

**A logic of appropriation:
Enacting national testing (NAPLAN) in Australia**

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Abstract: This paper explores how the strong policy push to improve students' results on national literacy and numeracy tests – the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) – in the Australian state of Queensland influenced schooling practices, including teachers' learning. The paper argues the focus upon improved test scores on NAPLAN within schools was the result of sustained policy pressure for increased attention to such foci at national and state levels, and a broader political context in which rapid improvement in test results was considered imperative. However, implementation, (or what this paper describes more accurately as 'enactment') of the policy also revealed NAPLAN as providing evidence of students' learning, as useful for grouping students to help improve their literacy and numeracy capabilities, and as a stimulus for teacher professional development. Drawing upon the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu, the paper argues that even as more political concerns about comparing NAPLAN results with other states were recognised by educators, the field of schooling practices was characterised by a logic of active appropriation of political concerns about improved test scores by teachers, for more educative purposes. In this way, policy enactment in schools is characterised by competing interests, and involving not just interpretation, translation and critique but active appropriation of political concerns by teachers.

Keywords: politics; sociology

Introduction

Current discourses within the educational policy literature reveal a strong focus by governments upon improving students' literacy and numeracy capabilities within individual nations and states/provinces. Politically, standardised test results have been used as part of an accountability agenda to stimulate improved educational outcomes, and a focus upon such results has become integral to broader governance processes. In schooling settings, this elicits a variety of responses, including a constant process of managing performance and attendant fears about performance (Ball, 2003). However, there appears to be relatively little research into the nature of the actual teaching practices, and how teachers and principals make sense of their work and learning, and the contestation which attends this process under conditions of very strong political pressure

for improvements in such results, and rewards or punishments tied to these results. Significant research which does contribute to understandings of the effects of strong political and policy pressure upon schooling practices includes Gillborn and Youdell's (2000) accounts of the 'educational triage' practices of schools seeking to maximise 'returns' on scarce resources within the 'A-C economy', and Ball, Maguire and Braun's (2012) insights into the performative policy demands and pressures which characterise this economy, and other testing and assessment practices in schools. This paper seeks to add to this relevant literature not by drawing upon various Foucauldian and policy cycle approaches (Gillborn & Youdell) or interwoven discursive, interpretive and/or material analytical insights (Ball, Maguire, Braun) to reveal the differential consequences of performance policies for various groups of students, but utilises Bourdieuan resources of 'field', 'habitus' and 'capital' to more explicitly theorise the contested nature of responses to policy, and the various capitals at stake within what is described as the 'field of schooling practices'. In short, the research seeks to reveal policy enactment as a product of the differential *relations* which exist between those who seek to dominate the field of schooling practices, and how this plays out in practice.

Furthermore, the research undertakes this work in an Australian policy context, and in relation to primary schools, in which recent enactment theorising has not been extensive under current policy conditions. Also, and to reveal the enactment processes in such settings, the schools were selected as sites deemed in need of intervention to improve literacy and numeracy practices. This is in contrast with, for example, the 'ordinary' secondary schools focused upon in recent prominent policy enactment theorising and

research (see Ball et al., 2012; Maguire, Ball & Braun, 2010; Maguire, Perryman, Ball & Braun, 2011)

In order to shed light on the nature of actual teaching, work, and teacher learning practices under these conditions, this paper explores how policy and political pressure for significantly improved results in Queensland, Australia, on the National Assessment Program for Literacy and Numeracy ('NAPLAN') played out in three school sites in south-east Queensland. What makes this context particularly interesting is the overt way in which this state pursued the objective of increasing its performance on NAPLAN. Relatively low outcomes in the state's results in initial NAPLAN testing in 2008 prompted an inquiry into schooling practices in Queensland – the 'Masters' Report' (Masters, 2009) – which recommended, *inter alia*, increased time spent in Queensland schools to engage in test readiness activities (Masters, 2009). In response to an interim report released early in 2009 and encouraging schools to employ previous NAPLAN tests and resources for 'test taking experience' to improve students' test-taking skills (see Appendix 2: Masters, 2009, p. 107), this test-focused work was already well under way:

Attention [in schools] also was being given to improving students' test-taking skills, such as completing test booklets and working under test conditions.

