that minimum literacy and numeracy

2. The Australian presented the same data with a far more negative slant: ‘One in every 10 students is effectively illiterate
and innumerate’ (Ferrari, 2009i).
standards in Australian schools were set substantially below the level of skill necessary to enter the workforce (Ferrari, 2009q). Twelve months later, it also privileged a report released by the Skills Council for the Energy and Communication sectors which claimed that high schools were failing to equip students with the basic maths and science training needed by trade apprentices (Berkovic, 2010).

At times, individuals or groups with significant capital from the field of education contributed to the construction of discourses of educational failure, thus lending support to the federal government’s reform agenda via the space they were given in some newspapers, notably The Australian. That newspaper, for example, reported extensively on a letter written by University of Queensland emeritus professor, Rodney Huddleston, to every school principal in Queensland, warning them of an error strewn grammar guide distributed by the state’s English Teachers’ Association (Ferrari, 2010ff), thus implying the inadequacies of English teachers in that state. Similarly, Nobel prize winner Professor Brian Schmidt’s comment that ‘we either skill up to teach mathematics effectively or produce generations of Australians ill equipped for the modern economy’ (Rowbotham, 2012), also reported in The Australian, implied the failure of current mathematics curriculum and teachers.

7.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have sought to make explicit the interconnections between the political, journalistic, education and educational policy fields which shaped the way the MySchool story was presented in the three newspapers in this study in the months leading to the website’s release. I have argued that the intrusions of central government into the state political field forced a response from the states in the form of a series of state-based “performance” policies which, in holding teachers and schools more publicly accountable for “their” performance, altered the autonomy of the education field. I have argued that political interference in the field of journalism, as occurred in the NSW legislative ban on the publication of “league tables” in that state, profoundly altered the way MySchool was re-presented in The Australian, producing “pick ups” (Bourdieu, 1998) by other newspapers. A sense of the press ‘answering back’ (Canagarajah, 1999) was conveyed in the overt and covert stances adopted in journalistic products, transforming the debate about national reporting into a debate about press freedom. The side-effect of this, I have argued, was strong press (particularly Murdoch press) support for the
Federal Government’s reform agenda for schools, presented in *The Australian* as much-needed transparency in light of the concealment operating in the political and education fields in NSW.

I have argued that press representations of the AEU’s controversial boycott of 2010 NAPLAN tests were underpinned by this previous narrative and were presented in the press as an attack on the media by the teacher’s union which led to significant press criticism and corresponding support for central government’s education policies and for its chief political representative, Julia Gillard, in turn strengthening Gillard’s policy authority. I have suggested that Gillard’s emphasis on Australia’s educational failure, expressed in a number of forums, was seized upon by sections of the press following the release of NAPLAN results in September, 2009, potentially as a consequence of the education field’s attempts to block press publication of “league tables”. These discourses of failure, contributed to by the voice of business and government, colluded with multiple field intrusions to construct strong Murdoch press support for greater transparency of information about the performance of schools. While *The Age’s* reporting at times subscribed to this view, its editorial defence of the position of teachers and of the AEU highlighted the capacity of the press to ‘resist the impositions of the state’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44) and ‘exert critical scrutiny of political power’ (Hjarvard, 2013, p.71).

8.1 Introduction

Analysis of how the newspapers in this study reported on the launch of MySchool on January 28, 2010, revealed an initial period of press reporting on the website followed by, in the quality press, a period of analysis and commentary. Neither period was value free. Moreover, each newspaper constructed particular ‘versions’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.103) of national testing and reporting, suggesting that mediatization may be newspaper-specific. The Herald Sun’s decontextualised ranking of schools humiliated schools already facing significant disadvantage. In The Australian and, to a lesser extent, The Age, MySchool reporting unexpectedly exposed the underperformance of elite private schools, a kind of reverse “naming and shaming” with potentially profound consequences for named schools. There were, however, significant differences between these two newspapers. The Australian’s reporting and commentary on MySchool ‘conjure(d) up a field of other discourses’ (Kenway, 1990, p.198). Thus “standards”, failure, teacher quality and calls for school accountability for the taxpayer funds expended on them were themes heard in MySchool stories in this newspaper and in other unassociated education stories, producing a ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1977, p.195) of discourses which mobilized support for greater ‘surveillance’ (Meadmore, 2001, p.25) of schools and teachers, so acting as a ‘mouthpiece for the government’s agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71). In contrast, in The Age, the launch of MySchool became an opportunity for that newspaper to hold governments to account for their underfunding of disadvantaged public schools, a stance reflecting the capacity of the press ‘to resist the impositions of the state’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44).

The way all three newspapers reported on MySchool’s launch could potentially be seen as a ‘cross-field consequence’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) of earlier intrusions into the journalistic field, via the NSW legislative ban and the AEU’s proposed NAPLAN boycott. The coverage conveyed a strong sense of the press ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989), responding by, variously, attacking teachers and teacher unions and praising the government; defiantly choosing (or not) to publish the “league tables” which were the source of such contestation, or emphasizing the “failure” of elite private schools rather than, as predicted by the AEU, the underperformance of
disadvantaged public schools. However, while all three newspapers ‘answered back’ (Canagarajah, 1999), they made reporting choices which discursively positioned schools and teachers in quite different ways, confirming the ‘variation’ that is a feature of education reporting (Berliner & Biddle, 1998, p.27). This chapter outlines those choices and their effects on the policy’s re-presentation.

8.2 Press reporting on the launch of MySchool – January 29, 2010

8.2.1 The covert stances of news reports

Despite, or perhaps because of, educators’ concerns that media outlets would use the data on MySchool to “name and shame” disadvantaged public schools, the “naming and shaming” that did occur in The Age and The Australian highlighted the relative underperformance of elite private schools, a particularly noteworthy trajectory given that, in the 1980s, particular journalists at The Age and The Australian presented private schools as ‘the exemplification of the standards towards which state schools should strive’ (Kenway, 1990, p.187).

While acknowledging that the ‘poorest schools in the nation tend to have the worst results in literacy and numeracy’ (Ferrari, 2010y), The Australian’s MySchool coverage foregrounded the failure of ‘some of the nation’s most prestigious’ private schools which, despite ‘charging tens of thousands of dollars a year in fees scored lower’ on NAPLAN ‘than neighbouring public schools’ (Maiden, 2010b). “Consumers” were discursively positioned to question the value for money offered by the private sector in a double page spread on January 29th which devoted one full page to ‘naming and shaming’ these schools, including a state by state ‘league table’ (or variation thereof), presented in colour (Unauthored, 2010f) and accompanied by a series of articles which provided a national “snapshot” of elite private school underperformance juxtaposed with information about the exorbitant fees charged (Perpitch, 2010; Ferrari & Vasek, 2010b; Bita, 2010b; leGrand, 2010; Akerman, 2010).

While The Age took a similar approach, its coverage focused specifically on Victorian schools, reinforcing the importance of geographical factors in shaping education news. It “named” some of ‘Victoria’s most prestigious schools’ (Perkins & Harrison, 2010) and, like The Australian, highlighted the excessive fees charged. While ‘prestigious’ did not exclude government schools in this newspaper, only one was named. The Age also emphasized anomalies in MySchool’s...
ICSEA, covertly critiquing the policy in the supposedly objective terrain of the news report by dramatically highlighting flaws in its like-school comparisons. Advertising this as a ‘big news story’ via the use of pictures on the front page of the newspaper (McCabe, 2008, p.193), *The Age* juxtaposed two coloured photographs of schools described as ‘statistically similar’ on the *MySchool* website. One presented an overhead shot of the cloistered courtyard of ‘one of the most expensive private schools in Australia’ and the other, the dusty ‘rough hewn’ playground at a rural Victorian primary school (Perkins, 2010b). The accompanying headline ‘signposted’ (Rafferty, 2008, p.226) *The Age’s* criticism of the website’s method of comparing schools and the overfunding of elite private schools at the expense of more needy public schools, thus critiquing the policy while simultaneously emphasizing the need for more equitable funding for public schools.

That the pattern of ‘naming and shaming’ wealthy elite private schools may have been a response to earlier field ‘intrusions’ (Klinenberg, 2005, pp.174-5) was implied by *The Age’s* associate editor, Shaun Carney (2010a), who dismissed the ‘union’s unshakeable conviction ... that the media could not be trusted with the information about school performance’ by asking ‘What were the first front page stories about MySchool after launch day? That some of the nation’s richest private schools performed worse than comparable state schools: good PR for the state sector and the opposite of what the union’s leaders had predicted’ (Carney, 2010a). The sense that the qualities were ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) was also suggested by *The Australian’s* education writer, Justine Ferrari’s (2010x) comment that fears that disadvantaged schools would be stigmatised by the media were groundless, given that *MySchool* results ‘indicated some of the nation’s most exclusive schools could face some tough questions from parents, who in some cases pay $20,000 a year or more in Year 12’ (Ferrari, 2010x).

Whereas *The Age* did not “name and shame” disadvantaged public schools with poor NAPLAN results, *The Australian* did expose (albeit not in a league table) some underperforming public schools. However, it took great care to point out the circumstances of disadvantage contributing to underperformance, a strategy potentially designed to address concerns about the media’s ability to “responsibly” deal with performance data. It reported, for example, on the NAPLAN results of the Mt Druitt campus of Chifley College in Sydney’s west. In 1997, this school’s poor Year 12 performance was the subject of a damaging and condemnatory report in Sydney’s *The
Daily Telegraph. In 2010, however, the tenor of reporting had changed, with The Australian acknowledging that while Chifley College ‘performed “substantially below” the Australian average on every measure at both Year 7 and Year 9’, its ICSEA rating of ‘just 840’ indicated ‘the substantial hurdles’ it faced (Warne-Smith, 2010) (1)

8.2.2 Fulfilling educators’ fears: the publication of “league tables” in the Herald Sun

The Herald Sun’s coverage of MySchool’s launch fulfilled educators’ fears that the media would “name and shame” underperforming schools. This newspaper’s relentless focus on rankings was signalled in a half-page full-colour front-page banner on January 29th titled ‘Official test results - How your school rates’. Subheadings accompanying reports within the newspaper: ‘Rankings’ (Hudson, 2010e); ‘Lowly Ranked’ (Betts, 2010) and ‘Highly Ranked’ (Unauthored, 2010i) highlighted a ‘version’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.103) of education in which ‘what is counted is what ultimately counts’ (Lingard, 2010, p.35). An 8 page supplement listing every Victorian primary and secondary schools’ Year 5 and Year 9 NAPLAN results (Unauthored, 2010o) was accompanied by a double page spread on pages 4 and 5, one page of which was a “league table” of the top 5 and bottom 5 Victorian primary and secondary schools (Unauthored, 2010h). This fulfilled the AEU’s predictions by ‘naming and shaming’ largely disadvantaged public schools.

Moreover, the decontextualised data re-worked the policy’s intent of comparing statistically similar schools only. In publishing it, the Herald Sun determined for its readership ‘what is to count as a valuable, effective or satisfactory performance’ in education and ‘what measures or indicators are considered valid’ (Ball, 2003, p.216), developing a new kind of data-driven reporting, just as national testing and reporting regimes enabled data-driven decision making (Marsh et al, 2006) in education.

Four of the seven schools which made up the 25 ‘Bottom 5’ secondary schools in the Herald Sun’s “league table” were community high schools. Two were Koorie schools. All were schools experiencing significant disadvantage. The 17 schools listed in the ‘Bottom 5’ primary schools

1. Despite this, the NSW Teachers Federation –Mt Druitt Campus of Chifley College presented a submission to the Senate Investigation into the Administration and Reporting of NAPLAN results reporting ‘that talented students were leaving because their school had been “branded a failure” (SEEWRC, 2010), suggesting the damaging impact of both national reporting and press reporting on this school, even when seemingly handled “responsibly” – a ‘cross-field effect’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) produced at least partly by mediatized policy, with consequent effects on the operation and autonomy of this school.
included several rural primary schools and schools from disadvantaged areas of Melbourne. Only one “private school” was listed, a Catholic primary school. Two accompanying reports featured families whose children attended schools named therein. One reported glowingly on a high-performing Melbourne primary school (Unauthored, 2010i), including positive comments from a parent and the principal, with an accompanying photograph of three sisters who attended the school, and who also appeared in colour in the newspaper’s front page banner (Unauthored, 2010i). Located immediately above their smiling faces was a photograph of ‘Kim’ and her three children, two of whom attended a rural Victorian Community College ‘ranked’ by the Herald Sun ‘as one of the worst performing in Australia’ (Betts, 2010). Unlike the “high-performing” Principal, who cheerfully commented on his school’s excellent results (Unauthored, 2010i), the principal of this school not surprisingly ‘declined to comment’ (Betts, 2010); the failure of his school to ‘measure up’ designating him also as a failure (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004, p.304). The newspaper’s insensitive decision to interview ‘Kim’ and to accompany the interview not only with her photograph, but also her children’s, further entrenched their and others’ disadvantage while also constructing a ‘discourse of denigration’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.1) around public schools as failing. The Australian’s national snapshot of underperforming elite private schools similarly humiliated these schools, forcing them to defend their “value”.

8.3 The role of voice in re-presenting policy

8.3.1 ‘Voices’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.77) heard in news reports

Fairclough (1995b, p.77) comments that a ‘very high proportion of media output ...consists of the mediation of the speech or writing of, mainly, prominent people in various domains of public life’. Sometimes, ‘such people speak for themselves...sometimes their discourse is represented by newsreaders or reporters’. This privileging of views through the voices (Fairclough, 1995b, p.77) heard in news reports has important ideological effects. In general, as Fairclough (1995b, p.40) observes, ‘it is those who already have other forms of economic, political or cultural power that have the best access to the media’. Which ‘categories of social agent get to write, speak or be seen’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.40) has a significant impact on how a policy is re-presented. While a newspaper’s stance on education is perhaps conveyed most clearly in the explicit stances of journalists, the voices heard even in the ostensibly objective terrain of the news report also have
subtle discursive effects. Likewise, the exclusion of particular voices may act as a form of ‘concealed censorship’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.138).

Table 5 provides a simple categorisation of the voices heard in news reports about MySchool in January and February, 2010. Numbers record each source directly quoted or heard in reported speech, rather than the number of times they were heard in a specific report. That is, a parent or principal quoted several times in one newspaper article was recorded once. Different parents or principals quoted in a single article were recorded as multiple voices. While this categorization does not account for the ‘subtle ordering and hierarchization of voices’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.81) that also occurs in news reports (see Chapter 10 for a discussion of this area), or the extent to which each voice was heard, it does provide an indication of the key sources drawn on by the press to report on MySchool.

That there were more political voices heard in news reports than any of the other represented categories suggests the ‘exceptional symbolic power given to state authorities to define by their...entry into the journalistic field...the journalistic agenda’ (Bourdieu, 1998, pp.69-70). Gillard’s was the most prominent political voice heard in all three newspapers, giving her the ‘monopoly on the legitimate point of view’ (Bourdieu, 1996b, p.377) and allowing her to shape public understanding of this policy in significant ways, while also advancing her political capital (2). Gillard’s views were also given considerably more space than other views. One effect of this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voice Category</th>
<th>Herald Sun</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Australian</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Politicians</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent Association representatives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals Association representatives</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers’ Unions</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics/Educators</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Significantly, PM Kevin Rudd’s voice was a relative absence, heard in just one news report in the Herald Sun and two in The Age and The Australian
was to present the Federal Government as being ‘in charge’ of education and, when combined with new national education policies announced at the end of February, strengthened the national ‘presence in schooling and new national accountabilities’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130).

The prominence given to Gillard in all three newspapers meant that in some respects, the press largely ‘acted as a mouthpiece for the government’s agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71). Gillard’s comments presented the federal government as a kind of omniscient and generous benefactor, prepared to ‘shine a light on schools’ (Hudson & McMahon, 2010; Packham, 2010; Franklin, 2010d); ‘lend a helping hand’ (Gillard, 2010a; Bita, 2010c), ensure that ‘disadvantage is not destiny’ (Gillard, 2010b) and ‘empower’ parents to have ‘robust conversations’ with teachers and principals (Hudson & McMahon, 2010; Perkins, 2010a). In Gillard’s view, the information on MySchool was ‘profound’ (Perkins, 2010a) and signalled a ‘new era of accountability and openness’ (Franklin, 2010d). This ‘spin’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004), re-circulated by other voices in news reports and commentary pieces, began to assume the status of fact. Gillard’s comment that the MySchool website would ‘only compare apples with apples’ (Gillard, 2010a) was re-quoted by a parent profiled in The Australian who stated that the website makes ‘everything transparent so (she) can compare apples to apples’(Bita, 2010a). A commentary piece in The Australian titled ‘Parents are hungry for information’ (Yaman, 2010) echoed Gillard’s comment that ‘around the country parents are hungry for this information’ (Harrison, 2010m; Ferrari, 2010x). Gillard’s view that MySchool would ‘shine a light on schools’ was re-heard in a submission to the Senate Investigation when the Grattan Institute’s Ben Jensen referred to the advantages of ‘shining a light’ on underperformance (SEEWRCR, 2010, p.71). Perhaps the most notable re-use of Gillard’s words was, however, in an Age editorial which, in exposing the government’s ‘spin’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004), also reminded government of its responsibilities:

‘Yesterday, Ms Gillard said: “The worst thing in the world is for a child to be at an underperforming school and for no one to know that, and no one to do anything about it”. In fact, it would be worse for a child to be at an underperforming school, for everyone to know that, and still no one does anything about it. The responsibility is now on the Federal Government, in conjunction with the states, to ensure that does not happen’ (Editor, 2010r).

State politicians and their representatives were rarely heard in this period (3). When they were, they were often presented defending their state’s poor performance, or reacting by introducing policies of their own (see Ferrari, 2010ee). Sections of the press contributed to this silencing of
the states by endorsing federal policies. The national curriculum, for example, was described in *The Australian*, with implied approval, as ‘forc(ing)’ all states and territories ‘to follow a set program for teaching reading’ (Ferrari, 2010jj). Politicians in opposition also had a lesser voice and were thus given fewer opportunities to offer policy critique, a reporting pattern which potentially contributed to policy entrenchment. The comments of Opposition education spokesman, Christopher Pyne, heard once in the *Herald Sun*, four times in *The Age* and twice in *The Australian* were backgrounded in news reports, appearing after Gillard’s and receiving less column space, with only one piece in this period specifically focusing on his views (Harrison, 2010p).

While those ‘who already have other forms of economic, political or cultural power ...have the best access to the media’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.40), the nature of this policy and the sense that the press were ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) foregrounded voices not generally heard in education reporting. While Fairclough (1995b, p.49) has commented that ‘Ordinary people feature as offering typifications of reactions to news’, but not as news sources, the comments of ‘ordinary’ parents in all three newspapers, while offering ‘reactions’ to the *MySchool* website, also served important discursive functions. *The Australian*, for example, ran a page one profile of a Melbourne couple who would re-consider private schools for their children after viewing the results of local public schools on the *MySchool* website, a focus which appeared designed to demonstrate that the AEU were wrong in predicting that *MySchool* would be damaging for public schools (Vasek, 2010c; see also Bita, 2010a). The *Herald Sun*’s profile of two families whose children attended schools featured in their “league table” (Unauthored, 2010i; Betts, 2010) suggested vastly different journalistic motives, given that these parents were asked to comment on the school’s performance rather than, as in *The Australian*, to give their views on the *MySchool* website. *The Age*, which repeatedly argued for income and assets to be published on *MySchool*, featured the views of three Melbourne parents, all of whom were critical of the website (Webb, 2010). These quite different parental “reactions” suggest that newspapers may be ‘highly selective’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.5) in choosing to report the voices of those who amplify their policy stances.

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3. The voice of the Victorian premier was heard in one news report in the *Herald Sun*. The Victorian Education Minister was quoted in one news report in *The Age*. The voices of the NSW Education Minister, a NSW Greens MP and the Queensland Education Minister were also heard in single news reports in *The Australian.*
The voice of school principals and principals’ associations was also significant in *The Age* and *The Australian*. Many of the private school principals quoted were forced into defensive positions after their school’s underperformance was exposed (see Perpitch, 2010; Bita, 2010b; Perkins & Harrison, 2010). In contrast, the principals of “successful” schools gained significant capital through press exposure (Unauthored, 2010i), emerging as ‘star heads’ (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004, p.308). A notable silence was the voice of teachers and students. Those most affected by the policy thus had limited opportunities to speak, other than through the letters forum. There was, in addition, very little overlap between the voices quoted in each newspaper, with the exception of politicians and teacher unions. There was, for example, no crossover in the parent, parent association or principals’ categories, though there was some overlap of principal association representatives.

8.3.2 The role of journalistic “voice” in supporting or critiquing policy

While reporting on *MySchool* declined rapidly in the *Herald Sun* following the launch, it became more analytical in both *The Age* and *The Australian*, suggesting the important role the quality press play in reporting on policy beyond its launch. Both newspapers explored growing criticisms of the ICSEA measure (Ferrari, 2010bb; Harrison, 2010o; Maiden, 2010d; Ferrari, 2010dd), while *The Age* also investigated the high NAPLAN absentee and withdrawal rates of Victorian students (Perkins, 2010e). That these stories were not covered in the *Herald Sun* reveals how ‘discourses of omission’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997) exclude readers from understanding emerging policy issues.

Fairclough’s (1995b, p.91) observation that ‘journalists don’t only recount events, they also interpret and explain them’ suggests that the notion of “which journalist” is potentially significant in accounting for press discourses around education. Ten of *The Australian’s* sixteen news reports in this post-launch period were written by senior education writer, Justine Ferrari, a significant and consistent journalistic voice throughout the entire period analysed. The remaining pieces were contributed by journalists who consistently provided education coverage; Bita, Vasek, Robinson, and Maiden. In *The Age*, eight of the twelve post-launch reports were contributed by experienced, dedicated education journalists: Harrison, Craig, Perkins and Milburn. There was, however, no single, shaping journalistic voice in *The Age* as there was in
The Australian, given that education editor Farrah Tomazin had left the role and was not replaced by Jewel Topsfield, an important voice in later periods analysed, until March, 2010.

The potential for journalists to impose ‘their vision of the world, their conception of problems and their point of view’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.47) was suggested in an interview with an Age journalist which revealed the capacity for a senior education journalist at a quality newspaper to autonomously ‘set the agenda’ and decide ‘what makes news’ (Kean, 2012). Table 6 reveals the significant role played by key education journalists in ‘representing to readers what education is about’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.302) across the entire period of the study. Importantly, this data highlights the role of the education journalist in both reporting and commenting on education. This dual function was most notable at The Australian where Ferrari contributed significantly more commentary on education than either Tomazin or Topsfield at The Age. It was, moreover, rare for Herald Sun education reporters to contribute commentary. At that newspaper, education reporter John Masanauskas, joined by Evonne Barry in the second extended period of analysis, appeared to leave the ‘education beat’ in 2012, re-appearing as urban affairs reporter in March, 2012. Likewise, having left the role of education editor at The Age, Farrah Tomazin later became Victorian Affairs editor, contributing a further nine news reports about education in this role. Age education journalist, Dan Harrison, who contributed 64 news reports; 17 co-authored pieces and 5 feature articles across the entire period of the study had, by February, 2012, become Social Affairs correspondent.

| TABLE 6 | Education items contributed by key journalists |
| June, 2009-February, 2010 | The Australian | The Age | Herald Sun |
| Ferrari | Tomazin | Masanauskas |
| News reports | 93 | 49 | 77 |
| Co-authored news reports | 18 | 9 | 6 |
| Commentary pieces | 10 | 3 | 1 |
| Feature articles | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| July, 2010-March, 2011 | Ferrari | Topsfield | Masanauskas | Barry |
| News reports | 68 | 95 | 64 | 24 |
| Co-authored news reports | 15 | 9 | 5 | 0 |
| Commentary pieces | 10 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Feature articles | 3 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| February-March, 2012 | Ferrari | Topsfield | Masanauskas | Barry |
| News reports | 18 | 23 | 1 | 9 |
| Co-authored news reports | 2 | 4 | 1 | 3 |
| Commentary pieces | 2 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| Feature articles | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
These patterns suggest a higher rate of journalistic turnover in education reporting at *The Age* and the *Herald Sun* than at *The Australian*, where Justine Ferrari’s ‘vision of the world’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.47) was often apparent in news reports and commentary pieces. In this period, she attacked ACARA, for example, who had rejected *The Australian*’s request for the database of school results so that the newspaper could ‘conduct a more detailed and sophisticated analysis of the data’ (Ferrari, 2010w). In her outraged assertion that ACARA’s ‘transparency is more like a one way mirror than a window’, Ferrari (2010w) re-worked the discourse of transparency originally constructed by the government to argue a case for national reporting, re-configuring it as a weapon to accuse ACARA and, by implication, the government, of concealment. While such comments highlight the capacity of journalists ‘to resist the impositions of the state’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44) and to use their journalistic products in the struggle for power, their capacity to also support the state was evident in the following explicit comments by Ferrari (2010z) which indirectly supported government by emphasizing the prevalent view of *The Australian* that the failures of the education system can be directly attributed to schools and teachers:

- ‘what is wrong with a bad school closing?
- ‘teaching to the test is not a concern if it’s a good test’
- ‘Public money is spent on schools and taxpayers have a right to know what they’re getting for their money’
- *MySchool* holds ‘schools, teachers and principals accountable for children who finish their education unable to read and write. It’s human nature to lift your game when you know someone is watching’ (Ferrari, 2010z).

Senior *Age* journalists Carney (2010a) and Grattan’s (2010) strongly worded criticisms of the AEU’s position on *MySchool*, coming as they did at the end of February after the media’s reporting on *MySchool*, appeared to be a direct response to that reporting, and thus an ‘answering back’ (Canagarajah, 1999), as suggested by Carney’s (2010a) discrediting of the AEU’s ‘unshakeable conviction ...that the media could not be trusted with the information about school performance’ (Carney, 2010a). In revealing the AEU’s “league table” fears to be groundless, these senior journalists implied that teacher opposition was unwarranted.
The explicit editorial stances taken by all three newspapers in this period highlight the function of the editorial as a tool for ‘political intervention’ (McNair, 1995, p.13). All three editorialised on the AEU boycott of NAPLAN testing ahead of the launch of MySchool and followed this with specific editorial comment on MySchool. Editorial stances on other education stories frequently reinforced stances taken on MySchool, creating a kind of discursive ‘incrementalism’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.46). The Australian, for example, attacked the NSW Teachers’ Federation’s attempts to block $8000 performance bonuses for ‘highly accomplished teachers’, describing the union’s attitude as ‘troglodyte’ (Editorial, 2010n). It also responded to Professor Huddleston’s criticisms of a Queensland grammar guide to launch an attack on both ETAQ and English teachers which evoked discourses of failure and denigration (Blackmore, 2006) also conveyed in its coverage of MySchool (Editorial, 2010o). Its support for the introduction of national ID numbers for students (Editorial, 2010p) was consistent with its support for policies which increased scrutiny of schools and teachers. In contrast, the Herald Sun’s editorial choices in this period commented on the numbers of Victorian students set to miss tertiary offers (Editorial, 2010u) and the growing tide of violence in schools (Editorial, 2010t), consistent with a tabloid focus on human interest (Bourdieu, 1998).

All three newspapers offered explicit editorial support for national reporting but qualified this in different ways. The Australian effusively praised ‘Education Minister Julia Gillard’s My School website’ (Editorial, 2010l) as the ‘real revolution’ in education. The comment that, despite its ‘limitations’, the site ‘will be welcomed by everyone who understands education is the engine of productivity improvement and social mobility’ (Editorial, 2010l) evoked Rudd & Smith’s (2007) “education revolution” policy texts (see Rudd & Smith, 2007b, p.25). Attacking the AEU’s proposed NAPLAN boycott, championing the rights of parents (described as ‘so desperate for information ...that Ms Gillard’s site received nine million hits on its first day’) and advocating for further reforms, including principal autonomy ‘to hire and fire staff’ (Editorial, 2010l) offered clear support for the government’s agenda.

In contrast, while The Age acknowledged the ‘grim reality of failing schools’ (Editorial, 2010r), it also condemned the production of league tables by some media outlets, thus differentiating its own approach by pointing out that, unlike competitors, it did not produce such rankings (Editorial, 2010m). The Age, moreover, contended that MySchool ‘falls short of the standards of
full transparency and accountability’ by ignoring ‘the role of government in the unacceptably wide variability in student’ performance’ (Editorial, 2010m). It criticised Gillard for having ‘come close to blaming’ teachers at ‘weaker schools’, pointing out that they ‘have been overwhelmed by the combined handicaps of disadvantaged communities, underfunding and staff shortages’ (Editorial, 2010m) and accused governments of failing ‘to recruit high quality teachers to a profession whose pay and status they have allowed to decline for decades’ (Editorial, 2010m; see also Editorial, 2010r; 2010v).

In contrast, the Herald Sun (Editorial, 2010s) simplistically argued that the website fell ‘short of clearly ranking the nation’s 10,000 schools’, thus justifying its own construction of such a ranking, but also implying that the media’s production of “league tables” would somehow magically solve “underperformance” in education, a view conveyed in the headline ‘Rank schools to get results’ (Editorial, 2010s). Like The Australian, this newspaper was also highly critical of the AEU’s proposed boycott which, according to it, treated ‘parents as dunces’ (Editorial, 2010q).

The press’s tendency to position ‘itself as a metanarrator, inserting its own opinion of solutions to the problem it (is) reporting’ (Macmillan, 2002, p.31) was most notable in The Australian’s editorial format which repeatedly presented education (and teachers) as failing and actively suggested policies to address this. It proposed that every school should be paid ‘a bonus for improving student performance on external exams and national tests’ and principals given ‘the power to hire and fire so it can happen’ (Editorial, 2010f). It repeatedly sought to discredit stakeholders whose views disagreed with its own, accusing the AEU of ‘demonstrating a contempt for the intelligence of average parents’ (Editorial, 2010l) and relying on their ‘pals in the press’ (Editorial, 2010f) to promote false claims (Editorial, 2010f). The inflammatory and provocative description of teaching as having been ‘the last resort of students achieving in the lower half of Year 12 results for too long’ (Editorial, 2010n) tellingly contrasted with the praise bestowed on Gillard for having the ‘administrative firepower’ (Editorial, 2010p) to introduce a national curriculum, ‘uniform teacher accreditation standards and a comprehensive reporting of national testing results’ (Editorial, 2010p), thus becoming ‘a friend to every parent who wants the best education possible for their children’ (Editorial, 2010l).
While *The Age* argued that ‘a properly transparent system’ would be one ‘in which government is as accountable for school standards as it rightly expects principals and teachers to be’ (Editorial, 2010m), *The Australian* presented an entirely different version of accountability, commending Gillard for her determination ‘to ensure schools (my italics) account for their performance’ (Editorial, 2010f). *The Age* was also more critical of *MySchool*’s methodology, emphasizing that the ‘missing element’ was ‘school funding and resources’ (Editorial, 2010r), a comment consistent with its ongoing campaign for greater funding of ‘needy schools’ (Editorial, 2010r). In contrast, *The Australian* dismissed this concern, accusing the AEU of making misleading claims that public schools are underfunded because they ‘receive nearly $12,000 a year per pupil from all government sources, twice what Canberra provides each student in a private school’ (Editorial, 2010f).

In general, journalistic commentary pieces offered ‘vital symbolic support’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.4) for editorial views. There were, however, exceptions to this, notably *Herald Sun* journalist Wilson’s (2010) condemnatory piece which, published a day after the *Herald Sun*’s pro *MySchool* editorial (2010q), was both anti-elite-private-school and anti-NAPLAN. In contrast was Howe’s (2010) highly emotive *Herald Sun* commentary piece in which he used provocative, sensationalist language to call for ‘dodgy teachers’ to be ‘sacked’, dismissed concerns about “league tables” and referred to the ‘Stalinist abuse of parliamentary power that ensued’ in NSW following the league table ban there, a comment suggesting ongoing journalistic anger at the intrusions of the political field. In *The Australian*, contributing editor Peter Van Onselen (2010) replicated editorial views, as did Burchell (2010), with both writers advocating for choice and, thus, for the market.

### 8.3.3 External voices: the privileging of particular stances & stakeholders

Mazzoleni & Schulz (1999, p.5) point out that ‘it is left to the media to decide who will get access to the public’. While such access occurs covertly in the ‘web’ of voices (Fairclough, 1995b, p.77) heard in news reports, it is overtly evident in commentary pieces which privilege particular individuals and their stakeholder sources. The data reveals that the views of external commentators often support the policy stance of the newspaper. Their selection also illustrates Bourdieu’s (1991, p.138) argument that ‘concealed censorships’ operate in the privileging and exclusion of agents from ‘the places which allow one to speak with authority’.
Table 7 lists the external commentators published in The Age and The Australian in January and February, 2010. Of the nine pieces published in The Australian, eight offered support for MySchool. In contrast, two of the three pieces published in The Age offered scathing criticism of MySchool. There were no external commentary pieces in the Herald Sun, a telling omission.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Commentary pieces contributed by external commentators in The Age and The Australian, Jan-Feb, 2010</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
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Notably, three pieces were contributed by one author in The Australian, ‘elite’ private school teacher and regular Australian contributor, Christopher Bantick (2010c; 2010d; 2010e). Bantick’s thirteen pieces across the entire period not only constituted an extraordinary attack on teachers from within the field, but reproduced views consistently expressed by The Australian: that many teachers lack the skills necessary to improve student performance, a strong anti-union stance and support for greater school scrutiny. He argued, for example, that student under-performance is directly connected to teacher under-performance; that it should be a ‘requirement’ that ‘prospective English teachers...sit a rigorous grammar test’ (Bantick, 2010e) and that if poor children do not receive a quality education, ‘then look to the teachers’ (Bantick, 2010c) (4).

While The Australian’s external commentary choices mobilized support for preferred government discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement, in The Age the opposite was true. The voice of Melbourne High School principal, Jeremy

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4 Eleven of Bantick’s thirteen pieces were published in The Australian. Notably, the two pieces published in The Age focused on curriculum issues, rather than attacking schools and teachers (Bantick, 2009a; 2009b; 2010a; 2010b; 2010c; 2010d; 2010e; 2010f; 2010g; 2010h; 2011a;b;2012).
Ludowyke (2010) castigated the *Herald Sun*’s league tables which had ranked his own select-entry high school as the highest performing school in the state in numeracy, condemning them as ‘a piece of crock’. Professor Richard Teese (2010b) argued for a more just funding model to address the disadvantage in Australia’s school system, bluntly exposing national testing and reporting as a ‘spun policy’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004). In Teese’s (2010b) view, *MySchool* had become ‘a form of political leverage’, requiring parents to ‘repair’ the failure of governments to ‘ensure consistently high standards across all schools’ by ‘becoming informed consumers’ (Teese, 2010b; 2010a).

To balance this anti *MySchool* commentary, *The Age* also published a piece by ACARA Chair, Professor Barry McGaw. McGaw’s (2010) suggestion that the ‘best way to counter’ the ‘unfair comparisons’ of school performance produced annually by the media is ‘with comparisons that are fair’, which ‘is what the My School website provides’ (McGaw, 2010) could be seen as a ‘structural effect’ (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004, p.368) of the temporary social field created by the debate around *MySchool*, an attempt by the bureaucratic field to impose its logics over the journalistic field and, in a sense, to arrest the mediatization of this policy. In *The Australian*, Geoff Masters (2010b), Chief Executive of ACER, similarly presented *MySchool* as a weapon to counter the ‘simple lists of student results’ produced by newspapers (Masters, 2010b), potentially inflaming tensions with the journalistic field.

*The Australian*’s decision to publish a commentary piece by NYC schools chancellor Joel Klein explicitly signalled that newspaper’s allegiance to the policies of the federal government. Not surprisingly, Klein (2010) supported national reporting, invoking the market and shifting responsibility for educational achievement from government to schools, as did Penfold (2010). Dismissing “league table” concerns as ‘cynical fear tactic(s), Klein (2010) condemned ‘entrenched interests’ who seek ‘to block change’ and commended ‘Gillard and her colleagues in government’ (Klein, 2010). Like Klein, former *Australian* Schools and Higher Education editor, Ebru Yaman (2010) argued that ‘parents have every right to know as much as they need to make an informed choice’ and voiced the increasingly common refrain that ‘every Australian supports (the school system) by way of taxes at the very least’.
8.4 Inconsistencies and contradictions in press reporting on policy

That press involvement ‘in the education-policy-making process’ is a highly complex matter which entails ‘inconsistency, contradiction and rarely straightforwardness’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.395) was evidenced by The Australian’s emphasis on emerging criticisms of MySchool’s ICSEA which raised questions about the validity of school comparisons. Despite strong support for the federal government’s reforms, The Australian reported extensively on this issue, suggesting the capacity of the press to offer critique in its reporting on some aspects of a policy, while acting as a ‘mouthpiece for the government’s agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71) on others (see Ferrari, 2010u; 2010bb; le Grand & Ferrari, 2010). Extraordinarily, this led to an attack on the Herald Sun’s “league tables” when Ferrari (2010cc) exposed that newspaper’s folly in “naming” one rural Victorian school in its “bottom five” for numeracy. She demonstrated how the data had been skewed and was therefore inaccurate. Thus, while earlier defending the media’s right to publish “league tables”, The Australian had no hesitation in revealing the inadequacies of the Herald Sun’s tables, despite both newspapers being Murdoch publications.

Such tactics suggest the operation of ‘permanent surveillance’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72) in the journalistic field, the ‘object’ of which ‘is to profit from competitors failures’, not only by ‘avoiding their mistakes’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72) but by exposing them.

Bourdieu (1998, p.72) would describe such practices as an ‘effect of competition on the field’ of journalism. What is interesting here is the further effect such practices may have on other fields. Ferrari’s stories (2010aa; 2010cc) effectively vindicated the AEU’s stand against media-generated “league tables” and constituted significant criticism of government policy by revealing inaccuracies in the data. Moreover, through such stories, readers of The Australian received a very different version of MySchool from, for example, readers of the Herald Sun. Ultimately, the capacity of the press to exert pressure on policy makers was evidenced by the fact that ACARA chair Barry McGaw was forced to defend the grouping of schools on MySchool that ‘labelled large, elite private schools as similar to very small rural public schools’ (Ferrari, 2010dd) when he appeared at a Senate Estimates hearing, while Gillard conceded that the index ‘does not accurately reflect some schools’ student mixes’ (Harrison, 2010o).
8.5 The Letters pages as a site of resistance

While this policy’s re-presentation in the press appeared to influence readers’ understanding of what the policy was about in ways which reflected the newspaper’s broader stance on education, readers clearly have the ‘capacity for resistance’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.36), as evidenced by the Letters pages which, in this period and throughout, were an important site of resistance. The significant role played by both *The Age* and *The Australian* as a forum for reader discussion and debate was illustrated by the volume of letters published in those newspapers in January and February, 2010, a marked contrast to the *Herald Sun* where letters were a relative absence (see Chapter 6).

Broadly speaking, the letters published in *The Age* and *The Australian* appeared to reflect each newspaper’s policy stance. The overwhelming sense of letters expressing a point of view on *MySchool* in *The Age*, for example, was one of opposition to the website and its underpinning policies. Only seven of the thirty-four letters published in that newspaper in January-February 2010 explicitly opposed it. While three writers expressed no clear view, twenty-four explicitly opposed it. In *The Australian*, where forty letters were published, many in response to associated stories discussed earlier, only eleven writers opposed the website. In contrast, eight of the thirteen letters published in the *Herald Sun* opposed national testing and reporting, thus challenging the newspaper’s editorial support.

This data raises interesting questions about the relationship between the stances taken by a newspaper, the responses of its readers and letter selection. Do *Australian* readers, for example, read that newspaper because their views on education are similarly aligned? Did *The Australian* publish more pro-*MySchool* letters in line with their own support for the website, or were more supportive letters received? How can the letters of opposition published in the *Herald Sun* be accounted for, given that newspaper’s support for national reporting? One answer to this, perhaps, is that some writers felt strongly enough about the issue to express their views in multiple newspapers (5). Another is that the *Herald Sun*’s “league tables” prompted letter writers to voice their anger directly to that newspaper. Moss (2010), for example, appeared to draw on

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5. Van Zetten (2010a; 2010b) wrote to *The Age* and the *Herald-Sun*, as did Minas (2010a; 2010b; 2010c); Langrehr (2010b; 2010c) to *The Age & The Australian* & Colquhoun (2010a; 2010b) to the *Herald Sun & The Australian*. Of these writers, only Colquhoun supported *MySchool*. 
personal experience to defend an Aboriginal College listed as one of the state’s worst performing schools. A much stronger attack was mounted by the Chair of the Association of Heads of Independent Schools (Vic), the President of the Victorian Association of State Secondary Principals & the President of the Principals’ Association of Victorian Catholic Secondary Schools who used their collective capital to condemn the Herald Sun’s ranking of schools as a misleading and demoralising ‘misuse of the data’ (Merry et al, 2010).

Across all three newspapers, those who wrote in support of MySchool reproduced recurring media-generated discourses around education, deriding teachers, teacher unions and, sometimes, universities (Wilson, 2010); emphasizing declining standards and arguing for greater scrutiny of schools which, they suggested, should be accountable for the taxpayer funds expended on them. The cumulative effect of such letters was to construct a sense of crisis and to lay the blame for this with teachers and teacher unions, providing powerful support for MySchool. Some writers implied that teachers lacked competence (Colquhoun, 2010a); others that there was a need to test teachers to combat declining grammar standards (Bedford, 2010; McLeod, 2010). Some called for a return to school inspectors to ensure ‘the quality of the teaching and the teachers’ (Murray, 2010). At times, criticism of teachers was voiced by those within the field in letters about associated stories. Former high school inspector, Shinkfield (2010) commented that the ETAQ grammar guide criticised by Professor Rodney Huddleston was a ‘sad indictment of educational standards’, while academics Grant & Mueller (2010) argued that ‘many teachers under the age of 50’ ‘lack confidence and skill in teaching grammar and punctuation’.

Other writers attacked teacher unions (the ‘manic ideologues currently running (or more correctly, ruining) our education systems’ (Kellock, 2010); accusing them of attempting ‘to keep parents in the dark about school performance’ and thus denying them the necessary information to ‘better select an appropriate school for their child’ (Appleby, 2010). Some argued that the ‘public education system is taxpayer funded and should be transparent to the taxpayer’ (Hoyle, 2010), thus advocating the ‘economisation of schooling policy’ (Lingard, 2010:136). Others located Australia’s educational performance within ‘a global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18), identifying the need for ‘performance’ to be measured and recorded ‘transparently’ because ‘Australian education has to keep up with the standards of other major nations in this competitive global village’ (Douglas, 2010; Clark, 2010).
Often, letter writers critical of *MySchool* sought to expose the derisory discourses constructed by *MySchool* supporters. The debate around *MySchool* was ‘another excuse for school and teacher bashing’ (Carpenter, 2010), and amounted to ‘open warfare on teachers yet again’ (Sinclair, 2010). Northey (2010) pointed out that teachers are ‘the first to be blamed’, while others questioned the justice and validity of judging teachers and ‘malign(ing) schools’ (Walters, 2010; Rossiter, 2010). Many writers were also critical of government, accusing them of ‘neglecting’ the needs of students at ‘Australia’s most disadvantaged schools’ (Van Zetten, 2010a; 2010b). Some described the website as ‘a great feat of spin’, ‘wasting our taxes’ (Upcher, 2010) and as a ‘publicity scam to appear to be doing something about education’ (Bertozzi, 2010). The government was also accused of a ‘lack of empathy...in its desire to publicly compare schools’ (Owen, 2010) and criticised for not using the ‘real information’ it already has about students’ socioeconomic status (Nicholson, 2010) Occasionally, attacks on Gillard were made, thus challenging her ‘consecration’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.102) in many media reports. Garner (2010) ridiculed the idea of parents who ‘speak little English’ “having a robust conversation with teachers and principals if their school was performing badly’. Gillard was also accused of failing to use the ‘years of AIM/NAPLAN data’ she has had ‘at her fingertips’ but hasn’t used ‘to direct funding to schools in need’ (Bertozzi, 2010).

The voice of teachers, as Keeney (2010) observed, was a relative absence in *MySchool* reporting. Some, however, used the Letters forum to voice well-informed criticism of the government’s policies, offering insights rarely heard in other sections of the newspapers. Long (2010), with ‘more than 35 years’ experience’ in school education, referred to a curriculum now determined ‘by what can be ticked, graphed and given a ranking’ and identified accountability as a seductive but ‘false ideology’. Mancev (2010), a recently graduated primary teacher, expressed disappointment that ‘so many parents believe the MySchool website will improve education’ while Froomes (2010) drew on her experience teaching in New York City, ‘where teachers taught to the test and results did not improve’ (see also Meadley, 2010). At times, members of the public showed an understanding of the complex work of teachers not always demonstrated by newspaper editors (see Moore, 2010; Sinclair, 2010).
Frequently, letter writers played a significant role in alerting readers to the damaging long-term consequences of national testing and reporting. In *The Age,* five of the six letters published on the AEU boycott highlighted the detrimental effects of publishing school performance data, with informed and thoughtful reference to OECD rankings and the negative impact of such approaches in Britain and the United States (Ogston, 2010). Other writers emphasized the inadequacy of NAPLAN results as a measure of school performance or teacher quality (Timmer-Arends, 2010); highlighted the damaging effects on ‘higher achievers in so-called “underperforming” schools’ (Holland, 2010); the ridiculousness of comparing public and private schools given the enormous discrepancies in funding levels (Staples, 2010) and the retrograde efforts by governments to appeal ‘to parents’ idea of school when they were there’ (Mercer, 2010). Others pointed to the way in which teachers were being forced ‘to teach to the test to prove competence’ (Sinclair, 2010; Langrehr, 2010c; 2010b); rendering students ‘passive participants in the schooling process’ (Collins, 2010c), ‘narrowing the curriculum’ (Minas, 2010c; 2010b), and severely damaging education (Minas, 2010b). Some, such as Hall (2010), writing as a parent, pointed to the wider purposes of education not measured by *MySchool.* Others, like Morice (2010), a grandparent and former early childhood educator, shared her grandson’s negative experience of Year 1, where excessive NAPLAN preparation had transformed him from a happy, enthusiastic little boy in prep to one ‘who is reluctant to attend’ school. These letters constituted powerful criticism of the federal government’s *MySchool* website. They were, in effect, a cry of protest, heard most loudly in *The Age.*

8.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have applied aspects of Fairclough’s model of critical discourse analysis to newspaper texts produced by *The Age,* *The Australian* and the *Herald Sun* following the launch of the *MySchool* website. I have argued that each newspaper constructed a particular ‘version’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.103) of national testing and reporting for their readership which was influenced by specific field-effects and by events and intrusions into the journalistic field. The chapter has shown that readers of different newspapers may receive different versions of the same policy, in turn suggesting that the processes of mediatization may be newspaper-specific. Evidence was provided of the capacity of the press ‘to resist the impositions of the state’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.44), or to act as a ‘mouthpiece for the government’s agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007,
I have argued that these competing functions may be taken up by the same newspaper in reporting on different aspects of a policy. The chapter has illustrated that the reporting choices made by newspapers discursively position schools and teachers in quite different ways and, in constructing different versions of a policy text, not only construct a new policy text, but also position the press as key players in the policy process. The chapter illustrated the key role of ‘voice’ in constructing particular versions of a policy which reproduce recurring discourses apparent in the coverage of other education stories. I have argued that readers are not passive recipients of the particular versions of policy constructed by newspapers and suggested that evidence of this is found in the Letters pages of each newspaper.
Chapter 9: Events and their effects on the MySchool story: July, 2010- February, 2011

9.1 Introduction: An overview of key events

When MySchool2.0 went live on March 4th, 2011 it contained, for the first time, school financial information, including capital expenditure ‘disaggregated by source of funding’; ‘school initiated fees, charges and voluntary contributions; and other sources’ (SEEWRRRC, 2010, p.77). In the months leading to MySchool2.0’s release, the publication of this data was fiercely contested by the private school sector. Their efforts to block its publication delayed the second version of the website from its scheduled release date of December, 2010 to March, 2011. Consequently, both the data and its delay became newsworthy, changing the nature of the policy’s contestation. Press attention on the ‘value for money’ offered by private schools and the vexed issue of their funding introduced into the debate two ‘duelling discourses’ (Falk, 1994, p.2). One was a market-oriented discourse focused on choice and competition. The other, an equity discourse which was advantageous for public education advocates, was assisted by other events occurring in the educational policy field, notably the government-initiated Gonski review of school funding.

At the same time, press emphasis on the impending release of school financial data, amid significant concerns about the reliability of the data and the threat of legal action by private schools, reduced reporting on the effects of national testing and reporting. In February, 2010, however, all three newspapers reported on a departmental memo sent to Victorian teachers in the Loddon-Mallee region in which they were told to ‘explicitly teach’ for NAPLAN as ‘part of a drive to lift the states’ overall performance’ (Ferrari, 2010ss; Masanauskas, 2010b; Perkins & Murphy, 2010). The Australian later reported that nine schools had been implicated in test breaches (Owens & Lim, 2010) and both the Herald Sun and The Age reported on a disadvantaged Melbourne school’s extraordinarily high NAPLAN results and a subsequent departmental investigation which led to the resignation of a senior Education Department bureaucrat (Masanauskas, 2010f; Topsfield, 2011j). The Age also reported on a survey of principals which revealed that more than two thirds of Australian secondary schools ‘had spent more time on practice NAPLAN tests since the introduction of MySchool ... than they had before’ (Topsfield, 2010c).
That Schools Minister Peter Garrett’s denial that publishing the results of national tests on *MySchool* ‘had led to teachers teaching to the test’ (Topsfield, 2010c) was political ‘spin’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004) was suggested by the fact that in May, 2010, allegations of schools cheating and manipulating test results by excluding students (SEEWRRC, 2010) initiated a Senate review into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN. Among the twelve recommendations in the Coalition majority report, tabled in November, 2010, was a recommendation that ACARA prioritise ‘the improvement of the method used to develop like school comparisons’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, pp.xi-xii), a criticism both *The Age* and *The Australian* had been instrumental in revealing (1). Subsequently, ACARA announced modifications to the index, as *The Australian* reported (Ferrari, 2010n).

A second recommendation, that ACARA should ‘examine and publicly report on ways to mitigate the harm caused by simplistic and often distorted information published in newspaper league tables’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, pp.xi-xii), led to a series of changes made in October, 2010 to limit the activities of the press, including the introduction of a ‘clickwrap’70 requiring users to indicate their agreement up-front to terms and conditions prior to accessing schools data, together with ‘a tool to deter automatic scraping of the data from the website’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.74). The threat of legal action by ACARA also forced a private company selling an 854 page report ranking Australian schools for $97 (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.35) to withdraw it from sale.

This period was also one of turbulence at the federal political level, with former Education Minister Julia Gillard assuming the Labor leadership in June, 2010 and swiftly announcing a federal election for August, the result of which was a hung parliament. During the election campaign, and following ‘a series of disastrous polls’, education was the ‘policy strength’ to which Gillard returned in an attempt to ‘regain political momentum’ (Ferrari & Maher, 2010a; Ferrari, 2010c).

The release of NAPLAN results in September, 2010, enabling comparisons to be made for the

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1. The Senate report, in commenting that the inquiry was initiated following allegations of cheating, referenced this with a footnote citing an *Australian* article published in May, 2010 and an ABC news online piece (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.35). The report also refers to ‘media reporting alleging that schools discouraged (weaker) students from attending on test days’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.15). Such references provide evidence of the “mobilizing power” (Bourdieu, 1991, p.194 ) of the press.
first time between cohorts tested in 2008 and again in 2010 overlaid previous discourses of educational failure with a new discourse of “improvement” and the failure of Australian students to improve. The release of PISA results in December, 2010, revealing that Chinese students had ‘blitzed their debut performance’, ‘topping the global league tables’ (Harrison, 2010h) located these discourses of educational failure in a global context.

In this period, the MySchool story was influenced by journalistic field-effects, notably the search for the ‘newest’ news (Bourdieu, 1998, p.6), and by the response of the educational policy field to perceived media intrusions. At the same time, effects also occurred as a ‘cross field consequence of particular events’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714) in the political field and in the fields of education and educational policy, and as a result of the way the press reported on these. The unfolding Gonski review, the federal election of August, 2010, the release of PISA results in December, 2010 and the story of the BER, which received extensive coverage in The Australian, had multiple and complex effects on the MySchool story. Untangling these reinforces the need for policy analysis to be attentive to the interaction of policies within and across fields (Taylor et al, 1997, p.16), and to the ways in which events interact with policies and with press reporting on them. This chapter seeks to unpack those connections and their effects on the MySchool story in the second extended period investigated.

9.2 The role of the press in critiquing government

Both The Age and The Australian played an important role in this period in critiquing preferred government discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement by continuing to highlight flaws in ACARA’s ICSEA and emphasizing inaccuracies in the proposed financial data to be presented on the website. Reports conveyed the view that ACARA and, by implication, the Federal Government, were not displaying the transparency they expected of schools and teachers. This noticeable shift, particularly in The Australian which had earlier been ‘fulsome in its praise’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130) of MySchool, not only constituted significant criticism of government at a time when it required press support, but also illustrated Bourdieu’s (1998, p.6) notion of ‘permanent amnesia’.

The Australian highlighted ‘the shortcomings of MySchool’ by exposing questionable “like school” comparisons (Ferrari, 2010m); ‘obtaining’ a report provided to principals which revealed
‘that only about 78 percent of parents across the nation gave the required details’ (Ferrari, 2010o) necessary to construct the ICSEA; referencing the Senate report’s finding that the website was ‘bedevilled by unreliable and inaccurate data’ (Ferrari, 2010r) and reporting calls from ‘education experts’ for the board of ACARA ‘to step aside if issues raised over the publishing of incorrect data are not resolved’ (Vasek, 2010a). It also described the decision to delay the launch of *MySchool2.0* as ‘a blow to ACARA’s credibility and its technical expertise’ (Ferrari & Vasek, 2010a).

In *The Age*, ‘serious concerns about the site’s accuracy’ (Topsfield, 2010f) were revealed in a page 1 report which described these ‘mounting concerns’ as ‘an embarrassment for the Gillard Government’ (Topsfield, 2010f), highlighting the capacity of the press, even in the supposedly objective terrain of the news report, to ‘act as a check on the powerful’ (Schultz, 1998, p.52). Garrett’s ‘forced’ concession ‘that financial data for some private schools contained serious errors’ (Topsfield, 2010g) also received front page coverage in *The Age* which, by February, 2011 described the *MySchool* website as ‘troubled’ rather than ‘controversial’ and reminded readers of its own role in highlighting concerns by pointing out that ‘*The Age* had highlighted bizarre anomalies in the rankings’ (Topsfield, 2011i). Thus the press position on *MySchool* had seemingly shifted. Most noticeable in *The Australian*, this shift appeared driven by both structural and event effects (Rawolle, 2007) and was politically damaging for the Gillard Government as it sought re-election.

### 9.3 Policy as political weapon

When *MySchool* was launched in January, 2010, the issues around national testing and reporting were fiercely debated. By August, the website had become a data source for politicians and others to inform new policies as both major parties announced education policies which built on *MySchool* and sought to improve educational “standards” by tightening accountability requirements on schools and teachers and rewarding teacher “performance”. That these policies had been enabled by *MySchool* was acknowledged by *The Australian* when it described them as a ‘natural flow-on from the publication of test results’ on the website (Ferrari, 2010e). ALP pre-election education proposals included greater autonomy for school principals, bonuses for “top” teachers and cash rewards for schools who improved literacy, numeracy and attendance. These policies not only reflected new national accountabilities’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130) but constituted a
‘reform “package”’ (Ball, 2003, p.215) which constructed teachers as ‘individuals who calculate about themselves, “add value” to themselves, improve their productivity (and) strive for excellence” (Ball, 2003, p.217).

During the election campaign, ‘the media’s role as negotiator of public consent for political decisions’ (Hjarvard, 2013, p.55) was evident in the ways in which *The Age* and *The Australian* sought to oppose or support the major political parties and their education agendas and thus potentially influence voters. Such negotiations occurred in both overt and covert ways - through commentary (particularly at editorial level) on the policies of the major parties; through the various ways political agents were represented (or not), and through the voices foregrounded and backgrounded in news reports. The ‘political importance of the media’ (Hjarvard, 2013, p.42), their capacity to intervene in the political field and the subsequent mediatization (Rawolle, 2005, p.723) of *MySchool* which occurred had important ‘cross-field’ effects (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) for the educational policy field.

That Gillard had formerly been Education Minister assumed particular importance in reporting on the election campaign. Labor’s proposals were firmly aligned in all three newspapers with Gillard, whose former status as Education Minister was repeatedly referenced. In *The Australian*, positive references to Gillard’s achievements in implementing *MySchool* became evidence of her leadership capacity and, indeed, of her Prime Ministerial worth. She had ‘changed the educational landscape’ in Australia, as demonstrated by her introduction of national testing and national reporting (Ferrari, 2010b). *MySchool* was Gillard’s ‘foremost’ reform, and she was given credit for her ‘success’ in introducing it, despite significant opposition from the education sector (Ferrari, 2010b). She was similarly praised for implementing a ‘transparency agenda’ which aimed to ‘shine a light’ on ‘underperformance in the school system’ (Ferrari & Maher, 2010b), and commended for having tackled ‘some of the biggest bogeys in education in Labor’s first term of government’ (Ferrari, 2010e). In contrast, while *The Age* described education as Gillard’s ‘preferred policy turf’ (Harrison & Welch, 2010), it also reminded readers that NAPLAN was initiated by the Howard Government (Harrison, 2010a), while acknowledging Labor’s ‘achievement’ in actually getting ‘done what the Coalition failed to deliver’ (Harrison, 2010a).
During the federal election campaign, press reliance on stories sourced from media releases (Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005a, p.768) emanating from a centralised source created a ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.25) of information in which one politician ultimately had the ‘monopoly on the legitimate point of view’(Bourdieu, 1996b, p.377). This pattern of reporting had the side-effect of ‘strengthening...the policy authority of (particular) politicians’ and enabling their ‘prescriptive’ and tight control over a narrower education agenda (Knight & Lingard, 1997, pp.32-33). While news reports about the ALP’s education policies inevitably quoted Gillard, Gillard in turn repeatedly referenced MySchool as evidence of her leadership skills. She commented, in relation to her party’s principal autonomy proposal, that while there will be ‘people around the country who will say this can’t be done. That’s exactly what they said about MySchool and the national curriculum’ (Hudson, 2010c). Gillard’s response to questions about resistance from the states was that ‘she had tackled the “too hard basket” as Education Minister by introducing a national curriculum, ushering in a new era of transparency with the MySchool website and pushing for quality teaching’ (Ferrari & Maher, 2010a). Her repeated references to MySchool not only increased her political capital, presenting her as a strong and decisive leader, but had the side-effect of entrenching national testing and reporting by removing it as a source of policy debate and re-configuring it as a political weapon. Sections of the press were complicit in this strengthening of Gillard’s ‘policy authority’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, pp.32-3) by effectively ‘consecrating’ (Bourdieu, 1996b, p.102) her and, therefore, her policies.