Teachers had become more aware of testing and supervision considerations and of the need to teach the language of mathematics test questions (Masters, 2009, p. 57).

This paper draws upon the experiences of teachers and principals to reveal how this broader political and policy context influenced schooling practices, and the contested nature of these practices.

Policy enactment: Recent insights

Policy enactment processes in educational settings are not straightforward. Schools are typically subject to a plethora of reforms at any given moment. These reforms may be in harmony, or, as is often the case, operating in parallel or in tension with one another. Furthermore, policy enactment is a contested process involving active interpretation by those involved and resulting in unforeseen outcomes (Ball, 1994; 2008; Taylor Rizvi, Lingard & Henry, 1997; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010).

Because policy entails reinterpretation in specific contexts and under particular sets of broader conditions, its outcomes can never be predicted. For this reason, Braun, Maguire and Ball (2010) understand policy enactment to be a process of interpretation and translation rather than simply ‘implementation’:

Our use of the term ‘enactment’ refers to an understanding that policies are interpreted and ‘translated’ by diverse policy actors in the school environment, rather than simply implemented...As such, putting policies into practice is a creative, sophisticated and complex process that is always also located in a particular context and place... (p. 549).

Implementation, by contrast, 'is generally seen either as a "top down" or "bottom up" process of making policy work' (Ball *et al.*, 2012, p. 6). Policy enactment is a much more dynamic process which doesn't conform neatly to conceptions of simple top-down or bottom-up processes of making policies 'work' at specific sites.

In addition, the enacted policy is mediated at each step of the process. As Spillane (2004) argues, 'policy might best be thought about as plural rather than singular' (p. 172). As a result, the extent to which policies exert influence, particularly upon teachers' classroom practices, and learning, is often tenuous, with policy foci and teaching being somewhat disconnected from one another, and with the policy field characterised as possessing what Ladwig (1994) refers to as 'its own autonomy and its own rewards' (p. 341). In spite of considerable focus and attention by district policymakers and teachers, the intentions of broader state policy foci may not influence what occurs in teachers' classrooms (Spillane, 2004). .

In their work upon the specific settings in which policies are enacted, Braun, Ball, Maguire and Hoskins (2011) argue for greater attention to schooling contexts. The particular histories and ethos of schools matter, as do the results of mediations between schools, governments and local/regional authorities (Braun, Maguire & Ball, 2010). Braun *et al.* (2011) describe what they refer to as various 'situated' (e.g. locales, school histories, intakes), 'material' (e.g. buildings, technology, other infrastructure, staffing), 'professional' (e.g. teacher commitments and experiences, values, 'policy management?'),

and ‘external’ contextual dimensions (p. 588). Similarly, Ball, Maguire, Braun and Hoskins (2011a) describe ‘imperative/disciplinary’ policies as a category of policy which demands teachers’ compliance for reasons of apparent necessity. Under these circumstances, little room is left for teacher judgment, and school leaders may act as ‘policy enforcers’ (Ball *et al.*, 2011a, p. 613; emphasis original). These imperative/disciplinary policies contrast with more exhortative/developmental policies with the former not requiring a level of professional judgement encouraged by the latter.

As part of this process, education workers are policy actors who are both agent and subject of such policy enactment processes; both perspectives are necessary to make sense of such processes (Ball *et al.*, 2011a). Also, teachers may adopt roles of ‘narrators’ (interpreting policy), ‘entrepreneurs’ (advocating for particular policies), ‘outsiders’ (e.g. as partners), ‘transactors’ (reporting, monitoring policy), ‘enthusiasts’ (investing in policy), ‘translators’ (producing and interpreting texts), ‘critics’ (counter-narrators of policy), and ‘receivers’ (accepting, coping with policy) (Ball *et al.*, 2011b, p. 626). In the empirical research on which this typology was developed, Ball *et al.* (2011b) identified that teachers and other educators in schools are creative in their approach to managing and implementing policy but they are also ‘tired and overloaded much of the time’ (p. 636). In this way, there is a gesturing towards contestation as characterizing teachers’ practices in the context of current policy conditions.

However, further research is needed into whether and how these policy enactment processes play out in ways indicated within the literature in relation to teaching practices

and teachers' work and learning in reform-oriented primary schools in the context of very strong policy and political support for improved results on current standardised national literacy and numeracy tests in Australia. This strong policy and political support for improved NAPLAN results constitutes a high-stakes environment for teachers, schools and students, resulting in potentially problematic and contested responses on the part of those involved. By explicitly theorising the contestation and tensions which attend this process using Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' of field, habitus and capitals, the research focuses upon revealing the intrinsic social *relations* which characterise this process, and those which come to dominate, and which subsequently characterise the field of schooling practices. Also, the relationship between more contextual conditions and more agentic/subject positions is an area for further development insofar as such conditions and positions are dialectical and mutually constitutive. Also, as part of this work, trying to capture what seem to be more 'habitual' elements of practice in context, but without implying a reductive notion of habit, seems instructive. There is also relatively little research into the effects of overt state policy support for increased test scores on standardised literacy and numeracy tests in the Australian context which has come relatively late to high-stakes standardised national literacy and numeracy testing.

On this last point, research evidence into high-stakes testing suggests that, in its various manifestations, such testing has a limiting effect upon teachers' pedagogies and practices and is often employed for performative and political reasons, rather than educational purposes. In the United States, Hursh (2008) argues the curriculum and teachers' practices have been overly determined by state-mandated assessment in Texas, New York

and Florida. Stobart (2008) argues such tests are also construed as markers of future potential economic competitiveness, and employed for broader political purposes as the primary indicators of evidence of students' learning. In the Australian context, Author (2011) reveal how the publication of students' NAPLAN results through the publicly available *MySchool* website threatens to reduce the educational nature and intent of schooling practices, and how the site's political and performative purposes dominate over an educational function. For a federal government under constant criticism, the publication of NAPLAN results is considered one of the few successes in an otherwise fraught political environment. Through such mechanisms as the publicly available and politically profitable *MySchool* website, with its graphic colour-coded comparative overviews of school results (red/pink indicating the selected school is achieving 'below average' compared with statistically similar schools; green/light green equating to 'above average'), Queensland state educational authorities, principals and teachers have been under an unprecedented level of scrutiny.

Systemically, this has resulted in perverse policy effects, with some state educational policy-makers deliberately setting lower targets during negotiations with federal counterparts, in order to attain additional federal government funding tied to improved test results (and to minimise broader political criticism) (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Given evidence of these pressures – of a focus upon performative concerns rather than student learning on NAPLAN – it seems reasonable to assert that in such a manifestly high-stakes environment in which those in schools are well aware that additional funding as 'reward payments' are tied to improved NAPLAN results, educational practices may be under

threat. (This situation is exacerbated by the placement of principals on short-term contracts (including those in this research) in lower performing sites accessing additional federal government funding provided expressly to assist in raising literacy and numeracy capabilities (measured as ‘results’)). Under such conditions, pressures for strong performance in testing for the sake of testing could be assumed to be having an impact upon teachers’ practices. Consequently, how teachers and principals in schools respond to performative and political pressures impacting upon them is an area of considerable interest. (All teachers and principals in the three schools were also acutely aware that their results in forthcoming NAPLAN tests constituted data of great interest to these senior bureaucrats, and relevant state politicians more generally, particularly in light of poor results in 2008). Without necessarily asserting an *a priori* distinction between higher NAPLAN results, and productive student learning, in light of emerging international, national and more local research, there does seem some evidence to suggest that strong political and performative focus upon NAPLAN could serve to limit or inhibit teachers’ attention to students’ learning more broadly. Whether or not this is the case, and the extent to which this may be the case, is therefore considered worthy of investigation, and a contribution to current understandings of how such policies currently play out in practice. For these reasons, the study focuses specifically upon how teachers responded to the broader political and policy pressures which characterised implementation of NAPLAN. That is, in light of the potential for ‘perverse effects’ at the school level (and the way in which such effects are construed as ‘the new norm’ at the system-level in Queensland and across Australia (Lingard & Sellar, 2013, p.1)), such performative policy and political pressure are considered useful starting points for

considering the effects of NAPLAN in practice. This policy context is outlined further in the following section.