The editorial columns of both The Age and The Australian judged the education policies of the major parties based on their own agendas around education. Such judgements revealed ‘the political leanings’ of each newspaper (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004, p.59), confirming the editorial format as a ‘precise barometer’ of a ‘newspaper’s position on political’ questions (Santo, 1994, p.94). The Australian actively supported ALP proposals which endorsed its own campaign for higher standards and, in so doing, lent powerful support to the government as it sought to secure votes. In effect, what occurred in this newspaper was a variation of the ‘game of mirrors’ Bourdieu (1998, p.24) describes, in which the newspaper’s support for ALP policy produced (for voters) ‘a formidable effect of mental closure’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.24). Gillard’s proposal to increase school principals’ autonomy was supported because it would ‘enhance’ the lifting of education standards which, as ‘this newspaper has reported and argued for a couple of decades’, is an ‘urgent need’ (Editorial, 2010g). It was, according to Ferrari (2010c), ‘the missing link in
Julia Gillard’s education revolution’. More ‘rigorous testing and transparent reporting’ was described as an essential building block in the struggle to improve standards (Editor, 2010g). Principal autonomy ‘would enhance that vital process’ (Editorial, 2010g). The ALP’s proposed bonus pay scheme for teachers was similarly praised (Editorial, 2010h) while national accreditation standards for teachers were applauded as a ‘major breakthrough’ (Editorial, 2010i; 2011b). Moreover, after ‘years of campaigning for higher standards in primary and secondary classrooms, The Australian particularly welcome(d) the move to ensure trainee primary teachers have completed Year 12 with results in the top 30 percent of students in English and maths’ (Editorial, 2010i). Such comments not only reveal the media’s role in ‘shaping the public’s understanding of education policy’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007, p.2) but confirm that some newspapers are highly active in seeking ‘to influence policy development’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71).

While The Age was equally active in mobilising support for its educational agenda/s and indeed continued to offer support for national testing and reporting, it discursively positioned schools and teachers in very different ways, actively campaigning for more equitable school funding, particularly for disadvantaged government schools, and consistently arguing for governments to be as accountable for educational outcomes as they expect teachers to be. The editorial comment ‘The Age has consistently argued that the (school funding) formula is inequitable as it has delivered too great a share of funds to the nation’s richest schools’ (Editorial, 2010d) suggested significant pre-election criticism of the Federal Government. Implied criticism of Labor’s $388 million plan to provide school ‘incentives’ of up to $100,000 in exchange for improvements in literacy, numeracy and attendance rates (Murphy, 2010a) was apparent in a page 1 news report describing the policy as being ‘pitched at the families that applauded the accountability culture encouraged by the government’s MySchool website’ (Murphy, 2010a). While The Australian also provided page 1 coverage of this story (Franklin, 2010a), it attributed an entirely different slant by describing it as seeking to ‘consolidate Ms Gillard’s credentials as a reformist in education, focused on improving school standards’ (Franklin, 2010a). Thus, while MySchool and new accountability regimes derived from it were presented by The Australian as Gillard’s political salvation, The Age provided an alternative reading. In its Education supplement, it privileged the views of U.S. researcher, Drew Gitomer, who offered criticism by commenting that ‘policymakers should trust teachers to develop professional standards, rather than imposing standards and bonus schemes on them’ (Ryan, 2010).
The role of *The Age* in privileging ‘intellectual discourse ...one of the most authentic forms of resistance to manipulation’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.11) was evidenced also in the selection of external commentators given voice in this period. On August 16th, for example, just five days before the federal election, Professor Richard Teese’s (2010a) scathing assessment of the commonality in education policies between the two Federal parties provided a damning indictment of educational policy directions in Australia. Teese’s (2010a) criticism of the federal government’s dependence on policies emanating from the United States was particularly harsh, evident in his description of the ALP as ‘scavenging on the scrapheap of failed educational reform.’

It is noteworthy that while *The Age* and *The Australian* were far more active than the *Herald Sun* throughout the election campaign in informing their readers about the education policies of both major parties and, indeed, in ‘re-presenting’ Julia Gillard, it was to the *Herald Sun* that Gillard chose to contribute a piece on the day of the Federal election in which she emotively commented on her ‘lifelong belief in the power of hard work and education to transform lives’ (Gillard, 2010c)

9.4 The release of NAPLAN results – the failure of Australian students to “improve”

The release of NAPLAN results in September, 2010 led the *Herald Sun* and *The Australian* to emphasize the failure of Australian students and “standards” to ‘improve’ ‘at the expected rate’ (Ferrari, 2010h; Masanauskas, 2010a), fuelling a relentless “improvement-drive” which consolidated the performance-based policies of both major parties during the previous month’s federal election and, in *The Australian*, re-introduced calls for greater scrutiny of teachers.

The effect was to overlay past media discourses of educational failure based on declining academic standards (Ball, 1990, p.25; Kenway, 1990, p.192) with a new “profit-based” dimension derived from “improvement”. This ultimately ‘consecrated’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.58) the market by requiring schools, teachers and indeed state governments to show “improvement” or profit. A news report in *The Australian*, for example, warning that the QLD government needs to ‘demonstrate continued improvement if the state is to catch up with better performing states’ (Lim, 2010) assigned to education the ‘ethics of competition and performance’ (Ball, 2003,
p.218). An editorial (2010j) similarly presented the states as competitors, describing ‘all states, but especially QLD, WA and the NT’ as needing to do ‘a lot of work to ... ensure more of their students master basic skills’. The AEU alluded to this trend in its submission to the Senate investigation, commenting on the damaging effects of ‘competition-induced pressure between jurisdictions to perform in NAPLAN tests’ (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.43).

In The Australian in particular, this reporting pattern fuelled recurring discourses of derision (Kenway, 1990, p.191) around (under)performing teachers, simultaneously placing all teachers ‘under surveillance’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2003, p.593). One editorial, for example, described the ‘long overdue’ ‘transparent reporting’ of results on MySchool as having ‘shone a light on the skills of teachers as well as students’ (Editor, 2010j). In cautioning that it is a ‘serious concern that so many children are falling below acceptable standards’ and warning that ‘No government, federal or state, can afford their focus to be distracted from further improvements’ (Editor, 2010j), The Australian assumed the ‘watchdog role of the news media in a representative democracy’(Schultz, 1998, p.10), ‘man(ning) the moral barricades’(Cohen, 2002, p.1) of a “standards” panic.

Even when ‘improvement’ had occurred, The Australian and the Herald Sun sought angles to suggest otherwise. The Weekend Australian’s page one report, while acknowledging that ‘primary school children performed above expectations’, emphasized that high school students were ‘not improving at the expected rate’ (Ferrari, 2010h). In pointing to falling NAPLAN results in ‘some’ Victorian schools, ‘despite a big investment by the Government to improve performance’ (Masanauskas, 2010a), the Herald Sun implied that “value for money” had not been achieved by the education sector. Despite acknowledging that ‘Victorian children are among the nation’s brightest’, the focus of the Herald Sun’s reporting was on how ‘some scores have declined across all year levels since 2008’ (Masanauskas, 2010c), and on how Victorian schools were ‘falling behind the rest of the country in the rate of improvement made by students’ (Nowell, 2010a). This failure to improve became a source of political advancement in the lead up to the Victorian state election in November, 2010, with Opposition education spokesman, Martin Dixon emphasizing that ‘Victoria’, (my italics) ‘had failed to improve in 16 of 20 test categories since 2008, and had gone backwards in more areas than any other state or territory’ (Masanauskas, 2010c). Dixon utilised market-sensitivity (Hjarvard, 2013, p.50) to emphasize
that this was despite Premier Brumby spending ‘well over $1.2 billion on literacy and numeracy programs’ which ‘have failed most Victorian students according to Naplan’ (Masanauskas, 2010c). “Improvement” thus became a kind of profit-margin judged against government (ie taxpayer) investment, so privileging the market and performativity (Ball, 2003, p.215) and positioning teachers in a new kind of currency exchange, exemplified in Gillard’s announcement, during the federal election campaign, that her government’s plan to pay teacher bonuses was not only ‘a transformative education plan’ but a ‘transformative economic plan’ (Ferrari & Maher, 2010b).

9.5 The location of Australian education within a global field of performance comparison (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010)

The release of PISA results in December, 2010, located Australia’s increasingly ‘national system’ of education within both ‘a global system’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.56) and a ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). This found Australia wanting, intensifying discourses of failure. Moreover, China’s success in displacing Finland as the highest performing nation on PISA strengthened the claims of the pro-national-testing-and-reporting lobby by undercutting the anti-testing arguments of some educators who, in arguing against high-stakes testing, frequently cited Finland’s ‘indisputably impressive’ PISA results (SEEWRRC, 2010, p.49), pointing out that that nation does not have full cohort high-stakes testing (2).

Significant discursive differences between The Age and The Australian were apparent in their reporting on PISA. In The Australian, the nation’s ‘teenagers’ were ‘falling behind the rest of the world’ (Ferrari,2010p), while Australia was ‘only one of five countries, and the only high-performing nation, to record a drop in student scores over the past nine years’ (Ferrari, 2010p). In addition to reporting which emphasized national failure, four pieces by external commentators collectively created a ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 2002, p.1), manufacturing a sense of crisis around declining literacy and numeracy standards (Kenway, 1990) and thus strengthening The Australian’s campaign for greater school and teacher accountability via performance.

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2. See, for example, Professor Brian Caldwell’s submission to the Senate investigation committee (SEEWRC, 2010, pp.49-50).
measurement. Those given voice included academics associated with organisations with particular “improvement” agendas: ACER’s Chief Executive, Professor Geoff Masters; Centre for Independent Studies Research Fellow, Jennifer Buckingham and the Grattan Institute’s Ben Jensen. Liberal politician, Alan Tudge, also contributed.

This commentary not only strengthened The Australian’s stance but increased the capital of some academics, like Masters, whose policy authority was advanced not only by national testing regimes and the ensuing efforts of state governments to improve “their” results in response to ‘new national accountabilities’ (Lingard, 2010, p.130), but also by the media’s reporting on these trends. Masters, for example, was commissioned by the QLD government to help improve the state’s NAPLAN results in 2008. He was later ‘enlisted’ to assist NT principals to ‘boost test scores’ (Schliebs, 2010a) and was quoted in The Australian praising QLD’s improvement in 2010 (Lim, 2010). In his commentary piece, Masters (2010a) implied that ‘Australia’s’ decline in reading levels over the past nine years, as demonstrated by PISA, signalled a need to attract ‘more able people into teaching’. Buckingham (2010a) laid the blame for the ‘significant decline’ in performance with ‘education policy over the past decade’, while Jensen (2010b) argued the economist’s view and echoed the ALP’s education revolution policy texts, appealing to readers’ fears by asking ‘what happens when China’s workforce is better educated than Australia’s?’ Jensen and his organisation would later use China’s PISA success as the basis of a report arguing the need for Australia to improve its educational performance by emulating the strategies used in East Asia (Jensen et al, 2012). Jensen, moreover, was a significant voice in the Senate report into the administration and reporting of NAPLAN where he advocated for value added measures of school performance (SEEWRRC, 2010, pp.71; 52).

Tudge’s (2010) opinion piece developed the theme of underperforming teachers as the cause of failure by arguing the need for ‘tough decisions’ ‘to make Australian teaching world class’, the ‘most contentious’ of which ‘is to fire bad teachers’, a view clearly endorsed by The Australian. Such views presented ‘teachers and schools and their practices as being the sole solutions’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.105) to “underperformance”, supporting the view that media representations of education often ‘reinforce public perceptions concerning the causes of school failure as attributable to failing teachers and/or school structures rather than contextual factors’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007, p.2).
While *The Age* also reported significant declines in maths and reading in Australia’s test performance (Harrison, 2010h), it acknowledged that the PISA scores of Australian students remained ‘among the world’s highest’ (Harrison, 2010h). Moreover, and in contrast to *The Australian*, the two opinion pieces by external commentators published in *The Age* notably critiqued current directions in education policy. Bonnor (2010) urged against ‘a moral panic’ which, he argued, would simply propel governments ‘into silly, unproven and populist “reform”’. His claim that ‘We are almost three decades into creating a lopsided free market of diversity, competition and choice’ exposed the current ‘economization of education’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). The blunt assessment that it ‘hasn’t worked….school competition has not delivered any significant increases in quality’, coupled with the view that the only ‘success’ *MySchool* has achieved is that it has laid ‘bare many of the regressive features of our system’ (Bonnor, 2010) sat in stark contrast to *The Australian*’s effusive praise for national testing and reporting. Teacher-educator Amanda McGraw’s (2011) thoughtful feature in the *Education Age*, inspired by her attendance at an international conference on teacher education in Hong Kong, similarly invited critical reflection on policy directions in Australia. McGraw (2011) challenged the view that Australian education is “failing”, emphasized the policy shift in Australian education ‘to what can be measured because we want to compete in high stakes tests’ and commented that the Australian ‘educational landscape is becoming so murky that we risk losing sight of what is important’ (McGraw, 2011); a refreshing acknowledgement of the importance of the wider purposes of education (Taylor et al, 1997) entirely lacking in *The Australian*’s external commentary pieces.

While the *Herald Sun* surprisingly provided no coverage of PISA results it did, in October, report that the Trends in International Mathematics and Science showed that ‘Australia is falling disastrously behind the rest of the developed world in maths education (Nowell, 2010b), thus emphasizing national failure on the global stage.

### 9.6 The ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.25) of discourses in press reporting on education policy

Policies do not ‘enter a social or institutional vacuum’ (Ball, 1993, p.11) or operate as separate entities. Rather, they interact both within and across fields and within past and present ideological, social and political contexts. These notions of continuity, context and interaction
also seem to apply to newspaper reporting on policy. That is to say, policies do not enter a press vacuum. A prior history informs the stances taken by newspapers. Moreover, the stances taken by a newspaper in their reporting on one policy frequently inform and influence their reporting on other policies in what amounts to a ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.25) of discourses which accumulate considerable discursive weight. Often, it seems, policy reporting becomes a vehicle for the press to have its say about what policy ought to be.

The ways in which the press select, develop and present ‘for public consumption what the discursive themes of policy will be’ (Falk, 1994, p.11) are illustrated by The Australian’s extensive and highly critical coverage of the Federal Government’s BER program which not only revealed that newspaper’s political/electoral allegiances (Macmillan, 2002, p.35) and its efforts to intervene in the political field, but also influenced its coverage of MySchool. Equally, the preferred government discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement constructed by MySchool became a weapon used by The Australian to attack the BER.

The BER delivered some 23,670 construction projects to Australian schools at a cost of $16.2 billion (AAP, 2011b). Claims of mismanagement and the misuse of millions of dollars in the program (Franklin, 2009c) led, in June, 2009 to a Commonwealth Auditor-General’s investigation. In April, 2010, just three months after the launch of MySchool, and in the same month that the Federal Government announced the Gonski review, retired investment banker, Brad Orgill, was appointed by Gillard to head a taskforce to investigate these complaints. By July, 2010, 240 formal complaints had been made. Despite attempts by the Coalition to implement a full judicial inquiry (Vasek, 2010f), the final taskforce report released in July, 2011 concluded that despite ‘clusters of poor quality outcomes’ and the disenfranchisement of school communities, ‘the rollout of the program was, overall, successful’ (AAP, 2011b). Throughout the period investigated, The Australian pursued this story relentlessly, with various peaks in coverage corresponding with these ‘events’. In June, 2009, for example, BER stories accounted for 65 percent of The Australian’s total education coverage. By way of contrast, in the same month, only six of The Age’s 48 education stories and two of the Herald Sun’s 34 stories reported on the BER which was, in general, an ‘absence’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.28) in these newspapers.
News reports and commentary in *The Australian* focused on BER failures, appearing in full page (and sometimes double-page) spreads, tagged with the provocative headline ‘School Stimulus Debacle’. Articles were accompanied by online links directing readers to ‘Visit our special section on the schools stimulus debacle’ (Franklin, 2009d). Reports emphasized complaints about rigid guidelines, price gouging, unrealistic deadlines and claims of ‘bungling, bullying and dubious accounting’ (Wallace, 2009). These claims intensified during the federal election campaign of August, 2010, where BER stories accounted for 57 percent of *The Australian’s* education coverage, with potentially damaging consequences for PM Julia Gillard who, as former Education Minister, was seen as directly responsible for the program’s implementation. *The Australian* reported, for example, that almost $2 billion had been wasted in the eastern states (Klan, 2010) and emphasized various ‘bungsles’, such as schools earmarked for closure receiving significant grants, or the construction of poorly planned buildings (Rout, 2009). The political significance of *The Australian’s* campaign against the BER during the federal election campaign was ironically highlighted by former Liberal Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser, who commented on the ‘pressure from News Corporation’ which ‘hammered’ the ‘Failure, Failure, Failure’ of the BER when, in fact, the Orgill report revealed ‘2.7 percent complaints, 97 percent success’ (Cut & Paste, 2010).

*The Australian’s* reporting on the BER enabled it to influence and, potentially, to also construct education policy agendas (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004, p.362). Editorials, news reports and opinion pieces not only attacked BER mismanagement, but called into question the ALP’s wider education policies, particularly in regard to its “education revolution”. In doing so, the newspaper mobilised discourses related to choice, teacher quality and standards, thus increasing support for the discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement exemplified by *MySchool*. A ‘real education revolution’, for example, would ‘give parents of students in the state system the comparative data on classroom performance they need to decide which school is best for their child’ (Editor, 2009n). Similarly, a ‘real education revolution would improve the quality of teacher training’ and ‘increase the income of elite teachers (Editor, 2009o). Moreover, the BER paid ‘scant attention to teaching quality’ at a time ‘when educational standards need to be raised’ (Editor, 2009p) and failed ‘to address the most crucial aspect of educational performance, teaching quality’ (Editor, 2009u). Reporting on the BER thus became an opportunity for *The Australian* to advance its own ‘policy position’ on education.
The transformative work of the media: its capacity ‘to do something distinctive to (that is, to ‘mediatize’) particular processes, objects and fields’ (Couldry, 2008, p.376), can be gauged here by the response of the political field to *The Australian’s* BER coverage. After attacking that coverage in parliament in June, 2009, Julia Gillard read a statement from a school in Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s electorate which praised the school stimulus program. According to *The Australian*, just hours before, the PM’s electorate office had telephoned the principal to ask him for the letter (Ferrari & Franklin, 2009). This action was presented by *The Australian* as a direct response to a critical report they had published the previous day (Ferrari & Franklin, 2009). The actions of Gillard and of Rudd’s electoral office in response to reports in *The Australian* suggest both an altering of the political field’s autonomy and a change in its operations. Similarly, on June 30, 2009, when *The Australian* reported that the Auditor General would examine the BER (Franklin, 2009c), the newspaper pointedly highlighted its own role in revealing ‘widespread concern about the scheme’ (Franklin, 2009c) thereby constructing itself as playing a key role in instigating the inquiry.

Reporting on the BER also became an opportunity for *The Australian* to denigrate its competitors and advance its position in a competition for ‘distinction within the field’ (Hallan, 2005, p.235). In August, 2010, education writer Justine Ferrari (2010rr) commented that *The Australian* was ‘the only newspaper to have consistently asked where the money was going’. During the election campaign, immediately after the release of Orgill’s 2010 Interim Report, *The Australian* reproduced 17 headlines of BER stories it had published, under the banner ‘History of a debacle – How *The Australian* has led the way on the BER story’ (Unauthored, 2010a). Other newspapers were described as ‘largely missing in action’ in ‘applying the blowtorch to a massive government program’ (Elliott, 2010), so much so that during the federal election campaign, the editor (2010k) commented that the ‘BER saga has imposed an alarming reality about Australian journalism – that the balance between those scrutinising government and political minders has swung against the public interest ... For all the speculation about the future of the media, technology is not the biggest threat. It is the failure of too many journalists to break news, to the detriment of the public interest’ (Editor, 2010k).

In October, 2010, *The Australian* was named ‘Newspaper of the Year’ at the News Awards and journalist Anthony Klan won the Sir Keith Murdoch award for excellence in journalism for his
‘relentless pursuit of the waste and mismanagement’ of the BER (Lower, 2010). The newspaper used the occasion to strike a blow against competitors, observing that ‘While the BER story was largely ignored by other media outlets, The Australian published more than 200 articles about the program, shifting public opinion and forcing the federal government to launch a $14 million inquiry into the scheme’ (Lower, 2010). In November, 2010, following Orgill’s appearance before a Senate Inquiry, The Australian commented on the role it had played in ‘unveiling the waste, price-gouging and inefficiency of the BER’ and vowed to ‘pursue the fallout until the last dollar is spent’ (Editor, 2010w)

9.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that in the months leading to the release of MySchool2.0, press emphasis on the newsworthy aspects of the policy, notably the release of school financial data, backgrounded discussion of the effects of national testing and reporting. In essence, an effect of the journalistic field contributed to the policy’s entrenchment by removing its core aspects from public contestation, producing effects on the education field. This policy’s entrenchment, I have argued, was aided by the increasing use of MySchool data by politicians and bureaucrats to inform new policies.

I have shown how specific national and global ‘events’, emanating from both the political and policy fields, had multiple and complex effects on how the MySchool story was reported in the press. I have suggested that this provides evidence of the need for analysis to be attentive to the interaction of policies and events within and across fields. Moreover, as I have argued, policies do not enter a press vacuum. A prior history informs the stances taken by newspapers in their reporting on policy, ultimately producing in some newspapers a ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.25) of discourses. This concept was illustrated through an account of The Australian’s reporting on the BER.
10.1 Introduction

Moore (2011a) argues that the ALP’s intention, in developing MySchool, was ‘to open up state education bureaucracies to the same consumer accountability that paying customers had long insisted on from private students’. As I have argued earlier, this agenda was largely ‘hijacked’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.720) by the newspapers in this study as a ‘cross-field consequence’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714) of field intrusions. Following the launch of MySchool, reporting in The Age and The Australian unexpectedly called into question the “value for money” offered by private education, exposing the ‘consumer accountability’ that private school parents had ‘long insisted’ on (Moore, 2011a) as a myth, challenging past discourses of success and failure attached to the private and public education sectors and unexpectedly creating advocacy for the “value” of public education.

The inclusion of schools’ financial details on MySchool2.0 strengthened this reporting ‘template’ (Warmington & Murphy, 2004, p.286). The ‘inevitable’ (Moore, 2011a) comparisons that followed between the public, private and Catholic school sectors renewed the earlier press emphasis on wealthy private schools that did not necessarily produce better test results than their poorer state counterparts. Press coverage implied that if money did not “buy” better literacy and numeracy results, then wealthy private schools could not justify the exorbitant fees they charged and the sizeable ‘taxpayer’ funds they received, a point that Gillard appeared to predict when she commented that the data on MySchool2.0 would “smash to the ground” preconceptions held about Australian education (Harrison, 2011a).

This indirectly assisted the public school lobby’s campaign for a fairer funding model, potentially influencing the ongoing Gonski review by constructing a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ (Kenway, 1990, p.168) for private education which forced the sector to defend its “value”. Thus ‘processes involving the mass media’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.73) potentially altered the operations of this sub-field by calling into question its “value” for “consumers”; that is, the ‘choosing parent and student market’ (Thomson, 2005, p.753).
Many of the arguments Kenway (1990) identifies which were used by the New Right in the 1980s to actively promote private schooling were re-heard in 2010 and 2011 to defend it. Earlier claims that private-school parents ‘saved other tax-paying parents money’ by sparing governments ‘the cost of educating private school children in government schools’ were underpinned by the ‘veiled threat that reduced funds would result in private school students returning to the state system en masse, causing an additional financial burden on the public’ (Kenway, 1990, p.182). Kenway’s (1990, p.169) assertion that The Australian actively promulgated New Right thinking, based on the core concept of privatization and the key ethic of “possessive individualism”, seems true thirty years later, as evidenced by that newspaper arguing for a continuation of the current school funding model, amid claims that the parents of private-school children effectively subsidize the public system (Editorial, 2011j).

In contrast to 2010, the reporting focus of March, 2011 did not appear to be a consequence of political intrusions into the field of journalism but rather, a product of the ‘temporality of journalistic practice’ and its ‘unquestioned bias in favour of the news that is the newest’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72). So the two newsworthy aspects of the policy’s second version, school funding and finance and the ability, in 2011, to compare the “value” added, and therefore “improvement” of schools through comparisons of cohorts tested in 2008 and again in 2010, were emphasized. This had important ‘effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714) on how the policy was represented in the press– the chief one being to marketise education by assigning to it ‘the ethics of competition and performance’ (Ball, 2003, p.218).

Press ‘pick-ups’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71) of the policy’s ‘increasing emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.27) in the delivery of education were evident in a news report in The Australian which commented that the data on MySchool ‘raises questions about the value for taxpayers’ money achieved in the nation’s school system’ (Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011). An effect of this focus was a relative press silence around national testing and reporting, positioning the core elements of the policy as a back-story to the “new news” about finance and “improvement”, a field-effect contributing to policy entrenchment.
10.2 The orienting role of the press

10.2.1 Introduction

Reid (2010) argues that the ‘public purposes of education have been marginalised’ in the last twenty years in Australia. In his view, during the years of the Howard government (1996-2007), a ‘dominant emphasis on education for private purposes’ constructed education as a commodity to be bought and sold in an education market (Reid, 2010). While the policy emphasis of the Rudd government seemed to have returned to education for public purposes, Reid (2010) argues that it had actually moved towards the ‘constrained public purpose’ of ‘education for economy’ through a commitment to markets and support for independent stand-alone schools competing in that market (Reid, 2010). MySchool, in Reid’s (2010) view, enabled this purpose by assuming ‘that people should shop around for schools, like plasma TV’s, thus creating the impression that education is a commodity rather than a public good’.

The press play an important role in orienting the ‘provision of education towards certain goals and purposes’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1). West & Pennell (2000,p.425) acknowledge this for the U.K. in pointing out that the publication of school performance tables ‘has re-oriented the provision of education in particular ways and has influenced its goals and purposes’. In voicing ‘a distinct position’ (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.7) on MySchool2.0, the newspapers in this study oriented education towards either public or private purposes, potentially opening it ‘to the public domain as a market’ (Meadmore, 2001, p.27).

10.2.2 The ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.76) of press selectivity in reporting on MySchool2.0.

The headlines of news reports in The Age and the Herald Sun following MySchool2.0’s launch on March 4, 2011, emphasized the “great divide” between public and private education in Australia (Harrison, 2011a; Topsfield, 2011h; Barry, 2011a; Barry & Johnston, 2011). The implication that elite private schools were not providing “value for money” confirms that news reports do far more than simply relay events and are often ‘political stances by which the news event gets framed’ (Macmillan, 2002, p.36). Bourdieu’s (1998, p.72) concept of ‘permanent amnesia’, which he saw as a product of the pace and ‘temporality of journalistic practice’, could be seen as having an internal effect here, enabling The Age to provide a particular ‘gloss’ which
allowed its ‘political/electoral allegiances’ (Macmillan, 2002, p.35) to public education, and to education for ‘public purposes’ (Reid, 2010), to be advanced by largely ignoring the fact, as it had reported, that Victorian independent schools had achieved the highest NAPLAN results in the nation (see Harrison, 2011b).

The provocative title of the page 1 Age report ‘Doing well in Footscray doesn’t cost $14m’ (Topsfield, 2011d) encapsulated the newspaper’s seemingly hostile attitude to elite private schools, particularly the exclusive Geelong Grammar, to which the $14 million of the title referred (1). The stark contrast between the $20,452 Geelong Grammar spent per student in 2009, together with $7.8 million in capital works, and the $8,503 and $174,000 spent at a Catholic primary school in the relatively disadvantaged Melbourne suburb of Footscray highlighted, as Topsfield (2011d) pointed out, the ‘yawning resources chasm between schools’. The comment that MySchool reveals that ‘money does not necessarily buy better literacy and numeracy (Topsfield, 2011d) was supported by evidence that year 5 students at the Catholic school ‘outperformed their peers at Geelong Grammar in four out of the five NAPLAN tests’ (Topsfield, 2011d). In critiquing the dominant policy ‘emphasis on education for private purposes’ (Reid, 2010) that had enabled such glaring inequities, this piece highlighted how the ‘expression of judgements and opinions....pervades’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.70) even ostensibly objective news reports. A second Age article by the same author “named” a number of Victorian government schools achieving excellent results to make the same point: that ‘high fee-paying non-government schools are not necessarily the top-performing schools in NAPLAN tests’ (Topsfield, 2011e), a theme further explored in the Education Age (see Milburn, 2011a).

The same kind of covert bias in favour of public schools was evident in the Herald Sun in a report on its “league tables” commending two select-entry secondary schools which ‘dominated rankings’ (Barry & Johnston, 2011) but making no mention of ‘elite’ private schools which also scored highly, suggesting a ‘selective sample’ of reporting (Mazzoleni & Schulz, 1999, p.5). More explicit bias was apparent in Herald-Sun journalist Susie O’Brien’s (2011) “naming and

(1) In an interview with an Age journalist, I broached the idea of the newspaper having waged a campaign against Geelong Grammar and was met with a hostile response and the blunt comment ‘there’s no way that we’d ever wage a campaign against a particular school’ (Kean, 2012). In retrospect, I should have framed the question more carefully, or avoided it altogether, though the response pointed to the gap that can exist between a newspaper’s intent and the ‘versions of reality’ (Fairclough, 1995b, pp.103-4) its products construct for its readership.
shaming” of elite private schools. Calling on the Gillard Government ‘to turn off the gravy train for Australia’s richest private schools’, O’Brien (2011) described Geelong Grammar as a ‘bastion of privilege’, contrasting the facilities its students enjoy with those at a nearby government school where ‘ceilings are falling in and walls are rotting’. The question ‘Why are hard-working taxpayers pouring millions of dollars into the coffers of a school like that when some state schools have to fund raise in order to pay their power bills?’ (O’Brien, 2011) positioned readers to feel a sense of outrage.