The policy context

In spite of Australia's federal political structure and the Constitutional devolution of education to individual Australian states, educational policy making in Australia has become increasingly national in the last five years. This is reflected in the push for a national curriculum, the development of national professional standards for teachers, and a range of 'National Partnerships' between the federal government, states and individual schools, designed to enhance teacher and student learning, including in schools serving low SES communities (see Australian Government, 2011a; 2011 b; 2011 c; and Queensland Government, Queensland Catholic Education Commission & Independent Schools Queensland, 2010; 2011).

However, perhaps the most overt indicator of national policy influence is reflected in the national testing of students on standardised literacy and numeracy tests. Since 2008, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) has been implemented at Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 in all schools throughout Australia. The results are aggregated at the individual school level, and published on the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) *MySchool* website. The results have been further aggregated at the level of individual states for national comparison purposes, and reported extensively in the media. In 2009, this revealed Queensland as performing

poorly in relation to most other states and territories across a range of literacy and numeracy indicators, resulting in the Queensland government strongly and publicly advocating the need for teachers and schools to focus on improving students' literacy and numeracy capabilities, and to improve test results in subsequent NAPLAN tests.

Understanding policy enactment in context: A Bourdieuan approach

To make sense of teachers' responses to this policy context, and the competing and contested stances which attend this process, this paper argues for a more explicit rendering of the mutually-constitutive nature of policy enactment practices and the broader policy conditions within which they transpire. To try to capture the complexity of how teachers respond to policy and political pressure for improved NAPLAN results, the paper draws upon sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's concepts, or 'thinking tools,' of field, capitals and habitus.

For Bourdieu (1990), the social world comprises a series of social spaces or social 'fields,' each of which is constituted by interactions and contestation between the individuals and groups who comprise these spaces, and over the specific practices which come to dominate. This contestation is a product of difference – different position-takings, or 'relations,' between those who occupy and influence these spaces. These different position-takings only make sense in relation to one another; they 'are defined in relation to one another through their *mutual exteriority* and their relations of proximity, vicinity, or distance, as well as through relations of order, such as above, below, and

between' (Bourdieu, 1998, p. 6; emphasis original). Such differences give rise to competing/contested practices. In the data presented, schooling practices are explored in light of the influence of what Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992) describes as the broader field of power – in this case, in the form of political and policy pressure for improved NAPLAN results.

As a result of these differences, practices exhibit their own particular 'logics' which are distinguishable from alternative manifestations. The particular logics of practice which come to characterise fields impart a certain *sui generis* character which reinforces some practices, whilst resisting others. These logics reflect the possession of particular social, cultural and economic resources, or 'capitals' (Bourdieu, 1986) by those within the field. The capitals which dominate any given field are a product of the accumulation of particular traits, titles, qualifications, property or any other social, cultural, political, economic, and/or national entity which is valued within any given field.

At the same time, fields are product and productive of particular dispositions – the 'habitus' – of those who occupy them. For Bourdieu, the habitus entails the embodiment of social practices, the result of exposure to particular experiences within any given field (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). At the same time, and through a process of actively interrogating their circumstances – socio-analysis – individual actors are able to bring to bear forms of analysis which enable them to better understand their situation and circumstances, thereby potentially transforming these circumstances (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). In the data presented, for example, if teachers simply accept the focus

upon test scores as valid measures of students' learning in and of themselves, this may encourage 'performative' practices which represent the reproduction of reductive political interpretation of such scores, whilst critique and efforts to use such tests for more long term, educational purposes could be considered to constitute more 'educational' practices, and serve as evidence of a more socio-analytical, transformative, disposition for change.

Focusing overtly upon the specific features of a particular field of practice, a Bourdieuan perspective is especially apposite for making sense of the simultaneously action-oriented and conditioning effects which attend policy enactment processes and some of the tensions and identifiable differences – contestations – which characterise such processes. In the data presented, this contestation relates to how teachers respond to broader political pressures for improved NAPLAN results *per se*, with their stances interpreted as particular positions amongst a number of alternatives. Exploring how the policy emphasis upon improved results in NAPLAN plays out adds to current understandings of whether and how strong policy support for such tests influences teacher and student learning.

Methods

The data were derived from 55 individual interviews with teachers and principals from three primary schools in south-east Queensland. These three schools were chosen to provide insights into teachers' responses to current policies in varied settings, whilst

providing sufficient depth to understand the policy enactment process within individual school settings. Schools were purposively selected in conjunction with senior Education Queensland personnel as sites with reputations for reform take-up. As such, how such sites engaged with the reform agenda had the potential to reveal insights into how reform was being engaged more generally, possibly suggesting broader systemic issues and difficulties which could be transpiring if these more proactive sites seemed to be struggling with the reform agenda.

Each school was distinctive in various ways. One was located in a rural area serving approximately 4000 people, and two were in metropolitan areas. One of the metropolitan schools was large by Australian primary school standards (with approximately 1000 students); the other was an 'average-sized' primary school with approximately 340 students. The regional school had approximately 360 students. Each school had a stable and mixed staffing profile.

Interviews were approximately 40 minutes to one hour, undertaken at the school site, over three months. While questions initially focused on the nature of teachers' professional development practices under current policy conditions, preliminary responses revealed the need to consider the nature of schooling practices more generally. Specific questions related to the impact of NAPLAN, the National Partnerships programme, the Australian Curriculum, and a range of policies specific to each individual school site. Participants were provided with summary reports of preliminary analyses of the data, and feedback solicited.

From the outset, it is recognised that interview data provide an incomplete means of establishing the nature of the habitus of teachers and principals. However, and at the same time, participants' comments, as a form of action, can and do provide very useful insights into their habitus. Similarly, the field in question is identifiable as the social space within which talk about student and teacher learning is recognised as a part of teachers' practice and learning, and the logics of practice or 'practical logics' (Bourdieu, 1990) which characterise the field are evident through teachers' comments, in context. Analytically, insights into the habitus, field and capitals which characterise schooling practices may be derived by pointing out the relations of power which exist between those involved who occupy the field (in this case, teachers and principals), and those who seek to exert influence over the field (most notably, those within the broader political sphere (e.g. politicians concerned to effect improvements in test results as quickly as possible). How teachers understand their work and learning provides insights into the habitus as socially constructed; identifying the capitals of value as part of this process, and which influence the habitus, is crucial. This work is part of the three-step process of analysing fields: firstly, analyse the field in relation to the broader field of power (in this case, political concerns about NAPLAN test results); secondly, identify the relations between those who occupy the field, and; thirdly, explicate the habitus of agents involved (teachers, principals) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Also, in relation to issues of reproduction and change expressed within the interview data presented, analytically, reproductive tendencies may be evidenced, for example, in teachers and principals engaging passively with the NAPLAN policy focus, while more active approaches could

include, for example, teachers drawing upon the political push for improved test scores to stimulate them to think more deeply about how to improve some aspect of their teaching practice.

This work must always, necessarily, be undertaken cautiously by the researcher, for just as Bourdieu recognised that the researcher is able to objectify her/his understanding of her/his own conditions, so too are research participants knowledgeable actors who can recognise their situation and circumstances (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992); again, this brings us back to the importance of recognising the socio-analytical capacity of the habitus, a necessary check upon any analytical attempt to make sense of schooling practices ‘from a distance’ – from a position of ‘scholastic reason’ (Bourdieu, 2000).