The media’s focus on the ‘sensational riches at the disposal of some elite private schools’ was, however, criticised by Monash University academic Tony Moore (2011b) who argued that ‘more robust analysis might have made more of the inequity between low and high-fee schools or asked a growing stream of parents why they were abandoning a poorly resourced state system for an equally parsimonious outer suburban or regional independent school’ (Moore, 2011b). While such comments reprimanded the press, implying a lack of intellectual rigour, if we accept Wallace’s (1993, p.322) view that the ‘media inform public opinion’ then public opinion in March, 2011 was clearly positioned to be hostile to elite private schools and the ‘private purposes of education’ (Reid, 2010). The potential ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) of such reporting were conveyed in an interview with a school principal. Strachan (2012) commented on the swift response of a colleague, who was the principal of a private school, after MySchool’s launch:

He had not slept, because he’s in a well-to-do area and the local high school’s results were better than his; his parents were paying $20,000 and he just knew that all of a sudden it was a real game-changer ...and he said, with his tongue in his cheek, but he meant it – “we’re starting practising for NAPLAN from Day 1’ (Strachan, 2012).

10.2.3 The ‘orienting’ role of editorial stances

Editorials in this period again revealed their function as a ‘precise barometer of (each) newspaper’s position on political and social questions’ (Santo, 1994, p.94). While all three newspapers’ editorials on MySchool2.0 focused on school funding, significant differences in the stances taken reflected each newspaper’s wider stances on education, with sharp “political” differences differentiating The Age and The Australian.

The latter offered explicit support for the private school system. In a re-working of Gillard’s ‘shining a light’ metaphor, the revised website was described as having ‘shone a clear light on the controversial issue of school funding’, revealing an ‘overall picture …of fairness and good
value’ (Editorial, 2011j). This notion of “value for money” was used to launch a predictable attack on ‘public sector teacher unions’ and their ‘extravagant and misleading’ claims ‘that non-government schools are bastions of elitism unfairly featherbedded by taxpayers while state schools are short-changed’ (Editorial, 2011j). The editor’s reference to the union’s ‘pathetic complaints about NAPLAN, league tables and the “pressures” of “teaching to the test” trivialised the legitimate concerns of many educators, promoting the ‘myth that opposition to MySchool is synonymous with opposition to accountability and transparency’(Reid, 2010). Congratulating the Gillard government for enabling parents access to ‘information that helps them make informed choices about the best school for their children’ (Editorial, 2011j) privileged the market by supporting a system which allowed ‘consumers to make the “best” choices’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1), in turn constructing education as ‘a commodity rather than a public good’ (Reid, 2010).

In stark contrast, the first of The Age’s three education-related editorials in March, 2011, published three days before the release of MySchool2.0 (Editorial, 2011e), explicitly criticised the Howard government’s SES funding formula. The statement that ‘What is in dispute is not whether non-government schools are entitled to public funds, but whether the system operates equitably – and clearly it does not’ unashamedly advocated for the ‘public purposes of education’ (Reid, 2010), a stance reinforced when The Age later highlighted the ‘gross disparities’ in funding revealed by MySchool (Editorial, 2011f); questioned whether ‘funding arrangements are fair and achieve the best possible returns on investment’ (Editorial, 2011f) and, like The Australian, re-worked Gillard’s ‘shining a light’ metaphor to orient education towards quite different purposes than its competitor. Whereas The Australian described MySchool2.0 as having ‘shone a clear light on the controversial issue of school funding’ (Editor, 2011j) to reveal little need for change, The Age argued the need ‘to turn the spotlight on policy responses to My School’s revelations’ (Editorial, 2011f) thus locating accountability with the political field.

Unlike its competitors, The Age gave continued attention to the publication of league tables by rival newspapers. It pointed out that government schools with poor results or little improvement in literacy and numeracy ‘feel stigmatized’ by this practice, which strips ‘performance of its context of school resources and socio-economic status, the key predictor of educational achievement’ (Editorial, 2011f). It further reinforced that while ‘this newspaper believes strongly
in transparency and accountability for all schools’, it ‘does not produce such rankings’ (Editorial, 2011f), a claim which again secured for *The Age* a ‘profit of distinction’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.55).

In contrast, the *Herald-Sun* adhered to its 2010 reporting ‘template’ (Warmington & Murphy, 2004, p.286) by again publishing a “league table” of Victorian schools (Unauthored, 2011d), together with an eight page supplement listing the NAPLAN results of all Victorian schools for Year 5 and 9 (Unauthored, 2011e). This newspaper offered continued support for national testing and reporting as an effective tool to allow parents to make choices about the best education for their children (Editorial, 2011d). However, in avoiding taking a stand on school funding, by suggesting that this ‘complex’ issue ‘deserves national debate’ (Editorial, 2011d), the newspaper adopted “‘audience rating’ standards of “keep it simple”, “keep it short” (Bourdieu, 1998, p.71), excluding readers from informed policy knowledge.

### 10.2.4 The ‘web of voices’ *(Fairclough, 1995b, p.81)* heard in news reports

The ‘attribution of news statements to authoritative sources’ is, according to Fairclough (1995b, p.93), ‘a key point of the rhetoric of factuality, profoundly affecting the structuring of news texts with respect to the construction of complex embedding relationships between voices’. Table 8 indicates the categories of voices heard as ‘authoritative sources’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.93) in news reports about *MySchool2.0* in March, 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voices heard in <em>MySchool</em> related news reports – March, 2011</th>
<th>Herald Sun</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Australian</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Federal politicians</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State politicians</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Unions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Associations</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principals’ Associations</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent Schools Council</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Catholic Education Commission</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACARA</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education bureaucrats</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Bourdieu’s (1991, p.35) view is that the political field has the ‘monopoly of access’ to the media, while Fairclough (1995b, p.185) observes that the politicians ‘who feature in the media are for
the most part leading members of the main parliamentary political parties’. It is, however, politicians in power who appear to have the ultimate monopoly. The tendency of journalists to ‘consecrate those who are already consecrated’ (Marchetti, 2005, p.78) was again demonstrated by the relative silence of federal politicians in opposition in news reports in March, 2011 compared to the voice of government (2), while the privileging of the ministerial voice was evidenced by the replacement of Julia Gillard with Schools Education Minister, Peter Garrett (3) as the chief political voice heard in news reports about *MySchool2.0*. Garrett’s comments, which invariably focused on the inclusion of school funding and finance data, largely directed press coverage.

That this data was presented as evidence that the government had “delivered” on its ‘commitment to transparency’ (Ferrari, 2011b) suggests the way that action ‘on schools that can be demonstrated as a measurable quantitative effect is taken as effective government and can be represented as such to and in the media’ (Thomson, 2005, p.752). Garrett’s refusal to ‘rule out the possibility some parents would transfer children to different schools after looking at’ *MySchool2.0* (Barry & Johnston, 2011) and his advice to parents ‘unhappy with funding or performance at their children’s schools’ to engage principals in ‘a deep discussion’ (Barry & Johnston, 2011) shifted accountability for policy enactment away from government, enabling them to steer policy at a distance (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.37) while putting the onus ‘squarely on schools, teachers and students to lift their game’ (Meadmore, 2001, p.27).

While Gillard’s voice was significantly constrained in 2011, she was referenced in all three newspapers, generally to serve the political ends of the newspaper. The use of ‘spin’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.321) in *The Australian* editor’s (Editorial, 2011b) compliment to the Gillard Government on its ‘admirably pragmatic and transparent...approach to education reform’ appeared designed to manipulate via flattery, while simultaneously appeasing the private school lobby. This was suggested by the comment that ‘on the basis of their sound track record in striving for better curriculum quality and teaching, thorough testing and transparent reporting,

2. Federal Opposition Education spokesman, Christopher Pyne was quoted once in *The Age*, (Topsfield, 2011d); twice in the *Herald Sun* (Hudson, 2011; Barry & Johnston, 2011) and once in *The Australian*, albeit in a commentary piece (Moore, 2011a). Pyne (2011) did, however, contribute a commentary piece in *The Australian*.

3. Garrett was quoted in four news reports in the *Herald Sun* (Barry, 2011a; Hudson, 2011; Barry, 2011b; Barry & Johnston, 2011); four in *The Age* (Harrison, 2011a; Topsfield, 2011d; 2011c; AAP, 2011a) and two in *The Australian* (Ferrari, 2011a; 2011b). Gillard was quoted in one news report in the *Herald Sun* (Hudson, 2011) and *The Age* (Harrison, 2011a).
there is nothing to suggest that Julia Gillard or Peter Garrett will use the (Gonski) review or the financial data (on MySchool2.0) to upset the broad, effective balance of funding’ (Editorial, 2011b).

The Age editor’s (2011e) quoting of a comment Gillard had made three years earlier, that the SES funding model introduced by the Howard government ‘was one of the most complex and confusing in the developed world’, challenged the idea of ‘permanent amnesia’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72) in journalistic practice by in fact suggesting that ‘news long put aside and forgotten’ can ‘reacquire informational value’ (Luhmann, 2000, p.36) when required for ‘certain purposes’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1). It was re-used strategically here to support the newspaper’s campaign for more equitable funding for public education. O’Brien (2011) similarly drew on the past to argue for funding change, referencing a comment Gillard made in 2000 that the current school funding model ‘makes no allowance for the amassed wealth in a particular school’, a “very big flaw” ... that needs to be addressed’ (O’Brien, 2011).

As Fairclough (1995b, p.81) points out, ‘merely noting which voices are represented and … how much space is given to each’ is insufficient, given that ‘the web of voices is an often subtle ordering and hierarchization of voices’. In Barry’s (2011b) Herald Sun report, for example, Garrett is quoted only in the final paragraph, in represented speech. The bulk of the text privileges the voice of the principal of a high-achieving rural Victorian primary school whose opposition to MySchool’s use for interschool comparisons undercut Garrett’s policy authority. In a second report by the same author (Barry, 2011a), Garrett is the first voice quoted. The remaining voices, representing the Victorian Independent school sector; the AEU and a Catholic school principal who expressed his concern, and was given considerably more space than Garrett to do so, again undercut the Minister’s policy authority. This pattern of juxtaposing Garrett’s comments with the dissenting voices of critics also occurred in other reports (Barry & Johnston, 2011; Topsfield, 2011d) so that the ‘subtle ordering and hierarchization of voices’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.81) actually foregrounded criticism of the government’s reform agenda. Thus, an effect of the field, its conflict rather than cooperation focus (Gerstl-Pepin, 2002, p.43), enabled a kind of ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) in news reports which maintained this policy’s contestation.

The dissenting voices heard; principals, principals’ associations, school sector associations and teacher unions, were largely familiar ones, heard also in 2010, reflecting a media tendency ‘to
restrict the range of interest groups whose views are portrayed’ (Wallace, 1993, p.335). Not all newspapers gave the same voice to dissenters, however. The spokesperson for the AEU’s public advocacy group, ‘Save Our Schools’, for example, quoted in one news report in the Herald Sun (Barry & Johnston, 2011) and two in The Age (Topsfield, 2011e; 2011h) was not heard in The Australian. Thus the claim that ‘MySchool remained highly misleading, harmful and unfair to education’ (Topsfield, 2011e) was not available to The Australian’s readership, suggesting the operation of censorship through the exclusion of some from ‘the places which allow one to speak with authority’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.138).

The covert silencing of dissenting voices also oriented education towards particular purposes. AEU president, Angelo Gavrielatos, for example, was widely quoted in each newspaper voicing opposition to the current school funding model (4). While The Australian adhered to the rules of objective news reporting in giving voice to Gavrielatos in news reports, the union’s stance was criticised in three commentary pieces published in that newspaper (Editorial, 2011b; Bantick 2011; Moore, 2011a). Moore (2011b) also pointed out that the NSW and ACT Independent Education Unions had ‘used My School’s figures to argue the exact opposite (of the AEU) that private schools were getting less when state government money was taken into account’. Such criticisms, particularly when aired by ‘elite voices’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.75) weakened the AEU’s authority, enabling The Australian’s advocacy for the ‘private purposes’ of education (Reid, 2010).

Gerstl-Pepin’s (2007, p.4) observation that ‘often it is not the voice of teachers, administrators, university researchers or minority groups that provide “expert” commentary on education issues in the press’ was borne out by the absence of these voices in news reports in 2011. And, in stark contrast to 2010, parents had very little voice in 2011 as the press pursued other angles (Farouque, 2011; Owen, 2011 provide exceptions). Parent associations were similarly less visible and were heard only in features (5). While principals continued to have a voice, they were heard

4 Gavrielatos was heard in three news reports in the Herald Sun (Hudson, 2011; Barry, 2011a; Barry & Johnston, 2011); three in The Age (Harrison, 2011a; Topsfield, 2011d; Topsfield, 2011h) and three in The Australian (Ferrari, 2011a; 2011b; Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011)

5 The Executive Director of the Australian Parents’ Council was quoted in The Age in a feature article (Milburn, 2011a). The NSW Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations was quoted in a feature in The Australian (Moore, 2011a).

6 Principals voices were heard in five news reports in the Herald Sun (Barry, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d; Barry & Johnston, 2011); seven in The Age (Topsfield, 2011c; 2011d; 2011i; 2011g; Farouque, 2011; Bachelard, 2011; Milburn, 2011b) and two in The Australian (Akerman, 2011a; Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011).
more extensively in the Herald Sun and The Age (6). In general, the principals of government schools were quoted in relation to the good results of their school (Akerman, 2011a; Barry, 2011b; 2011c), while private school principals were again forced to justify either the level of funding they received, or their results (7). Representatives of the Independent sector similarly defended their position of relative privilege (8).

10.2.5 The role of external commentators in advancing press stances on education

McNair (2008, p.114) argues that ‘academics are frequently enlisted (by the press) as commentators on issues and debates related to their fields’. Their years of research and scholarship ‘signify authority in the public sphere’ and engender trust (McNair, 2008, p.114), enabling them to project ‘discursive authority’ (McNair, 2008, p.113). While a relative absence in news reports, academics featured strongly as external commentators in The Age and The Australian in March, 2011. Table 9 reveals their significant role in commenting on education in the quality press across the entire period of the study, and their relative absence in the tabloids.

|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>The Australian</th>
<th>The Age</th>
<th>Herald Sun</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No of external commentators</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>57</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total number of commentary pieces published</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of commentary pieces contributed by:</td>
<td>(i) Academics</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(ii) Politicians &amp; their representatives</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iii) Teachers/School Principals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(iv) Parents/Students</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(v) Sector representatives</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(vi) Other sectors</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(vii) Other</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The practice of academics contributing multiple commentary pieces to newspapers (and, in some cases, to similarly-aligned newspapers) not only enhanced their sphere of influence but potentially enabled them to reap ‘professional rewards’ (McNair, 2008, p.118). In The Age, 18 academics contributed 24 items. This figure was higher in The Australian, with 24 academics

7. See Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011; Barry & Johnston, 2011; Topsfield, 2011d; 2011i; Barry, 2011a
8. See, for example, comments made by the Executive Director of the Independent Schools Council (Harrison, 2011a; Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011) and the Chief Executive of Independent Schools Victoria (Barry, 2011a; Harrison, 2011a).
contributing 44 items.

Conservative commentator Dr Kevin Donnelly, for example, contributed seven commentary pieces in *The Australian*, and three in the *Herald Sun*, where he was the only academic heard. Two letters-to-the-editor by Donnelly were also published in *The Australian*. Blackmore (2006, p.4) has observed the over-representation of Donnelly in the opinion pages of newspapers and pointed to the ways in which such over-representation enhances the capital of the represented agent and, potentially, his/her influence in the educational policy field. During the Howard government era, argue Hattam, Prosser & Brady (2009, p.163; p.168), Donnelly acted as Federal Education Minister, Brendan Nelson’s, ‘media champion’, while ‘simultaneously being paid for providing policy advice’ to Nelson’. Liberal Party member, consultant to both the Kennett and Howard governments (Blackmore, 2006, p.4) and author of *Why our schools are failing* (2004), *Dumbing Down* (2007) and *Australia’s education revolution: how Kevin Rudd won and lost the education wars* (2009), Donnelly directed, during the period analysed, his own “Education Standards Institute”. Its website (http://www.edstandards.com.au) contains numerous references to articles Donnelly has written for *The Australian*, suggesting a mutual benefit for both commentator and newspaper.

Throughout the period analysed, Donnelly was consistently anti-Labor in his commentary pieces, attacking the BER and thus supporting *The Australian*’s stance by twice referring to it as a ‘fiasco’ (Donnelly, 2010a; 2010c) and as doing ‘Little, if anything, to improve student learning’ (Donnelly, 2009g). Donnelly’s (2009a) anti-teacher-union stance also replicated *The Australian*’s views, apparent in his claim that the AEU was ‘more concerned about protecting ineffective schools and underperforming teachers’ than ‘defending the right of every child to an effective and rigorous education’; that the government was more interested in ‘appeasing the AEU and its sympathisers than raising standards by making schools truly accountable’ (Donnelly, 2009a) and that Gillard, as Education Minister, was ‘siding with the teacher union and keeping parents in the dark’ (Donnelly, 2009a). Reference to the ‘dumbed down’, ‘substandard and ‘politically correct’ curriculum operating in Australian schools (Donnelly, 2012); arguments that ‘new age, progressive education does not work’ (Donnelly, 2010b) and claims that publishing “league tables” puts parents ‘in a better position to judge when choosing schools’ and ‘puts pressure on schools to raise standards’ (Donnelly, 2009a) also echoed *The
Australian’s editorial views. Oddly, in other pieces, Donnelly contradicted these claims, arguing the ‘dangers of reducing education to what can be measured and of imposing too much testing and accountability on teachers and students’ (Donnelly, 2009d); describing the National Professional Standards for Teachers as imposing ‘a bureaucratic, time-consuming and checklist mentality’ (Donnelly, 2011) and taking aim at the Grattan Institute’s failure to consider TIMSS results in analysing Shanghai’s strong PISA performance (Donnelly, 2012).

It is unsurprising, given Donnelly’s political leanings, that he was not given a voice in *The Age*. Indeed, there was very little crossover of academic commentary between *The Age* and *The Australian*. Exceptions were Professor Jack Keating, who contributed three pieces in *The Age* and one in *The Australian*; Professor Geoff Masters, who contributed one piece in *The Age* and two in *The Australian* and Trinity Grammar teacher, Christopher Bantick, who contributed two pieces in *The Age* and eleven in *The Australian*.

The organisations represented by the academics selected by the press as education commentators were also provided with ‘privileged access’ (McNair, 2008, p.113) to the media, enabling their education agendas to be advanced. Dr Ben Jensen, co-author of the Grattan Institute’s *Catching up:Learning from the Best School Systems in South-East Asia* (Jensen et al, 2012), widely quoted in *The Australian* prior to the release of *MySchool3.0* (9), contributed six commentary pieces in *The Australian* over the period analysed. Reference to Jensen always acknowledged the organisation he represented. *The Australian* also appeared to preference research from the Centre for Independent Studies, with four researchers from this centre contributing nine pieces. Six of these were written by Jennifer Buckingham (2009a; 2009b; 2009c; 2009d; 2010a; 2010b) former ‘schools editor at *The Australian* from May 2004 to June 2005’ (www.cis.org.au).

In March, 2011, external commentary pieces were an ‘absence’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.28) in the *Herald Sun*. In *The Age*, all three commentary pieces focused on the issue of school funding. Two advocated explicitly for the ‘public purposes’ of education (Reid, 2010). That *The Age*...
published one dissenting piece, written by Father Chris Middleton (2011), the principal of a Sydney Catholic school, seemingly highlighted that newspaper’s impartiality, particularly in light of editorial criticisms of the over-funding of wealthy Catholic schools (Editor, 2011e), and given Middleton’s (2011) spirited criticisms of the media which, he argued, had mounted ‘a campaign against non-government schools ... full of misinformation and bias’.

Middleton’s (2011) views were, however, directly attacked in a commentary piece by Keating (9) who argued that the Catholic sector was ‘unjustified’ in claiming ‘that it is under resourced in comparison to government schools’ (Keating, 2011). The case put forward by Keating (2011) for ‘a resource-needs regime that recognizes the different needs of communities and students and the different challenges that different schools face’ was the case also put forward by The Age. Monash University’s Joel Windle (10) similarly argued the desperate need for funding reform in the school sector, disturbingly describing 21st century Australian schooling as boasting the ‘best segregation that money can buy’ (Windle, 2011). The exchange of views revealed in The Age suggests that newspapers sometimes act as a ‘gaming space in which...agents and institutions possessing enough specific capital...confront each other’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.264). There is also, it could be argued, a subtle ‘hierarchization’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.81) at work in the selection of commentators, given that the views of Keating (2011) and Windle (2011), combined with those of the Age editor, undercut Middleton’s (2011) authority and his advocacy for the ‘private purposes’ of education. The same pattern was replicated in The Australian, where five of the seven external commentary pieces published were written by academics, the sixth by a private school teacher and the seventh by the Coalition Education spokesman. Unlike The Age, these pieces, which explored a range of issues beyond school funding, notably reintroduced ‘discourses of denigration’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) around teacher (under)performance, largely an absence in reporting on MySchool in March, 2011, but one consistent with The Australian’s wider stance on education.

Monash University academic Tony Moore’s (10) (2011a) criticisms of the ‘bifurcated system’ created by the Howard government’s funding model; his urging of the federal government to

10. The selection of academics whose sphere of influence is not necessarily education is a point of interest here. Windle, for example, is a senior lecturer in culture and pedagogy, not education. Likewise, Monash University’s Tony Moore, who contributed two commentary pieces in The Australian (Moore, 2011a; 2011b) in March, 2011, is the Director of the National Centre for Australian Studies.
avoid ‘setting up competition’ between the public and private sectors and instead ‘work to bring the sectors together as part of one public system’ (Moore, 2011a) suggested advocacy for the ‘public purposes’ (Reid, 2010) of education seemingly at odds with *The Australian’s* support for more ‘private purposes’ (Reid, 2010). However, Moore’s second piece (2011b) constructed schools and teachers as accountable for providing “value for money” by arguing that it is ‘time the debate shifted from arguing over funding amounts to what we require schools to do for this money to maximize the best outcomes for students’ (Moore, 2011b). Likewise, the remaining commentary pieces in *The Australian* ‘authoritatively allocated’ (Taylor et al, 1997, p.29) the values of competition and consumerism to education and thus cumulatively undercut Moore’s (2011a) views to, in turn, support the stance of the newspaper (see Jensen, 2011a; Bantick, 2011a; Pyne, 2011).

### 10.3 Celebrating “improvement”

All three newspapers reported on “improvements” made at schools between cohorts assessed in 2008 and again in 2010, with the *Herald Sun* and *The Australian* focusing on rural government Victorian schools (Akerman, 2011a; Barry, 2011b; 2011c) and *The Age* on Catholic primary schools in disadvantaged areas of Melbourne. This approach was a striking contrast to 2010 in that a number of schools reported on, while they had “improved”, were still below the national average. Surprisingly, there was no discussion of this “underperformance” in 2011, as there was in 2010. Rather, ‘celebrating success and making a difference discourses’ (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.338) predominated. Even the *Herald Sun* which, in 2010, interviewed a parent whose children attended a school named in its “league table” as the “worst in the state” chose not to comment in 2011 on its “Bottom” schools.

*The Weekend Australian* also reported on ‘stark improvements’ at a government school in Queensland, ‘where all 495 students are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander’ (Ferrari, Bita & Perpitch, 2011) and where Year 5 reading scores ‘soared to 311 –higher than the 255 average for similar schools’, despite still being ‘below the national average of 414’ (Ferrari, Bita & Perpitch, 2011). *The Age* similarly focused on improvements at a Catholic primary school in a relatively disadvantaged Melbourne suburb where, although English is ‘the second language for 89 percent of students’ (Topsfield, 2011c), the students ‘ chalked up significant improvements in NAPLAN...
test results compared with their results in year 3 in 2008’ (Topsfield, 2011c), despite still being below the national average.

On the one hand, this press emphasis on “improvement” reinforced the ‘ethics of competition and performance’ (Ball, 2003, p.216) by highlighting the “value” added by schools, suggesting that ‘what is counted is what ultimately counts’ (Lingard, 2010, p.135) in education. “Improvement”, in this context, became both a profit-margin and performance indicator of the good “work” of schools for, as Meadmore (2001, p.27) argues, in a commodified education system, ‘good test results testify to a value-added education system, gratifying both producers and consumers’. On the other hand, press focus on the improved performance of often disadvantaged public schools, particularly when contrasted with the largely derisory reporting around elite private schools, contributed to unexpected support for the work of public schools.

10.4 Inconsistencies and contradictions in press reporting on policy

Bourdieu’s (1998, p.72) concept of ‘permanent amnesia’ was strikingly apparent in The Australian’s contradictory coverage of MySchool2.0. The page 1 report, ‘Public matches private: No class divide in schools spending’ (Ferrari, 2011c) which launched The Australian’s coverage implied a degree of financial equity between the education sectors which contradicted the evidence on MySchool2.0. The claim that ‘Private schools spend about the same amount of money teaching their students as government schools’ (Ferrari, 2011c) was contradicted the next day in a page 1 piece, co-authored by Ferrari, which reported that ‘the nation’s most elite private schools have at least twice the income of their average government school’ (Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011). The Australian’s editorial on the same day challenged these claims, arguing that non-government schools are ‘excellent value for taxpayers’ and that ‘Private school parents fund state schools from their taxes more than state school parents subsidise private schools’ (Editorial, 2011j). Yet, six days later, a news report by Ferrari (2011d), titled ‘Poor disadvantaged by broken system’, challenged this view.

This ‘inconsistency, contradiction’ and ‘lack of straight-forwardness’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.395), while potentially a product of the ‘temporality of journalistic practice’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72), also suggested a collision of past stances, (namely, The Australian’s support for the Howard Government’s strengthened commitment to funding non-government schools
(McMorrow, 2008, p. 27), with the new evidence or “proof” revealed by MySchool2.0 data. Given The Australian’s consistent stance on education throughout the entire period analysed, this surprising inconsistency implied editorial reluctance to alter historic views even when confronted with the data it had earlier proclaimed as vital for school transparency and accountability.

10.5 The role of the quality press in exploring policy effects

Unlike the Herald Sun and The Australian, The Age’s continued exploration of the consequences of NAPLAN testing not only suggested the important role the ‘serious press’ (Champagne, 2005, p. 61) play in providing informed coverage of policy effects, but highlighted the discursive differences between these newspapers. Several feature articles in The Education Age (Milburn, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d) pursued angles not touched on by competitor newspapers, while news reports focused on the high NAPLAN exemption rate at a primary school in an affluent Melbourne suburb (Farouque, 2011) and the “gobsmacking” NAPLAN scores of one disadvantaged Melbourne primary school’ where the extraordinary improvements of Year 5 students in 2010 raised the issue of cheating (Bachelard, 2011).

Beyond this information-giving role, The Age played an ‘active part in constructing particular readings’ (Blackmore & Thorpe, 2002, p. 579) of MySchool via analysis of the policy’s effects. Education editor, Jewel Topsfield’s (2011g) blunt criticism of the Federal government’s blind adoption of US education reforms highlighted the journalist’s ‘capacity for autonomous production of news’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 69), as well as the capacity of particular journalists, or powerful agents in the field, to ‘resist the impositions of the state’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p. 44). Published on the editorial page on March 12th, Topsfield’s (2011g) powerful opinion piece took issue with the federal government’s accountability and transparency agenda, even though qualified support for that agenda was given by her editor (Editorial, 2011f).

10.6 The damaging effects of “league tables” – the effects of press error

Rowe (2000, p. 86) argues that ‘unspoken assumptions and value judgements about the location of “blame” or “credit” underpin ‘the publication of educational performance indicators in the form of “league tables”’. The ‘underlying assumption is that if a school is deemed to be ‘effective’ or ‘ineffective’ in terms of the ranked position of its students’ average test or examination scores on a “league table”, the reason for that performance resides in the school.
Whether intended or not, published performance data ‘in market terms ... introduces a common currency by which the relative ‘worth’ of schools are measured’ (Rowe, 2000, p.83).

The publication of league tables of student results by The Canberra Times, NT News, Herald Sun and Sydney Morning Herald in 2011 again prompted principals’ associations and teacher unions to demand that Peter Garrett ‘take action’ (Topsfield, 2011f). The Herald Sun’s “league table” (Unauthored, 2011d) included a new feature in 2011: a ‘Bottom 5’ banner presented in red, signifying the teachers’ red correction pen, accompanied by the individual NAPLAN scores of each ‘bottom’ school in pink, echoing the MySchool website’s use of this colour to denote results below or substantially below similar and/or all Australian schools’ average. These devices visually amplified the failure of schools thus deemed ‘ineffective’ (Rowe, 2000, p.86).

Of the three Catholic schools listed in the “Bottom 5” primary rankings, one was incorrectly recorded as “the worst school in the state” for Numeracy after a data entry error (Unauthored, 2011d). This error, identified by the school, led to a subsequent, though reluctant, “apology” from the newspaper in the form of a ‘good news story’ about the school (Barry, 2011d). It was only in the final two paragraphs of the article that the newspaper’s fault was revealed and the school was acknowledged as, in fact, ‘one of the better performing schools in Victoria’ (Barry, 2011d). No formal apology was given in the article for, as the principal of the school commented, it wasn’t the Herald Sun’s policy ‘to apologize or to print a retraction’. Instead, they offered to print a ‘good news story’ only after the school moved to ‘protect its boundaries’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) by threatening legal action (Davies, 2012).

The principal described the aftermath of this misreporting as a ‘terrible time’ for the school. Her initial concern, that enrolments would be affected, led her to write to parents to explain that the information was incorrect. Of even more concern, in her view, was ‘the message’ that parents, the community and colleagues would take that the school was a ‘failing’ school. Colleagues and neighbouring schools were, however, extremely supportive (Davies, 2012). The anticipated drop in enrolments did not occur, attributed by the principal only to the fact that very few of the school’s families read newspapers in English, a comment suggesting the view of the education sector that the press have a significant influence on the ‘choosing parent’ (Thomson, 2005, p.753).
The Age was quick to point out the Herald Sun’s error, highlighting the operation of ‘permanent surveillance’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72). It commented that the school had in fact ‘performed at or above the national average in all NAPLAN tests last year’ and that while the Herald Sun had reported that the school had ‘scored 387 in numeracy’, ‘in fact (it) scored 487’ (Topsfield, 2011f).

10.7 The role of the Letters pages in challenging preferred government and press discourses on education

The important role played by the Letters pages as a forum for challenging preferred government (and, in some cases, preferred press) discourses on education, and for critiquing the media’s mobilisation of support for those discourses, was again revealed in this period. The Letters pages illustrated readers’ ‘capacity for resistance’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.36), partly accounted for by the fact that many of the letters published in both The Age and The Australian were contributed by those with a stake in the education field. The letters pages thus became a site of struggle in which members of the education field, rendered silent in mainstream coverage, defended the work of teachers, countered ‘discourses of derision’ (Kenway, 1990, p.191), alerted readers to the increasing marketisation of education and alluded to the wider purposes of education. Importantly, the Letters pages enabled the wider issues around MySchool to ‘move towards dialogue’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007, p.4) in ways not apparent in press coverage.

In contrast to 2010, there was a lack of consistency in the extent to which letters reflected each newspaper’s stance. Of the sixteen letters published in The Australian, eight focused specifically on school funding. The remaining eight continued to raise concerns about the value of NAPLAN testing, despite this being an absence in the newspaper’s reporting. And, while only two of the Herald Sun’s eight news reports investigated the inequalities of spending revealed on MySchool2.0, the ten letters published in the Herald Sun focused exclusively on school funding. Perhaps because of the greater coverage in The Age of the consequences of NAPLAN testing, nine of the fourteen letters published in that newspaper offered criticisms of both the website and of NAPLAN testing. In general, however, the higher number of letters published in 2011 about school funding and finance reflected the press emphasis on this area of the policy and contributed to the general silence around the policy’s consequences.
Letters in *The Age* and *The Australian* were often written by ‘elite voices’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.75), and frequently presented a spirited response to the views of external commentators (Whitby, 2011; Collins, 2011c (11)). A number of parents, largely silent in news reports in March, 2011, used the letters forum to express their opposition to NAPLAN testing (Wilson, 2011; Strangio, 2011; Laby, 2011; Russell, 2011). Parents also drew, self-referentially (Blackmore, 2006, p.4), on their experiences of their children’s public and private schools to argue for change to the school funding model (Holley, 2011; Strand, 2011). Several principals also used the letters forum to comment on inequities in the public and private education sectors (Bromley, 2011) and to raise concerns about the injustices of *MySchool* for particular schools (Hawkes, 2011).

‘Taxpayers’ had a significant voice in 2011, notably in the *Herald Sun* where they were ‘rarely identified by their title or expertise, but only by name and location’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.75). Some replicated *The Australian’s* argument in support of private school funding. If, for example, ‘these kids went to public schools the taxpayers would be paying all the cost’ (Leslie, 2011; Horace, 2011; Burnell, 2011; ‘Been there’, 2011; Andrew, 2011). The opposite side of this coin was the view that ‘Private schools are private, so why should they receive public funds?’ (Roy, 2011); that taxpayers shouldn’t be paying anything to ‘keep private schools going’ (Greg, 2011; Bec, 2011); and ‘If parents want their kids to be educated at a private school, let them pay for it themselves’ (Strand, 2011; Sciffer, 2011; Mahar, 2011; Nichols, 2011; Ryan, 2011).

10.8 The ‘game changer’: metaphor and ‘sound bite’ (Levin, 1998, p.281) in press coverage of *MySchool2.0*

When Peter Garrett launched *MySchool2.0*, he described the inclusion of school funding and finance data as a ‘game changer’. This metaphor or ‘sound bite’ (Levin, 2004, p.278) was widely reported in all three newspapers (Harrison, 2011a; Ferrari, 2011c; Barry, 2011a) before being picked up and used by a range of commentators in subsequent pieces, just as Gillard’s ‘shining a light’ was in 2010. As Bessant (2002, p.93) argues, metaphors ‘assist with creating awareness

11. Collins, President of ETAQ for part of the period analysed, contributed 21 letters to *The Australian*. The most prolific of the letter writers, he invariably critiqued the federal government’s reforms, suggesting that the quality press are often willing to publish letters which are not necessarily compatible with their news agenda (Richardson, 2008, p.59). In one letter (2010e), for example, he accused *The Australian* editor of being an ‘educational Luddite’.
and appreciation of complex ideas that are otherwise very difficult to conceptualize’. Garrett’s ‘game changer’ metaphor suggested that the rules of the education ‘game’, the stakes involved and the way the ‘game’ would be played in future had fundamentally changed. Perhaps Garrett referred to the obvious inequities in Australia’s education system, or to the revelation that the results of elite private schools were often no better than government schools. Certainly, this seems to have been the preferred reading of the press.

The metaphor was, however, frequently re-worked to support the particular stances of stakeholder groups. The Executive Director of the Independent Schools Council of Australia, for example, accused the AEU of having long misled the public by failing to acknowledge that government schools receive more funding than private schools once state funding is included. In his view, the release of school financial data meant that ‘The game is up for the AEU’ (Harrison, 2011a). The Australian (Editorial, 2011b) also attacked the AEU, re-working the metaphor to suit its own agenda by commenting that ‘Rather than persisting with their pathetic complaints about NAPLAN, league tables and the “pressures” of “teaching to the test”, unions should wake up to the fact that the game has changed’ (Editorial, 2011b).

Jensen (2011a) similarly argued that ‘the game has changed for all schools’, while Bantick, in accusing publishers of ‘cashing in’ on NAPLAN, suggested that the ‘game suits (publishers) just fine as failed teachers flourish’ (Bantick, 2011a). Leigh, president of the Victorian Principals’ Association, used the metaphor to express concern about NAPLAN participation rates and the fact that ‘it isn’t a level playing field’ (Milburn, 2011a), a view endorsed by Jensen, who argued that ‘People will lose faith in the system if it can be gamed in this way’ (Milburn, 2011a). In defending his broken election promise to increase the pay of Victorian teachers, Premier Ted Baillieu stated that teachers will ‘need to lift their game to get any extra money’ (McMahon, 2011) while ACARA Chair, Barry McGaw, argued that MySchool’s like-school comparisons would require some schools to ask the hard question ‘So what are you going to do to lift your game and provide evidence than it can be done?’ (Milburn, 2011a).

The multiple uses of this metaphor by journalists and external commentators highlighted the relative powerlessness of the education field to protect its boundaries (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) from the often critical views of the press and the voices ‘consecrated’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.58) therein. The view that teachers as a whole needed to “lift their game” contributed to the
marketisation and commodification of education by presenting teaching as an auditable transaction (Power, 1997, p.103). This was supported by the repeated use of competition metaphors in the reporting of NAPLAN results. Schools achieving excellent NAPLAN results were presented as having ‘topped the state’, ‘shone, ‘triumphed, ‘aced’, ‘blitzed the field’ and ‘outperformed their peers’ (Topsfield, 2011e).

10.9 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that press coverage of MySchool2.0 was profoundly influenced by the logics of practice of the journalistic field which required a focus on the newsworthy aspects of the policy’s second version. The ‘effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.709) of this were a relative silence around the consequences of national testing and reporting which not only contributed to policy entrenchment, but also commodified education. I have argued that press coverage of MySchool 2.0 called into question past discourses around public and private education in Australia, creating press advocacy for public education which assisted the public school lobby’s campaign for additional funding via the ongoing Gonski review, while potentially producing ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) for the private school sector. I have suggested that press inconsistency in reporting on this area in The Australian was the product of past political stances colliding with the new evidence provided on MySchool2.0, highlighting not only the strength of ‘templates’ (Warmington & Murphy, 2004, p.286) in press reporting on education, but also the refusal of some newspapers to alter their view about what education, and educational policy, ought to be.

I have shown that newspapers take very clear stances on education and that new policy is represented and filtered through those stances, often in quite different ways. I have suggested that these stances are conveyed both overtly and covertly through the notion of ‘voice’ and ultimately orient ‘the provision of education’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1) towards public or private purposes (Reid, 2010). I have argued that while these stances may support or critique the education agendas of governments, the press do more than merely mobilize support for, or resistance to, such agendas. Their reporting, like ‘spin’, ‘is not simply “done to” a policy but becomes, ultimately, ‘something which “makes up”’ the policy (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.327).
Chapter 11  

Policy as a vehicle for the press to have its say about what policy ought to be: press coverage of *MySchool*3.0.

11.1  

Introduction

The dramatic decline in press coverage of the third version of *MySchool* in February, 2012 (see Chapter 6) was partly accounted for by a series of significant events in both the political and educational policy fields which coincided with the release of *MySchool*3.0, as outlined in Chapter 1. The relative press silence around *MySchool*3.0 was thus a ‘cross-field effect’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.706) but also, it could be argued, a field-effect produced by the absence of new information in 2012 which rendered *MySchool* no longer newsworthy, particularly in light of the ‘scoop’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.6) offered by the Gonski and Grattan reports. The fact that there was no formal government ‘launch’ of *MySchool*3.0 also contributed to a relative press ‘absence’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.28), suggesting that the inverse of ‘policy release as media release’ (Lingard & Rawolle, 2004, p.363) may be an insidious form of ‘censorship’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.47) in the form of an absence of coverage which, in removing policy from the pages of newspapers, silences discussion and debate.

The discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement constructed by *MySchool* continued to have a media presence because of the Grattan and Gonski reports. Indeed, much of the 2012 press coverage of Gonski and Grattan reconstituted earlier *MySchool*-related debates about “standards”, “performance”, the public-private divide, “choice” and the “value for money” provided by the education system, producing a kind of ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.25) of discourses in which the media-constructed discourses produced in 2010 and 2011 in reporting on *MySchool* informed the discourses emerging around the Gonski and Grattan reports. *MySchool* data also informed reporting on the Gonski and Grattan reports, just as it informed the Gonski report itself, as Garrett acknowledged when he commented that ‘the transparency of information provided through My School...was necessary for the review led by David Gonski’ (Ferrari, 2012p).

There were, however, significant differences between the Gonski and Grattan reports. The latter constructed Australian education as failing in a ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi
& Lingard, 2010, p.21), recalling the ALP’s education revolution policy texts where a similar discourse of ‘failure’ was expressed through competition and race metaphors. Drawing from audit discourses and a ‘delivery’ philosophy of teaching (Power, 1997, p.103), the Grattan report argued that financial investment in Australian education had not been matched by improved “performance”. The solution to this problem lay in re-directing existing funds to programs and approaches which (according to the Grattan Institute) will improve performance. This emphasis on ‘value for money’ underpinned by managerial discourses (Fairclough, 1995a, p.140) suggested a 21st Century, post-GFC ‘economizing of education’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18) in which education becomes an auditable transaction (Power, 1997, p.103).

While the Grattan report questioned the value of injecting more funds into an already “failing” system, the Gonski report called for greater financial investment in Australian education by government, with attached school, teacher and system accountability. Thus, the two reports seemingly ‘oriented the provision of education’ towards quite different ‘goals and purposes’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1). Grattan report co-author, Ben Jensen’s view that ‘We’re spending money in the wrong places’ (Ferrari, 2012f; Tatnell, 2012) contradicted the Gonski report’s recommendation that, in fact, a massive injection of $5 billion into, mainly, public education was needed to improve Australia’s education system. This orientation of the provision of education towards ‘public purposes’ (Reid, 2010) became the focus of press coverage of Gonski, suggesting the operation of mediatization as the press constructed a version of this policy which, by backgrounding the emphasis the report gave to the need to improve standards, was not entirely accurate. In fact, the Gonski report gave considerable attention to Australia’s underperformance on international testing measures (see Gonski et al, 2011, p.25). Indeed, in a commentary piece in The Age, David Gonski used exactly the same competition metaphors as journalists and politicians to convey the decline in Australia’s educational performance, referring to ‘the pack now ahead of us in mathematics’ (Gonski, 2012). At the same time, the Gonski review also stated that the ‘performance of Australia’s school system is about more than just literacy and numeracy results in national and international assessments’ (Gonski et al, 2011, p.xxix), suggesting a social democratic, as opposed to neoliberal, orientation in the review panel’s thinking about education (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.3). This orientation was evident in explicit statements which challenged narrow, instrumentalist approaches to education, such as ‘schools contribute to a much broader range of outcomes for students than those currently
measured by governments’ (Gonski et al, 2011, p.xiii). It was also apparent in the almost apologetic tone of the admission that, for ‘the purposes of this report and to adhere to the terms of reference, the panel has focused on funding for schooling and its impact on outcomes as they are currently measured by governments both nationally and internationally’ (my emphasis) (Gonski et al, 2011, p.xiii).

It was, ultimately, the political field which married these seemingly antithetical discourses. In its eventual response to Gonski, in August, 2012, the Federal Government endorsed the ‘ethics of competition and performance’ (Ball, 2003, p.218) by requiring schools to ‘submit a performance plan on how they would improve student results in return for extra funds and more control of their budgets’ (Schubert, 2012). Significantly, when Gillard pledged to phase in the Gonski report’s recommendations from 2014, she drew from the Grattan, rather than the Gonski, report to explain why, commenting that ‘Four of the top five schooling systems in the world are in our region, and ours isn’t in the top five. They’re our neighbours, but they’re also our competitors and we can’t win the competition against them unless we win the education race’ (abc, 2012).

That the stances taken by each newspaper in their reporting on Gonski and Grattan echoed the stances taken on MySchool suggests that the specifics of a policy may be peripheral to the real purpose of press reporting on policy: that is, to ‘orient the provision of education’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1) towards goals and purposes consistent with the newspaper’s view of what the goals and purposes of education ought to be. On one level, then, policies may operate in the press as vehicles for the press to have its say about what education (and education policy) ought to be. Given its stance on MySchool, it is no surprise that The Australian enthusiastically supported the Grattan report. Nor is it surprising that the Gonski report was warmly endorsed by The Age. Equally unsurprising is the Herald Sun’s failure to take a stand on Gonski and to, in fact, privilege more ‘sensational’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.19) matters.

To illustrate the argument that policies can operate interchangeably in the press as vehicles for the press to have its say about what policy ought to be, I include here a brief account of how the newspapers in this study reported on the Grattan and Gonski reports, making connections with the stances expressed on MySchool.
11.2 Press reporting on the Grattan Institute’s *Catching up: Learning from the best school systems in East Asia* (Jensen et al, 2012)

The release of the Grattan Institute report (Jensen et al, 2012) on February 17, 2012, just a week before *MySchool3.0* went live, focused press attention on Australia’s (under)performance on PISA in comparison to the stronger performances of Shanghai, Korea, Hong Kong and Singapore. The report received more coverage than *MySchool3.0* in all three newspapers (see Chapter 6). Its emphasis on the apparent ‘failure’ of Australia’s education system became the focus of press reporting, creating a ‘moral panic’ (Cohen, 2002, p.1) through the use of race and competition metaphors. Moreover, the ‘staggering divide’ between ‘Aussie high school students’ and their Asian counterparts translated to national failure, so that ‘We trail Shanghai’ and are ‘significantly behind’ (Tatnell, 2012). Politicians’ emphasis on the ‘danger’ this failure posed intensified the sense of crisis. Gillard, for example, described Australia as ‘in danger of losing “the education race” to its regional neighbours’ (Harrison, 2012). PISA results thus became indisputable evidence in the press ‘that the Australian education system lacks the rigour and discipline that makes many students in Asian countries succeed’ (Unauthored, 2012b).

Grattan report co-author, Ben Jensen, was enlisted as a media commentator in all three newspapers, signifying his ‘authority in the public sphere’ (McNair, 2008, p.114) and increasing his (and his organisation’s) policy authority and potential policy-making influence. Jensen argued that ‘the decline in performance in many Australian schools –despite increased funding – proves money is not the answer’ (Harrison, 2012). His implied criticism of the Gonski report’s recommendations possibly influenced press reporting. So the fact that Korea spends less on students than Australia, but still performs better than them (Hall, 2012) was cited in news reports, while some journalists began to argue that there should be less focus on how education should be funded and more on ‘what we should be doing with the money’ (Gittins, 2012). The view that ‘a huge increase in education spending … has been wasted because it failed to invest in making our teachers better’ (Tatnell, 2012) not only echoed *The Australian*’s arguments in relation to *MySchool2.0* that ‘taxpayers have rights to know that their money is being spent economically, efficiently and effectively’ (Power, 1997, p.44), but also located the blame for failure with teachers.
The Australian was the only newspaper in the study to editorialize on the Grattan report, glowingly endorsing its findings and selectively emphasizing aspects of the report which reinforced its stances on education. These included the ‘calibre of teachers and their training’, principal autonomy and merit based pay for teachers (Editor, 2012g). Approval of the Grattan report as an ‘excellent roadmap’, ‘essential if Australia is to better prepare students for a competitive future’ (Editor, 2012g) clearly supported the ‘economizing of education...in the context of globalization’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18), a view reinforced by The Australian’s editor-at-large who argued that, as things stand, Australian ‘parents and governments are throwing good money after bad’ (Kelly, 2012).

While some dissent was offered in both the Herald Sun and The Australian by external commentators and journalists (Donnelly, 2012; Callick, 2012a; 2012b), it was from the general public, via the letters pages, that the Grattan Institute report was fiercely resisted in ways reminiscent of the debate around MySchool in 2010. In The Age, the letters pages were a space for ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) by influential agents from the education field as ‘elite voices’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.75) advocated for the ‘public purposes’ (Reid, 2010) of education by questioning the narrow, instrumentalist view of education constructed by the privileging of high-stakes testing. Victoria University’s Professor Nicola Yelland (2012) challenged the Grattan Institute’s narrow definition of success ‘as doing well in tests’, while La Trobe University’s Dr Andrew Brookes (2012) attacked Jensen’s use of ‘educational measures as if they were workplace KPI’s’, suggesting they presented a ‘dismal view of children being engaged in a race to meet measures of economic productivity before each birthday’ (see also Mischiewski, 2012; Williams, 2012; Harris, 2012). Surprisingly, the majority of letter writers in The Australian expressed similar views, including the familiar voice of Gary Collins (2012b) (see also Ludowyke, 2012; Nordestgaard, 2012; Grimes, 2012; Greenway, 2012; French, 2012; Sinclair, 2012 and, for opposing views, Archer, 2012; Waters, 2012).

11.3 Press reporting on the Gonski Review into School Funding (Gonski et al, 2011)

The extent of press coverage of the Gonski review in February, 2012 recalled the extensive coverage the MySchool website initially received, with sharp differences between tabloid and broadsheet reporting again evident. In both The Age and The Australian, key journalists who
dominated press reporting on MySchool were again highly active in shaping their readership’s understanding of the Gonski review. Nine of The Age’s sixteen news reports in February were written by education editor, Topsfield, with a tenth co-authored piece. In The Australian, Ferrari wrote ten and co-authored a further two of the twenty-one news reports. In contrast, just four news reports were published in the Herald Sun, one written by a journalist who did not generally contribute education stories, with the remaining pieces co-authored by relatively new education writer, Evonne Barry.

In their reporting on the Gonski review, both The Age and The Australian constructed discourses consistent with those constructed in relation to MySchool. Frequently, this occurred through the ‘employment of a perspective’ (Harrison, 2008, p.43) in ostensibly neutral news reports, reinforcing that the ‘expression of judgements and opinions ...pervades every section of the newspaper’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2008, p.70). In the lead-up to the release of the Gonski report, for example, news reports in The Age implied that the current funding model needed to change and made use of MySchool data to highlight funding anomalies and inequities (Topsfield, 2012d; 2012g; Dunn, 2012b). In contrast, news reports in The Australian generally emphasized public and private school sector divisions (Ferrari, 2012a), gave private school principals a voice (Berkovic, 2012; Perpitch, 2012) and invoked past political campaigns, suggesting the ‘different histories and spatial stories’ (Harrison, 2008, p.40) embedded in news reports. Rout (2012), for example, recalled The Australian’s BER coverage by emphasizing the Gonski review’s finding that there are still ‘poor quality” school facilities, despite ‘the Gillard government having spent $16.2 billion on its BER program’. She also noted the Gonski review’s recommendation for improved ‘accountability measures for school building projects’ (Rout, 2012).

The Herald Sun’s limited reporting on Gonski drew on the Grattan report to emphasize Australia’s educational failure. ‘We’re failing our kids’ (Ainsworth, 2012), given page 2 prominence on the day of the Gonski launch, utilized the language of crisis to emphasize the failure of Australian students on both international and national test measures, thus backgrounding the Gonski report’s emphasis on the need for additional funding to overcome disadvantage.

The Age’s strong support for the Gonski report’s recommendations was evidenced by the publication of five editorials in February, 2012 which unreservedly endorsed its
recommendations and held governments accountable for their implementation, highlighting the function of the editorial as a ‘political intervention’ (McNair, 1995, p.13). Explicit comments, such as ‘inequity in schools funding must be abolished’ (Editorial, 2012a) combined with specific attacks on the Rudd-Gillard government, whose ‘education revolution’ was condemned as ‘chiefly (comprising) some more computers on pupils’ desks, a website that encourages dubious comparisons between dissimilar schools and a stillborn national curriculum’ (Editorial, 2012a). Moral appeals encouraged the federal government to find ‘the resolve’ to rectify the current ‘injustice’ (Editorial, 2012a). Indeed, The Age was the only newspaper in this study to consistently position governments as equally as accountable for the nation’s educational outcomes as schools and teachers. Of Gonski, The Age argued that governments must be held accountable for ensuring ‘that every child has access to full educational opportunity’ (Editorial, 2012a). Of MySchool, in 2010, it argued that government must be ‘as accountable for school standards as it rightly expects principals and teachers to be’ (Editorial, 2010a).

The Age, moreover, strategically used MySchool data as ‘proof’ to support its campaign for funding equity, citing the improved NAPLAN results at two Melbourne schools following significant financial investment by government (Editorial, 2012d). In connecting the federal government’s surprisingly lukewarm response to the Gonski report to its sidelining of a report recommending ‘“universal and equitable access” to dental care’ (Editor, 2012e), The Age clearly sought to ‘orient the provision of education’ (Gewirtz, Ball & Bowe, 1995, p.1) towards ‘public purposes’ (Reid, 2010). Its comment that:

‘sometimes a government needs reminding that its first duty is to look after the interests of its citizens. Democratic governments raise taxes predominantly for the purpose of investing in the welfare of the men, women and children on whose behalf they govern; they have a duty to use this revenue so that essential services are available to all, not only to those who can afford to pay a premium’ (Editor, 2012e).

illustrates the ‘watchdog role’ some newspapers play in a representative democracy (Schultz, 1998, p.10) to act as a ‘check on the powerful’ (Schultz, 1998, p.52).

In echoing similar themes, Age journalists sought to shame the federal government. Praising the achievements of the Gonski panel as ‘Herculean’ heightened the disappointment readers were entitled to feel at the government’s refusal to commit to additional funding (Topsfield, 2012i). Guy’s (2012) rather depressing conclusion that the state and federal cooperation necessary to
implement the Gonski recommendations was unlikely implied that the struggle for power within the political field would ultimately prevent more just funding arrangements.

The only editorial devoted to the Gonski review in *The Australian* (Editorial, 2012h) privileged the Grattan report and invoked familiar ‘discourses of denigration’ (Blackmore, 2006), explicitly endorsing the ‘incisive’ Grattan report to argue that ‘reform in the selection, training, mentoring and career structures of teachers would create a far more significant education revolution than reorganising the funding system’ (Editorial, 2012h), a view consistent with *The Australian’s MySchool* stance. In 2010, for example, *The Australian* editor (2010l) argued that ‘We need many more metrics to track teacher (my emphasis) and pupil performance’.

The *Herald Sun* published no editorials on Gonski. In fact, of its four education-related editorials published in February, two addressed the ‘scandalous’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.51) issue of whether a Victorian teacher engaged in a ‘porn’ scandal with a former student should be dismissed (Editor, 2012k; 2012l); a third commented on a *Herald Sun* investigation into the need for tighter Working with Children checks (Editor, 2012i) and the fourth reflected on the 70,000 Victorian students preparing to start school (Editor, 2012j). Not only did the *Herald Sun* not take an explicit stance on the significant issue of school funding, consistent with its approach to the publication of financial data on *MySchool2.0* in 2011, but its decision not to publish a Gonski editorial appeared to be at odds with the level of interest shown by its readers. Thirteen of the nineteen items about the Gonski review in the *Herald Sun* were letters to the editor, suggesting a significant level of public interest. By way of comparison, just nine letters to the editor were published in *The Australian*, and fifteen in *The Age*.

Two of the three opinion pieces by external commentators in *The Age* were written by familiar voices - academics with significant capital in the education field who also contributed commentary on *MySchool*. While Professor Jack Keating (2012) (see Chapter 10) applauded the Gonski report he, like Guy (2012), pointed to the insurmountable ‘barriers’ to implementation arising from the political field (Keating, 2012). The view that it may, ultimately, only be the market (in the form of a deepening ‘drift’ of students from government schools to the private sector) which forces governments to ‘embrace’ the Gonski reforms (Keating, 2012) suggested that, paradoxically, the ‘economization’ (Lingard, 2010, p.135) of education might, in fact, overcome its ‘politicisation’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.42). In contrast, Professor Geoff
Masters (2012) emphasized that ‘money alone will not guarantee improved student outcomes’ and questioned the value of greater financial investment in Australian education. His view that ‘more able people’ must be attracted into teaching and that the additional funding proposed by Gonski ‘will make a difference to the quality and equity of Australian schooling (only) to the extent that it is used to drive’ the strategies known by the education community ‘to improve school performances nationally’ (Masters, 2012) appeared to critique the Gonski report. Yet, as David Gonski (2012) had pointed out in The Age, ‘resources alone do not bring about real change and…extensive reform is also required to the delivery of schooling’, a comment designed to correct general misunderstanding of the Gonski report’s recommendations, partly contributed to by press emphasis on its calls for greater financial investment in public education.

The two opinion pieces by external commentators published in The Australian also presented opposing sides of the debate. It is unsurprising that AEU president, Angelo Gavrielatos (2012) strongly supported the Gonski recommendations. What is surprising, however, is The Australian’s decision to give voice to Gavrielatos, given its repeated criticisms of the AEU in the period analysed. Executive Director of the ACU’s Public Policy Institute, Steve Prasser’s (2012) argument that the Gonski review proposes a far more complex funding model than currently exists and that a better solution is to adjust the current funding arrangements was, however, more consistent with The Australian’s stance.

Opinion pieces by journalists in The Australian notably expressed views at odds with the newspaper’s editorial stance. Ferrari’s (2012j) support for the Gonski report, her criticisms of the federal opposition’s scare campaign, and of Gillard’s refusal to back the report, echoed earlier inconsistencies in The Australian over the “value” of the private school sector following the release of MySchool2.0. In stark contrast, provocative Herald Sun commentator, Andrew Bolt (2012c) critised the Gonski report for not detailing how the additional $5 billion in funding ‘should be spent to lift standards’. An accompanying photograph of the flags of nine countries which outperformed Australia on 2009 PISA tests; the listing of the countries who have ‘beat(en) us on maths literacy’ and the comment that ‘Of those, Canada and Japan spend a smaller share of their GDP on education than we do’ (Bolt, 2012c; see also Bolt, 2012d) clearly drew from the Grattan report to present Herald Sun readers with a vastly different version of the Gonski report than that constructed for the Age readership.
11.4 Press coverage of *MySchool3.0*

11.4.1 The discursive effects of silence

Only three news reports were published about *MySchool3.0* in *The Age* in February 2012. All were written by education editor, Jewel Topsfield. The stories appeared on February 24, 25 and 28, their placement on pages 5, 4 and 3 respectively a stark contrast to *The Age*’s page 1 coverage in both 2010 and 2011. One *Age* editorial used *MySchool* data to offer support for the Gonski review’s findings, but did not comment specifically on the website. There were no external commentary pieces about *MySchool3.0* in *The Age* in February, 2012 and only one letter to the editor.

The *Herald Sun’s* coverage of *MySchool3.0* was confined to a double page spread on February 29 appearing on pages 14 & 15 (Unauthored, 2012a). The coverage consisted of the formulaic and now familiar “league table”, occupying one full page; two news reports and an opinion piece by school principal and VASSP president, Frank Sal (2012). There were no letters-to-the-editor, editorials or commentary pieces published about *MySchool3.0* in either the *Herald Sun* or *The Australian* in February, 2012. In fact, coverage in *The Australian* shrank to just one newspaper report. In comparison to *The Age* and the *Herald Sun*, and in comparison to its own coverage of *MySchool* in 2010 and 2011, this represented the most marked decline. This silence was a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it contributed to policy entrenchment, so that a discourse of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement now ‘speak(s) us rather than us speaking’ it (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.8). On the other, removing *MySchool* from the public gaze potentially allowed schools to continue their core business and regain reduced autonomy. One principal alluded to this when she commented that the minimal media coverage of *MySchool3.0* was ‘how most schools would like it to be’ (Strachan, 2012).

11.4.2 Challenging the ‘value’ of national testing and reporting: the covert biases of news reports.

This notion of schools resuming control and continuing their core business was implied in Topsfield’s (2012k) report on the strong NAPLAN results of a small, semi-rural Victorian school. The prominent voice of the Principal, who spoke for herself (Fairclough, 1995b, p.79)
reminded readers that national testing data reflects ‘only a snapshot in time’, can be affected by many variables and is just ‘one of many forms of data’ (Topsfield, 2012k) used by schools.