Interviews were transcribed remotely, and key themes distilled from the data through repeated, detailed readings of transcripts, in light of Bourdieu’s understanding of practice as socially constituted and fields as sites of competing logics. Within this reading, and in keeping with a Bourdieuan analytical approach, particular attention was given to the nature of the influence of broader political pressures upon teachers/principals, the relations which these pressures produced, and the dispositions and habitus of those involved. Key findings are presented in the next section, and a more detailed analysis of this data in the subsequent discussion section.

Findings

Several themes were evident in relation to how teachers and principals responded to NAPLAN. These foci included how teachers drew upon NAPLAN as an indicator of students' learning; teachers' use of test data to more strategically organise student learning, and; teachers' engagement with NAPLAN results as a vehicle for their own learning.

Indicator of learning: Recognising and engaging with NAPLAN

Teachers' recognition of Queensland's relatively poor NAPLAN performance in comparison with other states, and increased accountability pressures in schools, revealed the field of schooling practices as influenced by the broader field of power:

I think there's ... pressure coming down from high up, starting with the Government and expecting standards to improve, particularly because Queensland's been at the bottom of the tally. And that pressure's passed through the principals, and principals are responsible. And they're being held more accountable for their data. (Teacher-librarian, Oleander)

The influence of more test-centric practices was evident in reflections upon how previous poor performance on NAPLAN in comparison with 'like schools' served as the catalyst for involvement in the National Partnerships program, and how improved NAPLAN scores were rewarded with increased funding:

Well it's all based around how well we're ranked throughout Australia. Queensland, in the past, has been a poor performer against other states, and I guess there's a big push to try and get us up there with the likes of New South Wales and Victoria. So when those scores come out, that data is sent to principals and all admin. teams ... And you look to see where you are against 'like schools,' and then compare your results against the state average. If you do well, if you're a school that does well, there's funding – you will get more funding ... so we've [Queensland] actually been granted over 40 odd million dollars as a result of that, for getting those scores up. ... Because this is a National Partnership school, it's around \$150,000 per year extra. (Deputy-Principal, Oleander)

In this way, a habitus influenced by comparison of data at the national, state and local levels was evident.

Within the schools, this recognition was also evident in how NAPLAN results were valued capitals within the administrative apparatus of Education Queensland:

'Well, Dylan, do you realise that your 6'A' teacher is statistically 12% below everyone else in your region?' I'm not sure they're [Education Queensland] going to do it, but that data is going to be there. And I think – when the NAPLAN came out – was Education Queensland embarrassed? Yeah, they were. (Principal, Oleander)

Also, principals felt some pressure to ensure students in their schools performed more effectively on NAPLAN because of this public accountability. A disposition towards comparisons was expressed through reflections on the existence of the *MySchool* website:

Interviewer: Q: Would you say it's a pretty significant sort of change what's occurred just in the last few years around this focus [displaying NAPLAN results on *MySchool*]?

Respondent: I think so, a lot more accountability. I think once everything is public, as it is on the *MySchool* website, and Queensland as a whole was rated ... across the nation, there's been a lot of pressure from our government to put things in place to lift our schools. So that feeds right back through to the principals, to the teachers. (Principal, Elsemier)

Arguably, principals were perhaps characterised by such a disposition because of their location closer to the administrative apparatus of the state (Lingard, Hayes, Mills & Christie, 2003). What this snippet also indicates is that it is important to note that these concerns were expressed in response to specific questioning about NAPLAN, and that the researcher was himself intimately implicated in the process of generating the data collected, and subsequent analysis.