That continuity of journalistic voice is a key factor in enabling continued exploration of policy effects was evident in this piece in Topsfield’s focus on the comments of Finnish educator, Pasi Sahlberg who, at the time, was visiting Australia. His criticisms of high-stakes testing infuse the text. Topsfield’s (2012k) implied support for Sahlberg’s views was suggested by her reference to Finland as having ‘one of the highest performing school systems in the world as measured by international tests held in all 34 OECD nations’ (Topsfield, 2012k), and her omission of Shanghai’s stronger performance on PISA in 2009. This was consistent with views explicitly expressed by Topsfield (2011g) in a commentary piece a year earlier when she highlighted the damaging consequences of high-stakes testing and exposed Labor’s ‘pyrrhic’ victory in the ‘education wars’.

A second Age report examined the outstanding NAPLAN results at an alternative independent Melbourne primary school which charges $13,000 a year and caps enrolments at 60. Seemingly signifying a shift in The Age’s reporting, being its first celebratory profile of a private school, the opening paragraph of the text implied that schools may not always give NAPLAN testing the priority governments expect and critics of standardised testing assume. That

Academic achievement is not the first priority at (this school)... is not even the second priority (and) comes in at a distant third, after happiness and viability’ (Topsfield & Moncrief, 2012), implied ideological resistance to the discourse of ‘being enterprising’ which MySchool enabled— that is, a resistance to the appropriation of strategies and tactics from business and their reinvention in education (Meadmore, 2001, p.27).

The school’s detachment from the accountability-agenda driving education was reinforced by its co-founder’s endearingly naive ‘surprise’ at being ‘measured against the outside world’, and by the amusing, whimsical description of its alternative approaches. There are, for example, ‘no rules’; the ‘most important class on the timetable’ is ‘free time’; the school runs 20 camps a year and students ‘are divided into tinies, middlies and biggies’ (Topsfield & Moncrief, 2012). The large accompanying photograph of a smiling student doing a handstand, while students in the background throw cushions at each other, suggested the capacity of schools to maintain their identity in the face of significant policy change. It also reinforced The Age’s approach in 2012 of
humanising NAPLAN testing and data by focusing on students and the individual, occasionally ‘quirky’ stories of schools to remind readers of the important ‘face of the child’ (Topsfield, 2012k) at the heart of this policy debate.

The ‘web of voices’ (Fairclough, 1995b, p.81) heard in news reports similarly suggested the capacity of schools to continue their core business. In the Herald Sun, for example, AEU Victorian president Mary Bluett’s warning to parents about the danger of ‘drawing conclusions around school programs on the basis of’ NAPLAN results’, and her advice that ‘Parents making decisions about where to send their kids would be better served by going to the school’ (Langmaid, 2012), implied that factors other than NAPLAN results were a more accurate measure of a school’s worth. Surprisingly, Victorian Education Minister, Martin Dixon’s comment that ‘The results thrown up are just one measure but in the end nothing beats a walk through the corridors’ (Langmaid, 2012) also backgrounded the importance of high-stakes testing as the measure of a school’s worth, while simultaneously suggesting that such testing is now taken for granted and no longer a source of debate.

11.4.3 Policy entrenchment: MySchool as a data source for new stories

While Topsfield’s (2012l) report on the improved NAPLAN results at a school in Melbourne’s ‘disadvantaged northern suburbs’ was ostensibly an article on MySchool3.0, it was also a powerful argument in support of the Gonski review’s recommendation that a significant investment in public education is needed. While the piece continued The Age’s earlier focus on disadvantaged government schools which performed well on NAPLAN measures, it moved beyond reporting on NAPLAN results to actively using NAPLAN data as evidence for new claims, in this case that educational outcomes improve when adequate funds are invested in schools. It thus reflects key notions of newspaper stance, covert bias, the influence of key journalists and the embedding of policies in press reporting. This use of MySchool data to inform new stories about other policies arguably contributed to the entrenchment of national testing and reporting by removing the policy as a source of contestation.

The school which was the subject of Topsfield’s (2012l) report was closed at the end of 2009 after 98 percent of its year 9 students performed below the national benchmark in numeracy on the 2008 NAPLAN tests (Topsfield, 2012l). It re-opened on the same site in 2010 under a new
name. Using data from the *MySchool* website, Topsfield (2012l) highlights the ‘massive improvements’ made by the school’s year 9 students compared to when they were in year 7, implying that the additional funding allocated to the school in 2010 contributed to this improvement. Reference to the Gonski report and the inclusion of a comment from the principal that his school’s story ‘is fundamentally what the Gonski report is talking about’ (Topsfield, 2012l) presented a powerful pro-Gonski argument.

While the Gonski report made extensive use of *MySchool* data as evidence for its findings, *The Age* here made use of *MySchool* data to support the Gonski Review’s recommendations, in a story ostensibly about *MySchool3.0*. The implication that governments need to invest adequately in public education in order to overcome disadvantage clearly reinforced the editorial view that government is as accountable for “standards” as schools and teachers. Indeed, the only *Age* editorial to make reference to *MySchool3.0* in February, 2012 used Topsfield’s (2012l) story as proof of the Gonski review’s finding that ‘resourcing is vital to the success of students in disadvantaged schools’ (Editor, 2012d).

The same pattern was evident in *The Australian’s* sole report on *MySchool*. Its focus on funding disparities between government, Catholic and independent schools suggested that the piece was more about the Gonski report than *MySchool*. The use of *MySchool* data to illustrate the Gonski’s review’s ‘conclusion that our current funding system is illogical and lacks transparency’ (Ferrari, 2012p) illustrates how the issues surrounding national testing and reporting were no longer a source of debate. Instead, the website data became the source for other stories and the subsequent debates, while associated, were different; a press move which contributed to the entrenchment of national testing and reporting.

The absence of letters-to-the-editor about *MySchool* in 2012 is perhaps the strongest evidence of policy entrenchment. Only one letter was published in *The Age* (Mahar, 2012), a stark contrast to the thirty three letters published in that newspaper in January and February 2010 and the sixteen in March 2011. Further evidence of entrenchment was also conveyed in Sal’s (2012) commentary piece in the *Herald Sun* in which he spoke, with implied regret, of how ‘quickly My School has become part of our comparison of our education system’. Despite offering criticism of national testing and reporting, Sal (2012) also showed a willingness to use *MySchool* data to advance his sector’s interests, commenting that the data reveals ‘that government schools
perform as well, if not better, than non-government schools with similar students’ and adding that the evident disparity in funding provided to government schools revealed on the website ‘should make many parents question their choice of school and investment of their money’ (Sal, 2012). Thus, MySchool data was selectively and strategically used by stakeholders to further particular interests – in this case to advocate for public education by positioning government schools as offering excellent “value” for money.

11.4.4 ‘in the end, nothing beats a walk through the corridors’ (Langmaid, 2012) - Press contradictions and inconsistencies in reporting on MySchool3.0.

In 2012, the Herald Sun’s “league table” “expanded” from the ‘Top 5’ and ‘Bottom 5’ primary and secondary schools to the ‘Top 10’ and ‘Bottom 10’ Victorian state secondary schools based on Year 9 NAPLAN results (Unauthored, 2012a). As for previous years, no analysis of the data was provided, preventing members of the public without a stake in the field of education from reading with informed knowledge. How could they know, for example, that many of the ‘Bottom 10’ schools were community schools operating under significant levels of disadvantage and, frequently, catering for students unable to succeed in mainstream settings? Twenty-five community schools and six Koori schools appeared multiple times in the ‘Bottom 10’. Other schools were from rural areas, or from disadvantaged areas of Melbourne, including the school celebrated in The Age for its improved NAPLAN scores (Topsfield, 2012l), yet “shamed” at ‘8’ in the Herald Sun’s bottom-scorers. This ‘naming and shaming’ discursively positioned the schools listed as failing, ostensibly endorsing the market, yet further entrenching disadvantage by encouraging pseudo consumer ‘choice’ for those who largely have no choice.

Extraordinarily, given this blatant “naming and shaming” of poor performing ‘cash-strapped state schools’, Langmaid’s (2012) accompanying report highlighted the ability of many disadvantaged Victorian state schools to ‘pack a punch when it comes to providing quality education for our kids’. Similarly, Masanauskas & Mawby’s (2012) celebratory narrative on the same page profiled two sisters, one a current Year 11 student at a Melbourne girl’s secondary college and her older sister, a former student of the school, ‘who completed her VCE last year with outstanding results’ (Masanauskas & Mawby, 2012). The sisters’ glowing description of ‘going to a government school (as) tops for education’ (Masanauskas & Mawby, 2012) provided
a rare student voice but, at the same time, sat uneasily with the adjacent list of ‘Bottom 10’ state schools. Nor was it mentioned that the girls’ school is highly advantaged socio-economically, being listed as fifth highest on the Herald Sun’s ‘Top 10’ ICSEA scorers on the adjacent page. This omission suggested a superficial understanding of educational issues on the part of the newspaper; an absence of ‘intellectual discourse’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.11) which is possibly a product of relative position.

11.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have argued that the relative silence around MySchool3.0 in 2012 in the newspapers in this study was both a field-effect and a ‘cross-field consequence of particular events’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714): namely the release of the Grattan and Gonski reports and the turmoil occurring at the federal political level. I have shown that in their reporting on Gonski and Grattan, the newspapers in this study reconstituted earlier MySchool related stances and oriented the provision of education towards either public or private purposes. In The Australian, this reconstitution produced a kind of ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.25) of accountability and performance measurement discourses located within a broader discourse of educational failure which discursively positioned Australian education as failing in a ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). In contrast, in The Age, central government was consistently held to account for inequities in school funding and for the consequences of this neglect. I have argued that the significant discursive differences between The Age and The Australian in their reporting on the Gonski report, and the consistency of the stances taken with those adopted on MySchool, provide evidence that press reporting on policy in the quality press is often a vehicle for political intervention: that is, for the press to have its say about what policy ought to be. This supports the argument that the specifics of a policy may be largely peripheral to the press in their reporting.

I have argued that a further ‘cross-field consequence’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714) of the absence of press discussion and debate around national testing and reporting was this policy’s entrenchment. To all intents and purposes, high-stakes testing, the right of newspapers to publish results and the associated discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement emerging from those practices had become ‘taken for granted’. That these discourses now ‘speak us rather than us speaking them’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) was, I have argued, also enabled by the
increasing pattern of politicians and journalists making selective use of *MySchool* data to inform new policy and journalistic products. The data therefore became a valuable commodity. However, as I have suggested, an unexpected consequence of these processes of mediatization was the freedom schools regained to resume their core business; to, effectively, ‘fly under the radar’ (Strachan, 2012).
Chapter 12

The discursive effects of mediatized policy on schools named in the press, from the principal’s view

12.1 Introduction

This chapter investigates the discursive effects of the mediatization of educational policy on particular schools that were named in the press, from the principal’s view. It examines the ‘cross-field effects’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.88) produced by the interventions of the journalistic field, focusing on alterations to the ‘relative autonomy’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.84) of school principals and transformations in the authority and capital of these agents (Couldry, 2008, p.377).

12.2 Press reporting on schools whose principals were interviewed

12.2.1 Pendlebury Primary School

Although Pendlebury Primary School’s (PPS) ICSEA in 2010 was 926,(1) suggesting significant disadvantage (www.myschool.edu.au), the public school in Melbourne’s outer northern suburbs was celebrated in The Sentinel in 2010 in relation to its strong NAPLAN results, performing above the average of all Australian schools in reading, spelling and numeracy. A year later, following the release of MySchool2.0, and amid concerns that low participation rates were skewing the accuracy of NAPLAN data, PPS received less favourable coverage in the same newspaper, despite continued strong results. While The Sentinel reported a significant rise in PPS’s enrolments following the launch of MySchool, it also observed that the school’s NAPLAN participation rate was twelve percent below the national average. The implication was that PPS had ‘skewed’ its test results and that its above average results were, in fact, not an accurate reflection of full cohort ability, a claim vigorously refuted by principal, Ron Harwood.

12.2.2 Austral Lakes Primary School

While Austral Lakes PS, a public primary school in Melbourne’s outer northern suburbs, was

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1. In 2010, the average ICSEA value was 1000. Most schools had an ICSEA value between 900 and 1100 (www.myschool.edu.au).
also featured in *The Sentinel* in January, 2010, the school performed below the average on most NAPLAN test measures. Although *The Sentinel* highlighted the school’s underperformance by contrasting the stronger results of ‘like’ schools, there was no sense that the newspaper was suggesting that Austral Lakes had failed. Rather, *The Sentinel* implied policy failure, pointing out that *MySchool* makes no adjustments for level of English spoken, and emphasizing that nearly half of the prep students beginning at the school in 2010 had little or no English. Principal Bruce McGee’s comment that his ‘measure of success’, as opposed to the measures employed by central government, is that his students are ‘talking’ and ‘happy’ by the end of year 1 (*The Sentinel*, 2010) constructed him as both a character and a ‘maverick’ head (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004) prepared to buck the system.

### 12.2.3 St Stanislav Primary School

A Catholic primary school in Melbourne’s outer northern suburbs with an enrolment in 2010 of 328 and an ICSEA value of 972 ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)), St Stanislav’s was incorrectly reported as one of the lowest performing schools in the state in numeracy in *The Beacon’s* 2011 ‘league tables’ of NAPLAN results, prompting the school to threaten legal action and *The Beacon* to publish a ‘good news story’ to compensate for its error.

### 12.2.4 The Willows Primary School

The Willows PS, a public primary school located in Melbourne’s inner east, was featured in a news report in *The Sentinel* in September, 2010 in relation to its extraordinarily high NAPLAN exemption rates, at a time when the Victorian Education Minister had warned of tough action on schools found “boycotting” NAPLAN tests by exempting students. The school’s 2011 ICSEA rating of 1209 ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)) suggested significant socio-educational advantage, with substantial numbers of parents coming from educated backgrounds, marking the school as quite different to the other five schools whose principals were interviewed. The piece in *The Sentinel* was generated by a parent complaint to the newspaper, following a letter he received from the school asking whether his child would sit the NAPLAN test. Principal, Helene Strachan, provided a carefully worded response to *The Sentinel* in which she commented that while opting-out from NAPLAN was not encouraged by the school, parents were entitled to choice.
The news report generated a series of letters in *The Sentinel*, largely from supporters of the school, including parents. Six months later, in March, 2011, following the release of *MySchool2.0*, *The Sentinel* again published a news report about the 86% NAPLAN exemption rate at The Willows. The article included comment from a parent who had exercised her ‘choice’ by refusing permission to allow her daughters to take the test. It again quoted the Principal who reiterated the school’s respect for parental choice.

Less than a week after I interviewed Helene Strachan, in May, 2012, *The Sentinel* published a page one story featuring the school’s exemption rates. This coincided with the commencement of the 2012 NAPLAN tests, and the launch in April, 2012 of the ‘Say no to NAPLAN’ campaign, designed to encourage parents to boycott the tests. The piece referred rather damningly to the ‘skewing’ of results at The Willows, given that just 14 percent of its students sat NAPLAN in 2011, and pointed out that according to *MySchool* the school’s performance was substantially below similar schools in almost every NAPLAN category (*The Sentinel*, 2012). The implication that the school was, in essence, cheating, was a significant shift from the suggestion in the same newspaper, just one year earlier, that The Willows’ rebellious stance was commendable.

### 12.2.5 Tania Community School

A public Year 7-12 Community School in Melbourne’s outer eastern suburbs, Tania Community School was listed as the worst performing Victorian state secondary school in all categories tested by NAPLAN in *The Beacon’s* 2012 “league table”, following the release of *MySchool3.0*. With an enrolment in 2011 of 115 students and an ICSEA value of 981 ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)), the school again featured in a more positive article in *The Beacon* in March, 2012 after the Principal contacted the newspaper to ‘reprimand’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) them.

### 12.2.6 Margaret Street School

A community secondary school in Melbourne’s inner west, Margaret Street School was listed in *The Beacon’s* 2012 ‘league table’ as fourth ‘worst’ in the state for Year 9 Reading, second ‘worst’ for Writing and third ‘worst’ for Spelling and Grammar and Punctuation. In 2011, the school had an enrolment of 98 students and an ICSEA value of 923 ([www.myschool.edu.au](http://www.myschool.edu.au)). It
had had nine principals in the space of two years. The current principal, Dirk Van Poppel, had been in the position for 17 months when I interviewed him and was in his first principalship.

12. 3 The discursive effects on schools named in the press, from the principal’s view

12.3.1 Introduction

The interviews highlighted the difficulty of disentangling the effects on schools of the policy investigated from the effects of press reporting on that policy. When principals spoke about NAPLAN testing or *MySchool*, for example, it was the policy they generally referred to, rather than press reporting on the policy. The exception was when they spoke of ‘leaks’ to the media by agents in the field of education, or of the “league tables” some newspapers had constructed. These were condemned by all six principals as a misuse of the data. Principals’ views about specific media coverage of their school often intersected with their views about the media’s reporting on education more generally. A number of principals expressed the view, also prevalent in the research, that the media has very little understanding of education or schools, while also acknowledging that the media could be used to advantage to market a school.

Four of the six schools whose principals were interviewed were “named and shamed” in *The Beacon* as poor-performing schools. It was the view of principals that this practice further entrenches disadvantage by reinforcing the absence of genuine parental choice. In these schools, there was no specific discursive effect of being “named and shamed” in the sense of altering practice or autonomy by, for example, altering parent choice, simply because, in the view of principals, parents had no choice. Being “named and shamed” was, however, seen as damaging in presenting a view to the wider (including the education) community that the school was failing. This suggested that media coverage may add to existing prejudices and provide a rationale for those parents with the capacity to choose to either leave the public sector or move to other public schools with stronger NAPLAN results, as appeared to occur at PPS.

An unexpected effect of being “named and shamed” was a strengthening of collegiality and support among members of the education community and a corresponding strengthening of animosity towards some sections of the journalistic field. The interviews suggested that the ‘reciprocal influences between media and other social fields’ (Hepp et al, 2010, p.227) include
agents from the field of education actively intervening in the field of journalism. Two of the four principals whose schools were “named and shamed” responded immediately, making connections with the relevant newspaper to express their disapproval. Moreover, such interventions may have effects on the journalistic field. In one case, principal intervention was successful in educating the journalist involved about the school’s disadvantage and the inadequacy of NAPLAN as a measure of its “worth”. Such interactions could potentially change the attitudes of newspapers which have demonstrated a ‘meek’ acceptance of a ‘top-down agenda of national education goals’ (Kaplan, 1992, p.17), producing a change in the products of this field, as appeared to occur when The Beacon wrote a positive piece about the school following the principal’s intervention.

The interviews also revealed that parents may actively use the press to intervene and alter practice in schools. Whether the media played any role in parents now attempting to pressure schools to do more to prepare their child for NAPLAN is difficult to determine, though it is possible that parents were made more aware of NAPLAN testing and its importance via the media, as well as through the actions of secondary schools in asking for primary NAPLAN results at enrolment.

12.3.2 ‘NAPLAN personally doesn’t concern me. Bring it on. Don’t care. I’m confident with what we’re doing’ (Van Poppel, 2012)

Principals’ attitudes to policy & to press reporting on policy

Despite principals accepting that governments need ‘a measure of a system’ because of the ‘significant dollars invested in it’ (Harwood, 2012), most were critical of NAPLAN and MySchool as this measure. McGee (2012), who dismissed NAPLAN as ‘summative’, ‘culturally exclusive’, ‘not even diagnostic’ and as having ‘limited value from a teaching point of view’ saw little value in NAPLAN other than to test ‘the health of the system’. Similarly, ‘like school’ comparisons between his school and ‘a little public school in Bega’, in rural NSW, were ‘absolute rubbish’ (McGee, 2002).

Van Poppel (2012) differed from the majority of principals interviewed in that he did not ‘have a problem with testing’ and saw both NAPLAN and MySchool as simply a sign of ‘educational
change’. He described those who opposed NAPLAN as ‘left wing’ ‘tree-hugging’ ‘hippies from the 70’s’, commenting:

I don’t know how you can possibly work effectively unless you have appropriate data to make judgements about the kids (and) inform the decisions you’re making about teaching and learning and the NAPLAN is a small part of it. If you want to become obsessed with it, it becomes a big part and if you don’t; if you have a different perspective about education and data and teaching and learning it becomes a small part, just part of the bigger picture (Van Poppel, 2012).

Several principals implied that the press amplified the effects of this policy; that, in fact, it is the media and not the tests themselves that are the issue. Davies (2012), for example, opposed the ‘advertising’ of NAPLAN in the media rather than the testing itself. She described herself as ‘not one to fear information being made available’, but pointed out that people can already ‘access that information anyway’. A sense of betrayal was conveyed in her comment that ‘we were always promised that “league tables” would never be used and published and that is what happened and it continues to happen.…

I don’t see the need for that. If people want to know, come and we’ll show them and whether it’s a NAPLAN test or a test that we’ve devised to administer on a particular day for a particular reason for particular learning that the children have done, well so be it but …no, I don’t understand. I do understand however the need for the country and our government to have national standards and national means of collecting information and if NAPLAN is the way that they can do that … I understand that and I can support that as long as it isn’t made out to be any more than just that. And that’s what it is and that’s the way it needs to be presented to the community. This is a snapshot; it is this; its limitations are these (Davies, 2012).

Strachan (2012) commented that MySchool has ‘made the stakes so much higher’. In her view, ‘most principals don’t like NAPLAN’ but for most, ‘it’s too hard to fight it’ (Strachan, 2012). O’Brien (2012) suggested that the policy’s inevitable association with ‘principal promotion’ and ‘teacher performance salary’ provides an incentive for schools ‘to make sure (their data) looks good’. While he could see nothing wrong with ‘something that actually lifts the performance of kids’, he too had issues with the ‘advertising’ of that performance in the media (O’Brien, 2012). In his view, NAPLAN is completely inadequate in reflecting the learning achievement of his students, many of whom are unable to succeed in mainstream settings. And, while he had glanced at the MySchool website, he felt it didn’t ‘give a great deal of information about (his) school and who (they) are’. He commented that his own children go to a local neighbourhood school with 320 students yet the website ‘doesn’t tell you that at a working bee recently they had 50 parents, family members turn up to a working bee on a Saturday morning …the school next to it, with 1200 kids, had two teachers… there is a difference there; there’s that community engagement. You’re not getting that through’ MySchool (O’Brien, 2012).
While the attitude of most principals was that national testing and reporting is here to stay and needs to be managed, Harwood (2012) was notable in his extremely strong stand on the issue of NAPLAN participation rates. As *The Sentinel* had pointed out, his own school’s exemption rate was high. Harwood (2012) described NAPLAN’s exemption policy as ‘institutionalised child abuse’:

We put a kid in NAPLAN after they’ve been in Australia for a year. I’ll take (bureaucrat) and I’ll stick him in a school in Saudi Arabia for a year and then get him to do a NAPLAN test in Arabic …it’s absolute bullshit and it’s child abuse; there’s no other way of describing it… I would happily be sacked over that issue. I will exempt kids from NAPLAN who don’t have sufficient English skills to do it because it’s child abuse. We’re not learning anything by it and the system gets judged by it and it’s wrong (Harwood, 2012).

Harwood commented on the ‘cheap shots’ made by other principals and members of the Principals’ Association in *The Sentinel* article which focused on his school’s exemption rates. Tension within the field was a strong thread throughout the interview, evident in phrases like ‘political point scoring’, ‘they should know better’ and ‘the boys’ networks’. Education bureaucrats were described as ‘not supporting the principal class by making these statements’ in the media. Harwood’s anger at press allegations of cheating at a nearby school where his friend is the principal also revealed tension within the field. The stories, which appeared in both *The Sentinel* and *The Beacon* were, in Harwood’s view, leaked to the media by a regional education bureaucrat who had been associated with the school but was removed following charges of bullying. ‘And all of the leaks that he did to the media on her results were payback for that’ (Harwood, 2012). According to Harwood, his friend was not supported by the Principals’ Association, and in fact became an outcast on the board, of which she was a member. He believes that various members of the board were leaking information to the press. Such comments confirm that the press can act as a ‘gaming space’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.264) in which agents from the field of education actively use the media to metaphorically confront each other in the struggle for power. As earlier chapters illustrated, this process is enabled by press reliance on, and privileging of, ‘voice’ as a news source. From Harwood’s (2012) perspective, McGee’s (2012) argument that schools are exempting students to make ‘the school look better’ indeed seemed to be one of the ‘cheap shots’ he alluded to.
A consistent theme throughout the interviews was the view of principals that their practice is unchanged by MySchool and/or press coverage of MySchool. Harwood laughed and said ‘Absolutely not’ when I asked whether his school’s extensive focus on literacy and numeracy was driven by MySchool.

No, no, no, no. It’s driven by moral imperative to improve the performance of the staff. If you build capacity in your teachers, you build capacity in kids – it’s not rocket science (Harwood, 2012).

When I asked Andrea Davies (2012) whether she felt a need to focus more on NAPLAN testing because the results are reported publicly, both on the MySchool website and in the press, she responded decisively - ‘No, No …a clear No. We won’t be dragged into that’.

Nevertheless, the interviews suggested that practice is altered in some schools in response to the ‘enormous pressure…on the agenda at every level’ (McGee, 2012) to improve results and that press reporting amplifies this effect. At PPS, students are prepared for NAPLAN testing, suggesting that some alteration in autonomy and practice is occurring. While Harwood (2012) dismissed teaching to the test as impossible ‘when you don’t know what’s in’ the test, he acknowledged that his school ‘absolutely’ prepared students for ‘the fundamentals of the test’:

Do we teach kids how to discern between a,b,c,d & e? With 3 stupid responses and 2 that will be close and you’ve got to make the choice between those? Do we do that? Absolutely. You don’t want the kids to fail within the construct of the test because of testing procedure, so yes we teach to testing procedure and it’s really important (Harwood, 2012).

Davies (2012) similarly conceded that:

Yes, we practice completing those kinds of tests so that our children are familiar with filling in those kinds of multiple choice questions and we do certainly in their literacy and numeracy lessons talk about the kinds of questions that they’re going to get so that they can understand how to decipher, how to make choices. So we do all that with them; we do the skilling but we don’t teach to the tests (Davies, 2012).

She also acknowledged that considerable time was spent by teachers working in professional learning teams to analyze the results and use them diagnostically, though the school’s existing annual P-6 PAT tests continue to be used to group students. Van Poppel (2012), who emphatically stated that NAPLAN ‘doesn’t drive what we do at all’, made a similar point. At his school, where many students have significant behavioural, welfare and learning issues and are referred from different schools throughout the year, a ‘regime’ of diagnostic assessments has led
to an acceptance of testing on the part of students. Few students refuse to sit NAPLAN while the staff see NAPLAN as simply another diagnostic tool:

So my whole thrust is we’re not going to shy away from data; data’s an important part of what we do to make our programs better to improve student outcomes so NAPLAN’s just a – (Van Poppel, 2012).

In contrast was the situation at Tanima CS where, as O’Brien commented, if they pre-warned students about NAPLAN, they’d ‘get no kids turning up’. There is, therefore, no preparation or practice for the tests at this school which O’Brien described as an ‘absolute nightmare’:

‘…for some of the Year 7’s, they were able to cope with it; the Year 9’s, no. More than half just walked out half way through, swearing ‘This is fucked. I don’t want to do it. This sucks’ (O’Brien, 2012).

Although principals maintained that their school’s practice remains unchanged by national testing and reporting, many argued that this was not the case at other schools. Several implied that schools with more at stake in terms of securing student numbers were preparing extensively for NAPLAN testing. The Principal of The Willows pointed to the use of social media sites by schools to promote their NAPLAN results, quoting the Facebook page of a private school in Melbourne’s south-eastern suburbs on which the school was ‘bragging about their NAPLAN’ results and using them as a ‘promotional tool’ (Strachan, 2012).

12.3.4  ‘While your data’s good you get a lot of autonomy; once your data falls over you’re in more shit than a Werribee duck’ (1) (Harwood, 2012).

The enabling effects of positive press coverage

My interview with Ron Harwood suggested that positive press coverage of a disadvantaged school’s strong NAPLAN results can have an effect at bureaucratic level, with flow-on effects at the school level. When Harwood was approached by The Sentinel in January, 2010 to talk about his school’s strong NAPLAN performance, ‘the general consensus’ of the regional office was that it would be good for’ PPS (Harwood, 2012). Bureaucratic willingness to harness this press coverage to market the school was potentially self-advantageous. It also advantaged the school principal by increasing his capital and authority in the field.

1. Harwood’s comment refers to the Western Treatment Plant in the outer Melbourne suburb of Werribee, which processes around half of the city’s sewage.
While Harwood (2012) insisted that *The Sentinel*’s press coverage had no effect on the school’s practice, and that the school is ‘non-responsive’ in general to the media, a number of comments made in the interview pointed to more subtle and complex discursive effects.

Harwood pointed out that the parents at his school don’t read *The Sentinel*(2). As far as he knew, none were aware of the stories featuring the school. However, the celebratory press coverage and the positive response of bureaucrats may have validated the school’s existing, and somewhat unusual, programs, thus increasing this principal’s autonomy. This was suggested by Harwood’s comment that ‘While your data’s good you get a lot of autonomy; once your data falls over you’re in more shit than a Werribee duck’, and by his outlining of a raft of changes introduced at the school in 2008, including new behavioural management strategies, a new curriculum based on ‘road maps’, the introduction of ‘learning conversations with children’ (Harwood, 2012) and the removal of all ‘peripherals’ from the curriculum such as swimming lessons and fundraising in order to focus almost exclusively on literacy and numeracy.

In effect, these changes represented the kinds of curriculum narrowing that many see as the product of a national testing and reporting regime. Harwood commented that his school gave ‘real value to the teaching of literacy, numeracy and science. If you want anything else, we’re not the place for you.’

…. we narrowed our curriculum and we didn’t do that because we want our NAPLAN results to be good; we did it because we need every second of every day to teach our kids to be literate and numerate. So, swimming – all that peripheral stuff, we just can’t do that… we’ve got to come to a point as a system where we stop allowing parents to abrogate their responsibility and place it on the education system….So what we’ll do at the start of the year is I’ll get (receptionist) to research all the local swimming programs and put them in the newsletter because it’s not my job to teach your kid to swim (Harwood, 2012).

Harwood acknowledged that while this focus was not typical of most primary schools, there was no pressure on him from the authorities because his ‘data’s OK’. If it wasn’t ‘OK’, he suggested, he’d ‘probably be having some conversations with (his) general manager’. This principal’s autonomy and authority appeared to have been increased significantly by his school’s strong NAPLAN results, an effect potentially enhanced by positive press coverage. In essence, Harwood was able to continue to offer a curriculum which focused on the basics at the expense

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2. McGee (2012) made a similar point, estimating that perhaps only ten parents would have seen the article about Austral Lakes in *The Sentinel* and commenting that the great majority were unable to access the *MySchool* website, either because of limited English or lack of home Internet access (McGee, 2012).
of other important extra-curricular activities because his data was ‘good’. Similarly, he was somehow exempt from making use of the Department’s ‘Ultranet’, despite some pressure from the region:

we won’t pick up the Ultranet, much to my general manager’s chagrin. He rings me every now and then …”You’re not doing anything with the Ultranet” and I say “(John), I’ve had this conversation with you; when you can tell me what the Ultranet is going to do for Mohammed in Grade 2, I will pick it up” (Harwood, 2012).

Strong performance data, and celebration of that data in particular newspapers, might therefore have subtle discursive effects, validating existing programs and providing principals with greater autonomy, including the right to defy education department directives.

### 12.3.5 Choice & competition – enabling the market

The strong NAPLAN results of PPS in 2009 led to a significant increase in student enrolments at the school. While Harwood was reasonably sure that this was not connected to The Sentinel’s coverage, he did believe it to be a product of both the MySchool website and the significant ‘airplay’ it was given which generated ‘talk’ among parents, suggesting that forms of media other than newspapers may be influential in some communities. Many of the 80 new enrolments in 2011 at PPS were low-performing students or ‘red flags’ (Harwood, 2012). The parents of these students, Harwood argued, wanted the school to ‘fix’ the problem. That is, they enrolled their children in the school because of its strong NAPLAN performance, as revealed on MySchool and in the media, a practice Harwood (2012) referred to as ‘data-driven enrolment’. This led, ironically, to lower performance on NAPLAN for the school in the following year and indeed, Harwood described the influx of new students as ‘having really hurt us’.

Davies described the aftermath of The Beacon’s misreporting of St Stanislav’s numeracy results as a ‘terrible time’ and stated that they were ‘saved’ by the fact that the school’s parents, many of them from non-English speaking backgrounds, are not newspaper readers. She wondered what the impact would have been if the school had been in an affluent area (3). Her initial concern, following the publication of The Beacon’s ‘league tables’, was that enrolments would be affected. This was a particular anxiety, given the school’s reliance on parental choice. So worried

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3. Despite this, Davies (2012) did comment that during school tours some parents had mentioned that they had looked at the MySchool website and that St Stanislav’s was ‘represented very well and they liked what they saw’. 

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was Davies that she immediately wrote to parents to inform them that the information was incorrect. An associated concern was the ‘image’ that had been presented to colleagues and neighbouring schools that the school was a ‘failing’ school (Davies, 2012). In fact, colleagues were enormously supportive, suggesting that a further discursive effect of negative press reporting might, in fact, be a strengthening of support within the education community as a move to ‘protect its boundaries’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2). A side-effect of this might also be a strengthening of hostility towards newspapers which provide misleading coverage.

This interview suggested that the potential for negative press coverage to damage a school’s reputation in the community may, ironically, be reduced by the level of disadvantage in that community. That is, parents with limited English who don’t read English newspapers may be unaware of the coverage. Despite this, principals anticipate negative effects, particularly on enrolments, which prompts them to take swift action to defend their school and to ‘reprimand’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) the media. This appears to be particularly the case when private schools are “named and shamed” in the media in a market-oriented environment. Moreover, press coverage of NAPLAN results more generally may strengthen market-oriented discourses around education by encouraging choice and competition. Davies, for example, commented that more Catholic parents now feel that they ‘have to shop around’ before choosing a school, thus ignoring traditional parish boundaries (Davies, 2012). She could not account for why this was but felt that *MySchool* could be a contributing factor.

McGee similarly suggested that the potential effects of poor NAPLAN performance *could* be significant if parents have a genuine choice. As he said: ‘we’re always going to be pink, so put simply a parent flicks on that … and thinks “Jeez, the school’s hopeless”. His parents, however, ‘don’t have any capacity to choose’. Ironically, the disadvantage of his school community has endowed him with a degree of freedom from the pressure which may lead some schools to take extreme steps to improve their data. The following comment alludes to this. It also suggests that a potential discursive effect of press coverage of *MySchool* is, in this principal’s view, to construct a ‘discourse of derision’ (Kenway, 1990, p.191) around failing public schools, entrenching disadvantage and giving a ‘leg up’ to private schools:

Those that choose and have the capacity to choose would see that pink and not come here and that’s very negative and that’s why I believe it’s crude… it’s popularism…if we started to play the game on our website the moment we talk down our school we give an ad for private schools …and I’ve spent forty years as a teacher; the last twenty as a
principal and I don’t need to give them a leg up by saying how hard it is to work in a public school and then create an advertisement for a private school (McGee, 2012).

McGee (2012) suggested that one of the discursive effects of national testing and reporting is the creation of ‘default schools’; ‘residualised’ public schools that ‘you don’t go to from choice’, a point also made by Hattam, Prosser & Brady (2009, p.164) in relation to the Howard Government’s funding model. McGee (2012) argued that MySchool fosters ‘neoliberal …privatization’ by enshrining the discourse of ‘you get what you pay for’.

12.3.6 ‘Habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.56) as a factor in accounting for principal resistance

Bourdieu’s (1990, pp.56-7) notion of habitus as ‘embodied history, internalized as second nature’ and produced by ‘the work of inculcation’ helps to explain principals’ diverse responses to the policy-shift signalled by MySchool and the naming of their schools in the press. In particular, it helps to explain why some principals offered resistance.

The Principal of Austral Lakes, a genial “character”, clearly had a strong connection with the school he led. He was born in the area, went to school there and, as a child, went rabbiting and yabbying on the site where the school now stands. His strong advocacy for public education, perhaps derived from his own experience of disadvantage, was evidenced by the ‘relationship’ he developed with the press in the 1990s promoting public education, and by his comments throughout the interview about advocating ‘the importance of public education for the public good’ (McGee, 2012). He made several references to inequities in funding for public schools, and to the flawed perception that local private schools are somehow ‘better’.

An educator for forty years and a principal for twenty, McGee was highly critical of the MySchool website and ‘point in time’ testing, arguing that the Australian Early Developmental Index was a more purposeful measure than MySchool. He referred to both the U.S. and U.K. and to research that ‘high-stakes testing…doesn’t lead to whole of cohort improvement’, describing the data on the MySchool website as ‘inaccurate’ and ‘crude’, and pointing out that when 500 of his 600 children are absent during Ramadan, two thousand student absences are recorded on MySchool, with no allowance for contextual factors.
What was more important to McGee than worrying ‘about whether it’s pink or green on a NAPLAN score’ was having ‘great public schools’ and being ‘somewhere (for kids) to walk and someone to walk with’ (McGee, 2012). I sensed throughout the interview that this ‘primary educator’ valued the work of teachers. He spoke of the ‘deeply committed people’ who work in schools and the ‘important work’ done by his teachers and support staff, and indeed by the ‘tens of thousands’ of teachers in Australia daily ‘making a difference’ (McGee, 2012). There was no sense of anti-teacher-unionism, nor any hint of criticism of ‘under-performing’ teachers in any of McGee’s comments, yet both these themes emerged in my interview with Harwood (2012), who spoke of the difficulty of ‘getting rid’ of teachers who were ‘absolute duds’ and of hating ‘the AEU with a passion’ because of their view that ‘every teacher’s a good one’ and their willingness to ‘support people who are beyond any logical person to support’.

Perhaps because of the wealth of experience and knowledge McGee drew on, and perhaps also because of his larger-than-life personality, he was fearless in expressing his opinions, both during the interview, but also in the media. He had, for example, recently been interviewed by commercial television station, Channel 7, on the subject of truancy. He referred to other principals who would ‘not feel safe’ to do so, fearing ‘the region, and the department and the media unit’, whereas he doesn’t ‘even tell them now’. While in ‘the Kennett era’ it was difficult to be outspoken, he nevertheless was, and although he received numerous phone calls about his comments, he was never summoned to the ‘department’ in a dreaded ‘black taxi’. Perhaps the most telling comment was his assessment of himself as a principal as sitting ‘very powerfully on the left’.

The importance of ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.56) as a factor in accounting for principals’ responses was evident in the ways their leadership experience led them to know the rules of the game, but their disposition and circumstances led them to challenge the rules. This was evident in my interview with Andrea Davies who, in her third principalship, had led St Stanislav PS for nine years. Like the Principals of Pendlebury and Austral Lakes, all her work has been in disadvantaged schools.

While Davies was not opposed to NAPLAN testing, she was adamant that it needed to be understood for what it was: ‘a very minor’ measure of performance. Her comments suggested
that school principals play a vital role in mediating the impact NAPLAN will have for and on
their school. When asked whether she thought most schools would have this attitude, Davies
(2012) laughed and said:
No, I don’t; I think some schools give it a lot of credence and get very caught up with preparing the children and
preparing them for weeks ahead of time.

So, are you different because that’s your stance as principal, do you think?

Probably, and look there would be some schools who share what we believe as well, and it’s not just me, it’s the
staff here that share that and understand that.

Her comments suggested that the principal’s individual disposition and their familial experience
and values may help to construct a group habitus, conveyed in the statement that ‘it’s not just
me, it’s the staff here that share that and understand that’.

The Willows’ long history of opposition to standardised testing, going back to the 1990’s, also
suggests that the habitus of the ‘group’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.58) which, in advantaged
communities, may also include parents, may be influential in influencing and accounting for how
a principal responds to both policy and the press. Current Willows principal, Helene Strachan
was, in the 1990’s, a member of the Australian Literacy Educators’ Association, along with two
other educators who are now members of the ‘Say No to Naplan’ group reported on in The
Sentinel. Strachan has also had a long association with the school she now leads, having worked
there in the mid 1980s as a classroom teacher. In the 1990s, she worked for the Australian
Reading Association (ARA) which, at the time, was active in critiquing the introduction of
standardised testing by the Victorian Education Department. In her role at the ARA, Strachan
spoke to the staff at The Willows. The Principal at the time, who led the school for eighteen
years, had taught in England prior to her appointment and had ‘seen the damage and the
narrowing of the curriculum’ (Strachan, 2012) there. The ‘climate’ in the 1990s, in Strachan’s
view, enabled strong stands to be taken. ‘Most schools were opposed to (state-wide testing)’, as
evidenced by industrial action. However, while most eventually ‘caved in and conceded the
battle’ (Strachan, 2012), the then principal of The Willows, described by Strachan (2012) as ‘a
very outspoken and strong leader’, refused to moderate her opposition to state-wide testing.

While Strachan saw the school’s current anti-NAPLAN stand as simply part of its long history of
opposition to standardised testing, it was also clearly a product of her leadership. Strachan had
read widely about the dangers of standardized testing. She had fought a long campaign against it over several decades. She regularly followed Twitter and Facebook and had set up a Google alert to keep informed about recent articles on NAPLAN testing. In her view, her own staff was largely unaware of the uniqueness of the school’s stand. Her comment that ‘They’re in a bit of a bubble here and they don’t really get that they’re so unique’ (Strachan, 2012) reinforced the centrality of the principal in shaping a school’s response. The school’s stance also reflected a level of education and advantage in the parent community which, Strachan implied, is necessary for resistance to occur:

I’m just following a very strong leader and trying to be strategic about it, but with an educated population. But if I’m in a struggling school in the northern suburbs I’m not in a position to do that (Strachan, 2012).

In Strachan’s view, it is not just because the majority of her parents are highly educated that they have taken such a strong anti-NAPLAN stand, but also because many are active in the arts and value ‘collaborative learning and the whole child’ (Strachan, 2012).

All three principals were highly active in seeking to minimize the impact of national testing and reporting on their schools, reflecting their individual ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.56). They shared a well-informed knowledge of U.S. and U.K. education movements and responded from the vantage point of lengthy experience in the field. In contrast was Van Poppel, in his first principalship, who had not seen The Beacon’s league tables “naming and shaming” his school, despite knowing, when they were published, that they were ‘coming out’. The coverage had not been discussed at a staff meeting and Van Poppel (2012) didn’t ‘even bother bringing it up at school council’. His contempt was evident not only in the fact that he hadn’t looked at the newspaper, but also in his dismissal of the “league table” as tabloid ‘trash’; ‘on the page for a day’ then ‘gone! So what?’

12.3.7 Principals’ active use of the press (including local press) to market a school or defend practice & pedagogy

Two principals made a distinction between the local and national press, presenting the national press as allies of ‘those who believe that public education has failed’ (Berliner & Biddle, 1998, p.27), in contrast to a more supportive local press which, in McGee’s (2012) words, are ‘a very different kettle of fish’. McGee made active use of the local media to promote his school and
praised his local newspaper’s ‘local advocacy for their local primary school’ (McGee, 2012), contrasting their celebration of his school’s ‘diversity and culture’ with the ‘popularism’ of the national press. O’Brien commented that following the publication of The Beacon’s league tables which named his school as the ‘worst’ in the state, Tanima CS received a call from their local newspaper who ‘wanted to help out’ because ‘they know what sort of place this is’ (O’Brien, 2012). Van Poppel (2012) similarly contacted his local newspaper to cover the school’s bike-ed program and the opening of their Youth Connections room and described the experience as ‘positive’.

McGee echoed the widespread view in the research that national press coverage of education ‘has a negative impact on public perceptions of, and support for, public education’ (Darleen-Opfer, 2007, p.166). He spoke of unfair stories in the press about ‘incidents’ (such as a physical altercation outside a school which had nothing to do with the school) which, once reported, can destroy a school’s reputation ‘for years’ (McGee, 2012). Similar observations were made by Jeffs (1999) for the U.K. He referred to Ministers employing ‘a slavish media to name and shame schools’, running stories about, for example, the ‘worst school in Britain’ (Jeffs, 1999, p.162). Interestingly, McGee (2012) saw the government (‘depending on their colour’) as feeding a discourse of public-school derision in order to save money….because ‘for every child that disappears out of the public system, that’s a reduction in state-level funding’ (McGee, 2012). Despite these criticisms, McGee’s decision to agree to The Sentinel’s request for an interview suggests that principals may actively use the press to ‘make a case for their school and their sector’ (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004, p.301). He wanted to demonstrate that his school ‘is in fact not underperforming, but underperforming on (MySchool) measures’ (McGee, 2012).

In some cases, principals use the media creatively to defend practice or promote particular campaigns. Strachan, for example, has gathered a collection of newspaper articles from The Sentinel which she uses in presenting the school’s anti-NAPLAN stand to parents. She also has a number of parents she contacts if approached by the media and, having already received one call from the press this year, had given them the name of a parent. Her comment that this parent was a good person because she was on School Council and she was a Parent Association person. She’s an academic … somebody who’d give a considered approach. You know obviously if they door-stopped you’d have no control over that (Strachan, 2012)
suggests that principals feel a need to exercise some control over who speaks about their school in the press.

The exchange of letters published in *The Sentinel* in 2010 defending The Willows occurred after a school council member wrote to the newspaper. Strachan (2012) indicated that the writer, married to the school’s music teacher, is involved in the arts and directs the school’s musicals. The apparently unsolicited letter from a visiting scholar which was later published in *The Sentinel* also had links to the school as the writer is a professional friend of the Principal. Further evidence of this active use of the media at The Willows was evident in the way the school contacted the director of Opera Victoria, after reading his commentary piece in *The Sentinel* in which he condemned NAPLAN’s detrimental effect on the arts curriculum in primary schools. The outcome was that he spoke to the school’s parent community with 150 people present. Strachan’s (2012) view that it’s fantastic to have people like that being quoted in the media or writing articles... Yes, that was an absolute win for us ... It’s really important that my staff and myself, that I feel supported.

not only reinforced the centrality of ‘voice’ in press reporting, but highlighted the effects of the voices privileged in the press on practice in schools.

12.3.8 Relative effects within fields

McGee’s comments on the effects on his school of extensive press coverage of the extraordinarily high NAPLAN results at a nearby “similar” school suggested that the discursive effects of being named and shamed in the press are not necessarily confined to the named school. ‘Leaks’ to the media from an education bureaucrat who formerly worked at the school implied that the schools results were statistically impossible. Despite being subjected to a departmental investigation and cleared of any wrongdoing, the school’s 2010 and 2011 NAPLAN results have since been removed from the *MySchool* website. McGee commented that this school had been ‘roundly condemned’ in the media and placed under ‘extraordinary pressure’ for seeking to improve its NAPLAN results. He added that ‘we all suffered from that…enormously’:

... because when it first came out, what were they doing at (the school), which is five kilometers that way – same profile, same sort of kids – Middle Eastern background, and yet they’ve developed their reading in sixteen months that went from where we all were ...the bottom 25th percentiles to the top 5 percent and in some cases beyond? So the negative impact that it had on our work, our real work beyond the school gate in our regional offices; it caused one fellow to resign (McGee, 2012).
The implication was that the initial press reports, prior to the inquiry into the school’s results, placed enormous pressure on “like schools” to justify their relative underperformance to regional offices.

12.3.9 Educators’ interventions in the field of journalism

Davies recalled a significant ‘level of distress among staff’ after her school was incorrectly reported in *The Beacon* in 2011 as being among the worst in the state for numeracy. The school’s swift response:

… we contacted (*The Beacon*), we contacted the Catholic Education Office, Melbourne; our media department…I spoke to the regional manager, spoke to principal consultant, spoke to lots of people – it was quite distressing (Davies, 2012)

suggested that this coverage had a number of effects beyond those associated with staff morale. In the temporary social field (Rawolle, 2007, p.87) that ensued, the principal’s interactions with agents from *The Beacon*, reflective of the education field ‘talking to the journalistic field’ (Bourdieu, 1995, p.31), highlighted her attempts to strengthen her school’s ‘relative position’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40) in the field by demanding a retraction from the journalistic field. This, when it came, was reluctant and in the form of a ‘good news’ story. The principal’s sense of outrage at the newspaper’s failure to apologize or to admit fault had clearly not diminished with time:

And I mean it was such a mistake...it was a simple mistake, it was a data entry mistake, that’s all it was and that’s all they needed to say, “We’ve printed the wrong information. It’s a typing error– it should have said this and it said that.” Now we couldn’t get them even to do that. And because we’ve typed in the wrong score this school appears to be here and in fact it’s not. That’s what we wanted and we couldn’t get that out of them. They kept saying it was just a data entry mistake and it was just a data entry mistake but the implications of that data entry mistake could have been amazing (Davies, 2012).

For Gerard O’Brien, Acting Principal of Tanima CS, ‘the people that were affected mostly by (*The Beacon’s* league tables) were the staff”:

... you’re working your butt off here with really challenging kids and then this comes up, so all we’re being judged on when a newspaper reporter whacks this into the paper is a result that has no relevance to where our kids are really at and it was just horrendous (O’Brien, 2012).

The anger underpinning these comments suggests that press construction of “league tables” strengthens the hostility and mistrust members of the education field feel towards sections of the
press who engage in this practice, magnifying perceptions of the divide between the tabloid and quality press.

12.3.10 External pressure on the education field
According to principals, press reporting on MySchool increases parental pressure on schools to prepare students more rigorously for NAPLAN tests. This may force schools to defend their practice to parents or, indeed, to alter practice. St Stanislav, for example, now feels compelled to explain to parents its current practice of seeking to minimise for its students NAPLAN-associated stress. Davies suggested that a further reason for this parental pressure is because secondary schools are now asking for NAPLAN results at enrolment, giving parents the message that NAPLAN results are the only selection measure used. Strachan (2012) made a similar point. In her view, this placed The Willows in a difficult position in that it was required to defend its stance on exemption. She admitted that she had had conversations with parents after information evenings where they said “You should tell us why the Department wants us to” do NAPLAN, and that the school now does that, suggesting an alteration in practice.

The ‘leak’ from a disgruntled parent which exposed The Willows’ extraordinarily high exemption rates in The Sentinel took Strachan completely by surprise. This ‘break’ of the ‘united front’ presented by parents (Strachan, 2012) left her feeling ‘very shaky’. Strachan spoke of the need to ‘follow process very carefully’ and referred to the annual School Council motion stating its faith in the school’s assessment practices and reiterating its belief that parents should have a choice as her ‘insurance’:

… you want to stand up and speak out but you also need to go under the radar a little bit with the Department because for me what’s important is that we’re allowed to continue to do…” (Strachan, 2012).

Strachan had no knowledge of the ‘leak’ until it appeared in the newspaper and still doesn’t know who the parent was. She believed that The Sentinel had kept the complaint ‘on file until they wanted to write their article’. In this instance then, a parent had clearly sought to alter practice in the school through press intervention.
12.3.11 False media claims about effects on practice

While press reports in 2010 conveyed the view that schools who underperformed on NAPLAN would be pressured by education bureaucrats to improve, several principals interviewed suggested that this has not occurred. Neither the CEO nor the regional manager was aware of St. Stanislav’s listing in The Beacon’s ‘bottom schools’. Davies hasn’t ‘experienced any pressure from the CEO about looking at the data, looking at other schools’ data, making comparisons. None of that has come through to us’ (Davies, 2012). While the school is encouraged to analyse its NAPLAN results through the school improvement process, and is required to submit these results in its evidence, ‘nothing really happens from it at CEO level’ (Davies, 2012).

The view presented in the press by Julia Gillard following the launch of My School, that underperforming schools should contact and learn from high-performing ‘similar schools’, was disputed by Davies, who had received no such contact and who commented:

….I wonder just how much schools actually get on there and have a look at other schools’ results. I mean I don’t. Why would I? (Davies, 2012).

Similarly, Strachan (2012) had only ever looked at the MySchool website once and simply ‘wasn’t interested’ in it. Press reports of a ministerial ‘crackdown’ on schools that boycotted the NAPLAN tests were not supported by The Willows’ experience. Even when the school was the subject of press reports:

there was no follow up phone call from the Department …there was nothing, there was just silence (Strachan, 2012).

Nor has Strachan (2012) experienced ‘overt pressure’ from the region; has never been ‘carpeted’ and has ‘never had to go and explain’ herself. She attributed the Department’s indulgence to the fact that

they think we’re a pretty high functioning school. If they were getting lots of complaints from parents; if they were getting reports that our kids were going to high school and not learning, I think all the measures are good and even though what we do is not totally standard and doesn’t tick all the boxes for the Department, I think it’s a good school and I think that’s respected (Strachan, 2012).

The Willows does, moreover, use some online standardized testing from the University of Melbourne which the regional network leader is aware of, so ‘we’re not completely thumbing our nose at the Department’. Strachan has, however, been ‘warned’ by her regional network leader that this year (2012) ‘she thinks I’ll be vulnerable’ (Strachan, 2012). She commented “I
think it’s got to happen at some point. I think this crackdown, all of that stuff; at some point they’ve got to actually follow through” (Strachan, 2012).

12.3.12 Potential negative effects on school image

Strachan’s view was that ‘the children at the school would do well if they did NAPLAN. It’s a high achieving population; so most children in this school wouldn’t be harmed by it.’ In fact, the MySchool website reported that in 2011, the school performed below similar school across all tested areas in both Years 3 and Year 5 (www.myschool.edu.au). This, in effect, constructs the school as failing, as was pointed out in The Sentinel in 2012. When I asked Strachan whether there was a potential negative for the school if prospective parents are using the MySchool website, given that exemption rates are not clearly listed on the website and it is difficult for parents to know whether the data is an accurate reflection of the whole school population or only of the small number who sat the test, it was clear that she was unaware that the school had in fact been presented as failing and felt that this was largely irrelevant to her school community. In fact, maybe three people in three years have mentioned the MySchool website and of our current school population, no one’s ever raised it…. so I just think (the school’s) parents don’t care about it. They don’t think it’s important (Strachan, 2012).

It is evident that The Sentinel is following this story, having reported on the school’s exemption rates in both 2011 and 2012. In 2012, the newspaper implied criticism of the school, though when I suggested this to a Sentinel journalist, she disagreed strongly (Kean, 2012) and indeed seemed amused by The Willows’ continued capacity to flout “the rules”, suggesting a lack of journalistic awareness of the effects of press reporting on schools. Yet, Strachan (2012) described herself as highly ‘sensitive’ to media coverage of NAPLAN and MySchool and had learned to expect ‘calls from the press about it. Those calls come when the MySchool website is released; when NAPLAN results are released and at the time of testing, in May’. She does not always talk to the media. Although she had been contacted by The Sentinel for its 2012 feature on NAPLAN testing, she declined to comment.

It is likely that the discursive effects of press reporting on The Willows will be played out in coming years and that the school may eventually be forced, by a combination of bureaucratic
pressure, press exposure and, potentially, parental intervention, to change its practice of promoting large-scale NAPLAN exemption.

### 12.3.13 Principals ‘educating’ the press

Press “naming and shaming” of underperforming disadvantaged schools reveals their capacity to manufacture a sense of crisis around education (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), without acknowledging the significant levels of disadvantage experienced in schools thus ‘named’. As O’Brien (2012) pointed out, his students present with serious issues, including ‘ADHD, ODD, Conduct Disorder, Oppositional Defiance, Asperger’s, School Refusal, high levels of anxiety, depression, self-harm (and) suicidation’. The ‘one thing they have in common is that they just can’t do it in a mainstream school’ (O’Brien, 2012).

When the Principal of Tanima CS saw *The Beacon*’s ‘league tables’ and contacted the newspaper, they defended themselves by citing ‘competition for time’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.28), saying “Look we had to get it out, there was no time to give you a call’. Her response was:

“Well, I tell you what, we can do the interview right now for next year because our results aren’t going to change so let’s do the interview now because this isn’t helping us. It doesn’t help our kids, it doesn’t help our families or our students and when you look at the list of schools, there’s a lot of community schools in there. Why? Because they’re working with the same group of kids (O’Brien, 2012).

Initiating direct contact with *The Beacon* led a reporter to spend several hours at the school and to work with the Principal to ‘tell some of (their) story’ in a subsequent piece, suggesting that schools may have a role in ‘educating’ journalists, not only about the context within which they work, but also about the damage caused by the practice of “naming and shaming” schools. It is interesting that the reporter who wrote the follow-up piece on Tanima CS is the same reporter who, one year earlier, was forced to go to St Stanislav’s and write a ‘good news’ story following her newspaper’s inaccurate reporting of that school’s numeracy results. *The Beacon*’s more positive response to the concerns expressed by Tanima CS suggests that some lessons may have been learned.

Maeroff’s (1998, p.6) argument that ‘Some of those who report on education may not ask the right questions because they do not always know the questions to ask’, seems supported by this example, as does Ogle & Dabbs’ (1998, p.97) point that ‘those who release test results must do a better job of explaining them’. While Warmington & Murphy (2004, pp.296-7) argue that
‘Complaints about poor coverage or ill-informed media comment, on their own take us nowhere’, the principal of Tanima CS found that intervention in the form of complaining directly to the source may successfully ‘educate’ journalists and potentially alter their practice and products.

12.3.14 Principals’ attitudes to the media

Maeroff (1998, p.222) argues that there is a lack of understanding by members of the education community about the media’s intermediary role between the field of education and the public sphere. As the research has shown, there is a widespread view that ‘Media representations tend to reinforce public perceptions concerning the causes of school failure as attributable primarily to failing teachers and/or school structures’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007, p.2). Jeffs (1999) refers to a UK press that, in the 1990s, was ‘unrelentingly hostile’ in its attitude to progressive education, and Berliner & Biddle (1998, p.27) to newspapers as having ‘become a natural ally of those who believe that public education has failed’.

Several of the interviews suggested that this history intersected with the current practice of press-generated “league tables” to influence school principals’ attitudes to the media. Certainly several expressed quite negative views about the media. These ranged from contempt for education journalists to suspicion that the media would ‘twist’ their comments. Harwood (2012) dismissed education journalists as ‘dumb’, with ‘no understanding of the education system, and no desire to understand it’, while McGee, who had used the media in the past to advocate for public education, nevertheless said that he was never ‘comfortable’ with them and implied that ‘you don’t always get’ your story told accurately (McGee, 2012).

Principals’ awareness of the differences between the tabloids and qualities, and of relative position and ownership as significant factors in accounting for press reporting on education was evident in the distinction drawn by some between The Sentinel and The Beacon. Of the “league tables” published in The Beacon, Van Poppel (2012) commented:

– what do you expect? Murdoch Press, what do you expect? It’s a right wing, fascist is probably too extreme but what do you expect?
He referred to *The Beacon* as having ‘had a go at the Koorie schools’ (which he felt was justifiable, given the failure of those schools), but also as having ‘had a go’ at Tanimia CS, a reference to (and a misunderstanding of) the follow-up piece on this school. Harwood (2012) similarly described *The Beacon* as sensationalist and inaccurate in its reporting and commented that they had once been ‘on-site and (he) threw them out’. He appeared to blame them for sensationalising the reports which emerged in 2011 of cheating at a nearby school where his friend is the Principal (although these reports also appeared in *The Sentinel*). He stated that he would not do any articles for *The Beacon*, or for commercial television programs like *A Current Affair* or *Today Tonight*:

> Because their reporting is about sensationalising stuff; it’s not about accurate reporting and it’s the same with the gutter journalism that occurs on *A Current Affair* and *Today Tonight*. They don’t walk through doors …they walk underneath them, those people. …they have absolutely no intent to report a story accurately (Harwood, 2012).

The respect Harwood (2012) nevertheless showed for *The Sentinel* journalist who wrote about his school reinforces Bourdieu’s (1998, p.23) point that “the journalist” is an abstract entity that doesn’t exist. What exists are journalists who differ by sex, age, level of education and medium’. Harwood appreciated her willingness to read him the story prior to publication and her openness to suggested changes though, as he also pointed out, that had been a condition of his doing the story. Similarly, Strachan (2012) commented that she ‘trusted’ *The Sentinel’s* journalists who have ‘respected the things’ she has said.

The need to be ‘media savvy’, suggested Harwood (2012), requires understanding of ‘what it is that they do’. Strachan’s comment that her school doesn’t ‘use the media very well’ and doesn’t have a ‘media strategy’, in part because they have an enrolment cap of 350 and ‘There’s always more demand than that’, suggests that principals may view the media as potentially useful in marketing their school, but as largely irrelevant when such marketing is unnecessary. McGee (2012) commented that ‘the quality of what you do every day goes largely unnoticed by the popular media’. Despite this, he suggested that it is possible for principals to build a relationship with the media and that such a relationship often leads to particular principals being sought out for comment. However, in his view ‘a lot of principals would not feel safe’ speaking to the media, as he had done when he spoke to Channel 7 reporters (current affairs journalists condemned by Harwood (2012)) and publicly said:

> There are some kids at risk in our school that have been away for 200 days. That’s why our results are the way they are. If they’re not here we can’t teach them (McGee, 2012).
While, in his view, many principals would share the same sentiments, ‘they wouldn’t get on the TV and say that. Coz their minders would then be onto them’. By ‘their minders’, he referred to ‘the region, and the department and the media unit and (a senior education bureaucrat who would) ‘get onto them on the phone’. For McGee, a principal of twenty years, there was little left to prove; a position which gave him freedom to offer policy resistance in the press.

Davies’ view was that the media have played a significant role in amplifying the importance of NAPLAN results through coverage of MySchool and in so doing, have compliantly endorsed the government’s accountability agenda:

Because it’s not coming from the schools. We’re not saying that about it and we’re probably not asked a great deal about it either (Davies, 2012).

Strachan made a similar point when she commented that the minimal media coverage given to MySchool in 2012 because of the federal leadership crisis and the release of the Gonski Report, was ‘how most schools would like it to be”.

On the one hand, then, principals may become ‘media savvy’ in order to promote their school or their position, but on the other, they are quite critical of the media attention given to schools. O’Brien (2012), for example, likened the impact of the media’s coverage of his school to being a celebrity pursued by the ‘paparazzi and the crap that’s written about them in the paper’. And, while the principals of disadvantaged schools may feel that media coverage has little impact on the choices made by their parents, partly because these parents have no real choice, but also because they may not read newspapers, those in more advantaged school communities have a different view. The Principal of The Willows, for example, believes the media is very important ‘because that’s how parents form their opinions very often’.

12.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that the discursive effects of the processes of the mediatization of educational policy on schools named in the media, from the principal’s view, are varied, complex and dependent on a range of factors. The nature of the press coverage, the school sector and the level of advantage and disadvantage in the school community are key factors in accounting for these effects. There was little evidence that the authority, capital or ‘relative autonomy’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.84) of school principals was altered as a consequence of negative
press exposure, in part because the absence of genuine “choice” and the disadvantage of these communities ameliorated a potentially negative parental response. There was, however, evidence that principals felt themselves to be under increasing pressure to improve results, and that this stress was keenly felt in the public sector. There was also evidence that increased principal autonomy, capital and authority might occur as a result of positive press coverage that celebrates the strong results of disadvantaged schools through a positive response to this at bureaucratic level.

I have argued that the interviews revealed the difficulty of disentangling the effects of policy on schools from the effects of press reporting on policy. The exception to this was when principals referred to “league tables”. These were clearly seen as a specific product of the press. References to “leaks” to the media were also perceived to be a specific press effect. There was evidence that these journalistic practices contribute to the ongoing hostility many school principals feel towards the press. This has a history and could be interpreted as the education field’s hostility towards the field of journalism, and thus as a ‘cross-field effect’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.88). This hostility, together with the widespread view of principals that the media has very little understanding of education or schools, reinforces the views of earlier U.K. and U.S. research that the misunderstanding and tension between the education and journalistic fields may be partly accounted for by the journalistic field’s lack of understanding of the education field.

The interviews revealed the permeability of both the journalistic and education fields. On the one hand, there is the capacity for schools to be harmed by “league tables” “naming and shaming” them and for this to have negative effects on staff morale and feed into ongoing animosity towards the press. I have argued that the education field may respond to such interventions by seeking to ‘protect its boundaries’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) with a strengthening of collegiality and support within the field. I have also suggested that the education field has the capacity to intervene in the journalistic field and potentially alter journalistic products and practice by “educating” journalists, which could have the potential to change both field and cross-field relations.

I have argued that while the view of principals is that their practice is unaltered either by this policy, or by press reporting on it, this may not necessarily reflect the reality of NAPLAN test
preparation which is clearly occurring in many schools. It is clear, however, that principals play a key role in shaping their school’s response to both policy and press reporting on policy, and that the principal’s ‘habitus’ (Bourdieu, 1990, p.56) is a key factor not only in accounting for this, but also in constructing a powerful ‘group’ habitus (Bourdieu, 1990, p.58) which is about resistance to particular dominant discourses.

I have suggested that the interviews reveal that the effects of this policy, and of the discourses of school and teacher accountability constructed therein, are amplified by the press through the role they play in bringing the policy to public attention. This was most evident in the responses of parents which clearly had effects on schools. The decision of some parents to withdraw their children from “like schools” and enrol them in nearby higher performing public schools, or to contact the press to complain about school policy, suggests that the response of parents to policy and to press reporting on policy may have important field-effects and be a useful direction for future research.
Chapter 13  Conclusion

13.1  Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings of the study in conjunction with the contribution it makes to the existing research on the news media’s reporting on education. It reflects on the relevance and usefulness of the theoretical understandings utilised, outlines the limitations of the research and points to directions for further research.

13.2  The study’s findings and contribution to the research

This empirical study examined the discourses constructed in three Australian newspapers in their reporting on the Australian Federal Government’s MySchool website. The study’s chief aim was to investigate the discursive effects of the processes of the mediatization of educational policy on particular schools in the context of an emerging national agenda in Australian education and an emerging global educational policy field. To achieve this, it identified the preferred discourses on education constructed by the Australian Federal Government in relation to the national reporting of national testing and located these in a global context. It then examined the preferred discourses on education produced by the selected newspapers over a period of time, investigating the ways in which these discursively positioned and represented schools and education before exploring, through interviews with school principals, the discursive effects on particular schools that were named in the press, from the principal’s view.

The study contributes to existing research in a range of areas. Its systematic tracking and analysis of press reporting on one policy, located in the broader context of press reporting on education, meets a need in the literature for more systematic investigations of news media discourses that move beyond descriptive accounts (Darleen-Opfer, 2007; Gerstl-Pepin, 2007; Thomson, 2004; Rawolle, 2007). The study also contributes to the existing, and still relatively limited, research on the interconnections between media and educational policy. There is, in addition, limited research which empirically applies Bourdieu’s theory of social fields, or his work on the journalistic field, to the Australian setting. The study may also have relevance to some areas of policy studies by contributing to research on the media’s role in ‘shaping the public’s understanding of education policy’ (Gerstl-Pepin, 2007, p.2).
The study’s findings confirm some claims made in the existing research on the media’s reporting on education and challenge others. The data revealed, for example, the important role played by the ‘quality press’ in acting as a ‘resource for public knowledge’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.403); the operation of ‘discourses of omission’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.402) or, in Bourdieuan terms, ‘censorship’ (Bourdieu, 1991, p.138) in some newspapers; the ‘internal inconsistencies and contradictions’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.392) in press reporting on education and the often adversarial nature of the press-education relationship.

While the study found that policy release is indeed increasingly ‘synonymous with media release’ (Lingard, Rawolle & Taylor, 2005a, p.768), the data challenges the view that the press are ‘unquestioning’ and ‘compliant’ (Berliner & Biddle, 1995, pp.3-4) in aligning themselves with central government education reforms. The idea of a slavish and subservient “transmission” of policy to the public fails to capture the complexity of press involvement in the policy-making process. It does not reflect the multiple, shifting roles adopted by the press; the capacity for reader-resistance; the way new policy is often filtered through an existing press lens or the mobilizing roles the press play. These, as the study has shown, may involve sections of the press actively manufacturing consent for central government education policies which match their own education agendas. That some newspapers selectively emphasized and foregrounded aspects of the policy investigated which appeared to reflect their view of what policy, and education, ought to be suggests that newspapers play more complex roles than merely acting as a ‘mouthpiece for the government's agenda’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.71), even when they appear to be offering unqualified support for that agenda. Conversely, some newspapers actively resist preferred government discourses on education, exerting ‘critical scrutiny of political power’ (Hjarvard, 2013, p.41) to mobilise opposition and advocate for change.

The study found evidence of ‘discourses of derision’ (Kenway, 1990, p.191) in The Australian and, to a lesser extent, the Herald Sun in relation to teacher “performance” and teacher unions. However, despite the research view that the media’s primary interest is in stories that highlight education’s failure (Berliner & Biddle, 1995), the study found that some newspapers do celebrate school, student and teacher achievement. While the research confirms that press involvement in the ‘education-policy-making-process is a highly complex matter’ (Pettigrew & Maclure, 1997, p.395), it also found that this involvement differs significantly across newspapers. Indeed, the
discursive differences between the three newspapers investigated in their reporting on the MySchool website suggests that mediatization may occur differently in different newspapers, even when the processes appear to be the same, highlighting the need for research to be attentive to such difference and avoid making claims for all media or all newspapers.

Bourdieu’s view of society as made up of separate, but connected, social fields provided the overarching framework for this study which empirically applied Bourdieu’s theory of social fields, aspects of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis and Rawolle’s concept of ‘cross-field effects’ to press coverage of national testing and reporting over a period of time. The study utilised both micro and macro analysis to systematically track and record newspaper coverage of the MySchool website. This tracking provided the ‘indices’ Bourdieu saw as necessary for empirical analysis and enabled some conclusions to be drawn about why discursive differences between newspapers occur in their reporting on education policy. Investigating how each newspaper reported on MySchool in the context of their broader reporting on education revealed that press reporting on policy is often part of a wider narrative, informed by the stances and approach a newspaper takes more broadly on education.

Applying Bourdieu’s (1998) outline of the properties and practices of the journalistic field to press reporting on MySchool also revealed the extent to which press reporting on policy is influenced by the properties of the field itself. A range of factors, clearly derived from the structure of the journalistic field, appeared to account for different policy and education reporting emphases in the newspapers studied. These included the ‘relative position’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.40) of each newspaper in the field and, as a corollary of this, whether the newspaper provided ‘serious journalism’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.42) or the ‘tried and true formulas of tabloid journalism’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.51); the ‘political leanings’ (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2004, p.59) and particular stakes of the newspaper, frequently associated with its ownership; geographical factors and the influence of significant agents occupying a dominant position in the space.

Applying aspects of Fairclough’s critical discourse analysis to the products of the field (ie., newspaper articles), in conjunction with the language set offered by Bourdieu, provided a process that can potentially be used by future research seeking to establish the specific processes by which mediatization occurs. This included identifying the overt and covert stances adopted by each newspaper via explicit journalistic stances; the selection of (and stances taken by) external
commentators; the discursive effects of “voice” revealed in the agents heard or excluded in the
‘web of voices’ (Fairclough, 1995a, p.81) in news reports; the tracking of agents who entered the
journalistic field and who were (and were not) represented in journalistic products; the
identification of particular lexical choices and their effect and the impact of specific practices of
the sub-field of journalism identified by Bourdieu, such as ‘circulation circulation’, ‘permanent
amnesia’ and ‘the scoop’, in shaping the policy’s re-presentation in the press. The research found
that the choices made by newspapers in these areas were partly determined by the broader field-
factors identified above and were important processes by which this policy was mediatized.

In framing the research around the idea of ‘location’, the study emphasizes that policies are not
released into a vacuum but have a back-story. They draw from previous policies; emerge as the
product of complex interconnections between fields and are released into a specific social and
political context which also has a complex history. Nor do policies enter a press vacuum. Rather,
they are launched into a prior history of reporting and a current context (in this case, one of
significant change) and their re-presentation is influenced by the field-specific factors outlined
above. Contextualisation of both the policy and the press into which it was released, and of the
political and policy landscape which informed it, was a crucial step in the analytical process,
illustrating the importance of “field habitus”, produced at least partly by the history of the field
itself. As fields interact in the policy-making process, each brings with it this habitus.

Newspapers, as this empirical study has shown, are rarely value-free in their reporting on policy.
Rather, they actively construct preferred readings of policy, most notably in their editorial
formats, but also through the more subtle and covert mechanisms outlined above. These interact
to produce a density which displaces information-giving. While these processes occur with
different degrees of intensity in different newspapers, the data suggested that the stances taken
by newspapers in reporting on one policy frequently inform and are re-circulated in their
reporting on other policies. The Australian’s focus on standards and teacher quality, for example,
crossed policy boundaries and formed part of a discursive narrative of widespread systemic
educational failure. Subsequent discourses of denigration and derision strengthened calls for
schools (and teachers) to be more accountable for the taxpayer funds expended on them. These
discourses were constructed in The Australian’s coverage of MySchool, the BER and the Grattan
report. Likewise, The Age consistently held governments to account for their underfunding of
public schools, presenting this stance in its reporting on both MySchool and the Gonski review. This kind of reporting created a ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.25) of discourses which, cumulatively, carried considerable discursive weight and, ultimately, oriented the provision of education towards either public or private purposes. In many cases, the policy investigated appeared to be a vehicle for the press to have its say about what policy ought to be, suggesting that the specifics of a policy may, in a sense, be peripheral to this purpose, and further emphasizing the point that mediatization may need to be seen as newspaper-specific. Unlike The Australian and The Age, for example, the Herald Sun remained committed to its league table template over the three versions of MySchool examined in this study, reflecting that newspaper’s view that it is necessary to ‘Rank schools to get results’ (Editorial, 2010s).

The research revealed that while the internal workings of the journalistic field had a significant bearing on how the policy investigated was re-presented in the press, the interactions of the fields involved in both the production and reception of this policy with the field of journalism were integral to its mediatization and had profound effects which could not be accounted for merely as the ‘attractions and repulsions to which (journalism) is subject’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.39) from other fields. The study’s focus on the effects of field intrusions on policy’s re-presentation in the press contributes to understandings about the processes by which the mediatization of educational policy occurs, beyond those outlined above. Utilising the concepts of ‘temporary social fields’ and ‘cross-field effects’ developed by Rawolle (2007) revealed that, for the policy investigated, relationships between social fields were crucial in accounting not only for the discourses constructed by each newspaper in its reporting, but also for the different versions of the policy each created. The study thus makes a contribution to the relatively limited research that exists on inter-field relations and their effects, identifying these as important processes by which the mediatization of policy occurs. It reveals that the mediatization of the policy investigated was not a ‘one way street’ in which the press ‘did’ something to the policy but rather, a ‘dual carriageway’ characterised by struggle and contestation: a dynamic process of multiple field intrusions and ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) in which, at times, the press acted as a site of struggle between fields and, at others, became part of that struggle. Sections of the press thus became a vehicle to enable policy support or contestation while simultaneously being part of the policy’s support or contestation. Like ‘spin’, these processes of mediatization have a
'constitutive’ role which “makes up” the policy (Gewirtz et al, 2004, p.327), re-presenting it in ways that differ from its original intent.

In the case of the policy analysed, intrusions in the field of journalism by both the political and education fields prompted the press to respond by constructing particular versions of the policy which re-worked its intent and altered how it was understood by the public. The effects of field intrusions were demonstrated specifically in the debate around “league tables”; the actions of the AEU in seeking to boycott the 2010 NAPLAN tests unless the government took steps to protect schools from “league tables”; the NSW legislative ban imposed on the publication of “league tables” of student results in that state and the actions of the political field in seeking to control and limit media access to MySchool data following the launch of the website in 2010. As a result, debate about the policy in the press became a debate about press freedom. A sense of the press ‘talking back’ (hooks, 1989) was evident in both 2010 and 2011 in The Age and The Australian in that the “naming and shaming” of disadvantaged schools predicted by educators following the release of MySchool was attached to wealthy private schools and not, as predicted, to the public sector. This strategy became evidence that the press could be trusted with the information, as senior Age journalist Shaun Carney (2010a) pointed out. Central government’s attempt to hold the public sector accountable for education standards was, in a sense, ‘hijacked’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.720) by the press as a ‘cross-field consequence’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714) of the political and education fields’ intrusions into the field of journalism. Ironically, the revelation that the results of wealthy private schools were often no better (and were sometimes worse) than those of “similar” government schools not only led to press questioning of the “value for money” offered by the private sector, but unexpectedly created press advocacy for the “value” offered by public education. This had the side-effect of re-working press re-presentations of education more broadly by challenging the generally accepted view in the research that the press are responsible for manufacturing a sense of crisis around failing public schools. In its early stages, then, this policy was mediatized through the construction of particular versions of the policy which reflected the stances on education taken by each newspaper and the intrusions of the political and education fields which were, in turn, produced by a struggle for power. This altered the autonomy of the educational policy field by re-working the policy’s intent for public consumption. It also, it could be argued, unexpectedly altered the autonomy of the journalistic field by changing the content of its products.
Mediatization occurred in other ways too as this policy unfolded. The release of NAPLAN results, for example, appeared to encourage a style of reporting which emphasized discourses of competition, performativity, audit and accountability. These further constructed education as an ‘activity’ of government and a reflection of their efficiency and effectiveness by privileging the voice of politicians and emphasizing the ‘performance’ of states. This reporting template enabled newspapers with particular agendas, such as The Australian, to offer support for the federal government’s agenda and, simultaneously, to construct a particular version of education. This emphasized failure, attached to discourses of blame associated with teacher performance, thus shifting accountability away from government (as the government, in fact, had already done) and on to schools and teachers. The highly active role the press play in supporting or contesting preferred government discourses on education was also evident during the federal election campaign of August, 2010, particularly in the way PM Julia Gillard’s political capital, and that of her party, was advanced through repeated references to her former position of Education Minister and her success in implementing the MySchool website. Moreover, the introduction of a new discourse of “improvement”, following the release of NAPLAN results in September, 2010, which enabled comparisons to be made between cohorts tested in 2008 and again in 2010, overlaid past media discourses of educational failure based on declining academic standards with a new “profit-based” dimension derived from improvement in which improvement was constructed as a kind of educational profit margin judged against government (ie., taxpayer) investment, so privileging the market. The release of PISA results in 2010 located this discourse in a global context.

The efforts of the private school sector to block the publication of financial data on MySchool2.0 focused press attention on this newsworthy aspect of the policy’s evolution, a consequence on the one hand of the properties of the journalistic field with its ‘unquestioned bias in favour of the news that is the newest’ (Bourdieu, 1998, p.72) but also, on the other, a ‘cross-field effect’ (Rawolle, 2007, p.68) created by the private school sector’s efforts to intervene in the political and policy fields to preserve their autonomy. The side-effect of this press focus was a silencing of discussion and debate around national testing which contributed to the policy’s entrenchment while also assisting the public school lobby’s campaign for a fairer funding model, potentially influencing the ongoing Gonski review into school funding. In a sense, what emerged in the press was a ‘crisis of legitimacy’ (Kenway, 1990, p.168) for the private sector in which it was
forced to defend its “value” and in which the “value” of this sector was called into question. At times, this led to a collision of past newspaper stances with the new data emerging as, for example, *The Australian*’s support for the Howard government’s strengthened commitment to funding non-government schools (McMorrow, 2008, p.27) was challenged by the new evidence provided on *MySchool2.0*. This produced contradictory messages as ‘the public’s right to information’ (Schultz, 2002, p.114) collided with the newspaper’s value-stances on education. Increasing press emphasis on school finances in all three newspapers ultimately consolidated the marketisation of education by emphasising ‘product accountability and outcome measures’ (Knight & Lingard, 1997, p.27; p.34) in the delivery of education: that is, the ‘value for taxpayers’ money achieved in the nation’s school system’ (Ferrari, Vasek & Edwards, 2011).

The relative press silence around *MySchool3.0* in 2012 reflected the absence of new news on the website and was thus a field-effect, while also being a ‘cross-field consequence of particular events’ (Rawolle, 2005, p.714), including the release of the Grattan and Gonski reports and the turmoil occurring at federal political level. In *The Australian*, reporting on the Grattan and Gonski reports produced a ‘circular circulation’ (Bourdieu, 1996, p.25) of accountability discourses juxtaposed with discourses of educational failure, in which Australian education was discursively constructed as failing in the ‘global field of performance comparison’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p.18). That these were essentially the same discourses as those heard in *The Australian*’s reporting on *MySchool* again reinforces the way policy is often a vehicle for the press to have its say about what policy ought to be. It also illustrates how ‘events’ interact with policies and influence press reporting. A consequence of the absence of press discussion and debate around national testing and reporting across all three newspapers in 2012 was the entrenchment of this policy approach. High-stakes testing, the right of newspapers to publish results and the associated discourses of school and teacher accountability and performance measurement emerging from these practices became taken for granted. The capacity for these discourses to now ‘speak us rather than us speaking them’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010) was further enabled by journalists increasingly making selective use of *MySchool* data to inform new journalistic products. The data therefore became a valuable commodity for both central government and the press, the effect of which was to commodify and marketise education.
While much of this research applies existing theoretical understandings to an empirical study, its investigation of the effects of mediatized policy on those directly affected by both the policy and its mediatized version/s potentially offers a tentative theoretical contribution. The study found that the discursive effects of the processes of the mediatization of educational policy on schools named in the media, from the principal’s view, are varied, complex and dependent on a range of factors. There was evidence of press reporting on MySchool producing an amplification of policy effects, with negative press coverage damaging staff morale and intensifying disadvantage, while positive press coverage increased principal autonomy, capital and authority and encouraged choice and competition. While the interviews revealed the difficulty of disentangling the effects of policy on schools from the effects of press reporting on policy, the exception to this was when principals referred to “league tables”. These were clearly seen as a specific product of the press and were perceived by principals as damaging, misguided and ill-informed: in short, as evidence of the journalistic field’s lack of understanding of the education field. The production of “league tables” clearly evoked historic animosity towards the press, particularly the tabloid press. Indeed, while many principals distinguished between the tabloid and quality press, hostility towards the press as a whole as a consequence of some newspapers producing “league tables”, perceived by principals as irresponsible, crisis-driven and as perpetuating a negative image of Australian education, resonated throughout the interviews. This had the effect of strengthening collegiality and support within the education field. In fact, the preference of principals generally was for press silence around education, a double-edged sword which, on the one hand, may enable schools to continue their core business but, on the other, leads to policy entrenchment by removing it as a source of public discussion and debate. At the same time, the study revealed the capacity of the education field to intervene in the journalistic field via the actions of school principals. The outcome of “educating” journalists through such intervention was an alteration in journalistic products and practice, suggesting that the field of education may also act as a change-agent. This finding, coupled with evidence that principals, operating from a particular habitus, play a key role in mediating policy reception in their schools, suggests that the interplay of field and cross-field effects may be as significant an influence on managerial responses to mediatized policy as it is on press re-presentations of policy.

Beyond this, the interviews revealed important messages for policymakers. They suggested that the detrimental effects produced by the national reporting of national test results and the misuse
of NAPLAN data by sections of the press outweigh arguments for accountability and transparency, or for providing parents with information to facilitate choice of schools. As the interviews revealed, many parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, do not even access the data. The effect is to add to existing prejudices and provide a rationale for those parents with the capacity to choose to leave the public sector. As principals suggested, publishing the data does not make them more accountable. They already are. Nor, as the interviews revealed, do systems appear to challenge underperforming schools. Moreover, schools can, and do, resist and nothing happens. The interviews therefore suggested that the rhetoric produced by politicians and the press is not always matched by the reality of practice in schools.

13.3 Limitations of the research and possible directions for future research

The writing of this thesis required a series of choices and compromises about information to be included or excluded. The volume of data gathered during the course of the print-media tracking and analysis, coupled with the word limits of the thesis, made it impossible to include much of the fine-grained analysis of newspaper articles completed in the earlier writing stages, leading to a decision to include only some of this material as exemplars of the work done. Given Fairclough’s (1995b, p.21) emphasis on the ‘texture’ of a text as an important factor in revealing the ideological workings of texts, and the decision to collect texts manually in order to give this area attention, not being able to include as much of this information as planned was a limitation as this fine-grained analysis provided rich evidence of the processes by which mediatization occurs. Likewise, while locating texts written specifically about MySchool in the context of each newspaper’s broader reporting on education provided useful insights into the value stances informing each newspaper’s reporting on education policy, it was not possible to make detailed use of this data, given word limit constraints.

In hindsight, the ethical dilemma encountered when writing up the interview data in a non-identifiable way revealed an unintended flaw in the research design. While I had planned to refer specifically to the media texts in which interviewee’s schools were named, I had not anticipated that this would identify the principals interviewed. Writing up the interview data in a non-identifiable way also had flow-on effects in terms of the material I could then use from the interviews with journalists. In hindsight, the latter would have been more useful, for the purposes
of the research, had they had a more general focus, used perhaps to tease out the properties of the journalistic field rather than being focused on specific media texts, as became my focus in the second interview conducted.

Seeking to account for the discursive effects of press reporting on policy on schools via interviews with school principals was a further limitation in that it provided only a leadership, or managerial view. Interviews with teachers, for example, might have offered a very different perspective. At the same time, this approach clearly revealed that strong leaders, operating from a particular habitus informed by support for the wider purposes of education, can and do make a difference to how policy translates in practice. A relatively small sample of six principals, with an emphasis on government schools and on disadvantaged schools “named and shamed”, was also a limitation. Given that the interviews contribute to new understandings of the effects of mediatized policy on schools, obtaining a broader sample and range of voices and school sectors would be a useful direction for future research. Further research might also explore whether the specific connections of the policy investigated to the press had a bearing on the particular ways this policy was mediatized. Do the findings, for example, have application to other instances of press coverage of education policy in which press involvement is less direct?

Both the analysis of newspaper texts and the interviews conducted with principals suggested that investigating the impact of mediatized policy on parents; the consequences for schools of parental responses to mediatized policy and the possibility that parents might also act as agents in the processes of mediatization are fruitful areas for further research. Was, for example, the decision of some parents to withdraw their children from “underperforming” public schools and enrol them in nearby higher-performing “like” public schools an effect of press reporting? And what uses do disgruntled parents make of the media to force change on schools and with what effect?

Many questions about the effect of technology on policy processes and journalistic practice were also raised in the course of this research. ‘Data units’, for example, now exist at some newspapers, their role to harvest data from sources such as MySchool to inform new stories (Kean, 2012). The online delivery of national reporting made national test results simultaneously accessible to politicians, parents, schools and journalists. The issue of whether schools now consult the website (many principals said they don’t) offers fruitful research
opportunities into the effect of online policy delivery and whether it enhances or ultimately reduces accessibility. Is the information largely accessed by schools only when it has visibility in the press? Given the press silence around *MySchool* in its third year, who is now using the website? The role of social media in shaping journalists’ understandings of, and reporting on, schools and education also emerged as a trend worthy of investigation.

The preferred vision of education expressed by central government in relation to the policy investigated reconstituted education ‘from an economic frame’ (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007) and simultaneously reflected and enabled increasing centralism in the ‘governance’ of Australian education. This research found that while sections of the press endowed central government with the capacity to successfully impose this preferred “vision” on schools, press support was not unthinking but rather reflected particular value stances and views about what education ought to be. The research argues that the particular stances adopted by newspapers such as *The Australian* further reduced the opportunity for its readership to be fully informed about what central government’s “vision” entailed, thus acting as a form of mediatization by encouraging support for a reform agenda which re-defined the relationship between central government and the states and constructed teachers in new ways, re-defining them as individuals who should “add value” to themselves, improve their productivity (and) strive for excellence’ (Ball, 2003, p.217). The fact that *The Age* vigorously critiqued this agenda, while the *Herald Sun* re-worked the policy’s intent to argue simplistically that ‘clearly ranking the nation’s 10,000 schools’ would ‘get results’ (Editorial, 2010s) by miraculously enabling standards to improve, ultimately suggests that how the Australian public understood national testing and reporting largely depended on which newspaper they read.

### 13.4 Conclusion- *MySchool:* Whose school?*

The title of this thesis attempted to capture the contested nature of the policy investigated. It reflected the sense schools and teachers often have of their relative powerlessness to protect their ‘boundaries’ (Blackmore, 2006, p.2) from the intrusions of the political, journalistic and educational policy fields as these fields, driven by a desire to protect or, in some cases, to expand their boundaries, seek to define or re-define what schools and education *ought* to be. While this research has shown that schools are relatively permeable sub-fields, subject to the attempts of other fields to, variously, marketize them, present them as failing, remind them of the taxpayer
dollars expended on them, demand greater value for money and generally advocate that they ‘lift their game’, they are, ultimately, neither powerless nor acquiescent. As the interview data suggested, they have the capacity for resistance and the power to withstand mediatized efforts to alter their autonomy and practice. They do this, in the end, by continuing their core ‘business’. Strong leaders, operating from a particular habitus, can and do make a difference to how policy and press re-presentations of policy translate into practice in their schools.

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