However, while there was recognition of the political pressure surrounding NAPLAN results, including, in part, because of a focus upon NAPLAN within the research project,

how those in schools responded also revealed simultaneous resistance to a focus upon NAPLAN results for accountability reasons alone. This resistance – contestation – was not necessarily overt. Instead, NAPLAN results were valued capitals which could be drawn upon – appropriated from solely performative and political purposes – for more educational purposes. This included assisting with the more accurate reporting of student learning using school-based measures more generally:

Okay, so there is national and state pressures around NAPLAN absolutely and NAPLAN results but I guess I – it's not that we, that teachers aren't aware of those and don't feel some pressures around those but we don't focus on NAPLAN ... I don't constantly look at NAPLAN, and results from 6 months ago, as to what teachers are doing today and now. What it's about is making sure our school reporting goes in line with that. It's not appropriate for us to be moderating assessment results in Year 2 and saying how fantastic things are and giving all these 'As' and 'Bs' and then of course NAPLAN comes up and we're reporting to parents and there's a huge mismatch; that's not appropriate. So NAPLAN does help provide some baseline, and some accountability across what we are doing.

(Principal, Montesquieu)

A more educative disposition in relation to NAPLAN results was manifest in how the principal of one school spoke effusively about the educational benefits of involvement in a specific literacy programme/project, instigated by poor NAPLAN results, which

entailed ongoing interaction with an academic, principals and literacy lead-teachers from schools in the region:

Well, we have cluster meetings where principals and literacy leaders get together usually once a term and we have a look, not just at our class data but across all the school data to compare how we are all going, which has been – that sharing has been very powerful, and then we bring that back to our staff as well... (Principal, Elsemier)

Support for data-focused collaboration and collegial discussions as a vehicle to improve student learning reflected an educational disposition on the part of teachers and principals.

Furthermore, there was some focus upon celebrating the successes achieved through the test, and learning from data:

And our ‘distance travelled’ data does show that we have greater improvements even between NAPLAN, Year 3 and Year 5... So they’re the sort of things we look to celebrate with our staff ... They look at data; there’s a focus on data. There’s a focus on setting targets, and we are moving, as time moves on too, we are gaining, as a team, as a school in greater knowledge too, around making sure we are more focussed in what we are looking at. (Principal, Montesquieu)

In these ways, the field of schooling practices was a site in which there was recognition of improved test scores as important political capital, but these were kept in check by a more educational disposition on the part of educators. In short, a ‘logic of appropriation’ – of using political demands not solely for performative and political purposes, but for more educative purposes – was evident.

Strategic learning: Structuring student learning

A teacher habitus shaped by more substantive concerns for building students’ self esteem, as students attained goals which they had set themselves, was also evident:

[Literacy and Numeracy testing] allows you to have that as a focus in terms of you know where you’ve come from and where you’re heading to and targets and things like that. And ... we’ve developed the culture with the kids that it’s not there to shame you or to upset you or anything like that. That’s where you are and learning is a personal journey, and it’s all about where you started from and where you’re getting to type thing. And not to worry about where everyone else is. So it’s been – I know a lot of the kids have used it as a motivating type thing and they really get a kick out of moving their name along the TORCH¹ wall. And they can set their own goals – and internalise them more rather than just saying, ‘I need you to be a better reader.’ They can say, ‘Well, I’m at a level 20 now; maybe

¹ TORCH – Tests of Reading Comprehension – a reading comprehension test to ascertain student reading capacity against established age-specific norms.

next term I can get to a 22.’ (Learning Support teacher (previously Year 7 teacher), Elsemier)

While increased test scores were valued capitals, opportunities for students to practise the test-taking process itself, and efforts to ‘build stamina’ as part this process, were considered important to help students learn how to sustain effort:

But we also know from those tests and from NAPLAN that our kids [say] ‘I can’t think,’ ‘I’ve got a mental block’ half way through the test... They tire during the test They don’t have the stamina in testing. ... So it’s also been pointing to us that we need to build some of that stamina in our kids. ... So it’s also – it’s not just about curriculum; it’s also about building those sorts of test-taking skills, the ability to sustain effort for longer periods of time. (Principal, Montesquieu)

At times, test preparation seemed to dominate learning practices within the field of schooling practices, but this occurred in ways which helped students overcome fears about the test. Test preparation was a structured part of students’ experiences and helped to allay students’ concerns about the test *per se*:

... we immerse them in that sort of style of learning as well. Like giving – just say for an example – for the writing side of the NAPLAN, they’ve now seen how to get a bit of writing, a bit of text, read it, and then do a response to that. They know how to do it, so that they’re not scared of it. (Year 6 teacher, Elsemier)

The appropriation of the testing process beyond performative and political purposes alone was also apparent through elaboration of the benefits of various strategic initiatives to maximise student outcomes. This included organising students into ability groups as a vehicle to assist teachers enhance students' learning opportunities, and ongoing assessment:

We even established ability grouping to help those children with their needs. And so each numeracy block class has a focus for that week or two weeks, so that we can overcome the difficulties that they have. And, of course, we do monthly testing on that to see if they've got the concepts. If not, then we retrace those the following term or a couple of weeks down the track. (Year 5/6 teacher, Elsemier)

The focus upon NAPLAN did not occur in isolation but was complemented by school-based tests, including PAT-R and PAT-M tests². Results on various other standardised measures of literacy capacity were also capitals which were highly valued for providing the sort of information necessary to enable the 'grouping' of students to enhance students' learning:

The PM benchmarks are associated with that and I guess what we are looking at now, with our guided reading, is maybe grouping our students a little bit smarter.

And the PD that we have been having the last few weeks has been actually PD

² The Progressive Achievement Test: Reading (PAT-R) and Progressive Achievement Test: Mathematics (PAT-M) were a battery of standardised literacy and numeracy tests used by many schools to ascertain students' literacy and numeracy capabilities.

around conducting ‘running records’ and what strategies are needed for those students to learn; what they’re using in their reading and what they’re not using, so they can be grouped accordingly as to what their needs are. So we are sort of getting right into the nitty gritty. (Principal, Elsemier)

That this wider data set constituted valued capitals *per se* was evident in how the National Partnership funding was considered advantageous because it enabled these tests to be marked externally, and for this data to be used in conjunction with NAPLAN results to set priorities for students’ learning:

So we know from NAPLAN that we have issues around comprehension in reading. We know we have issues, also, through NAPLAN and the ACER PAT-R and the ACER PAT-M tests that we’ve done ... We’re now currently, through NPA³ funding, having that marked externally and we’re doing it twice a year, not once a year. ... And so there’s an opportunity twice a year for teachers to use that data in ways across Year 3 to 7, to help set priorities. (Principal, Montesquieu)

In this way, even as it was heavily influenced by pressure for improved test results, the field of schooling practices was a site of considerable knowledge about the use of various forms of data for educational purposes – to improve student learning – not simply for test score enhancement; the field of schooling practices was a space characterised by a logic of appropriation of performative influences for more educative reasons. This is not to imply that teachers did not believe NAPLAN tests and results could not be used for

³ ‘National Partnership Agreement’

educative purposes *per se*, but that strong performative pressures themselves were being appropriated by teachers for educative purposes.

Data for learning: Teacher learning with and beyond NAPLAN

Together with diagnostic testing and assessment of subject areas ('Key Learning Areas'), NAPLAN data constituted what one principal described as part of a 'triangle of data'. This multi-faceted data constituted valued capitals, as evident in various 'data walls' in the schools, which were used as a vehicle for teachers' learning:

Yeah so I guess we have a triangle of data, we have NAPLAN, we have diagnostic testing and we have KLAs which is our school data. And so there are 3 sets of data that we can look at to make decisions... It's embedding data into the mindset of teachers, and the data is not just a test. For example, you may have seen a board up in the staffroom. And that's what we call a 'data wall' on reading. And we have a common element called the PM benchmarks that we're using. And all children's – in Year 1, 2 and 3 – names are put on there, and what level they're reading at in Term 1. And now we've just finished Term 2, and the teachers have moved them to where the children are at. And I'm taking photos of each term, and we put that up there so that the teachers can see it. And the questions are around, 'What do we see?' ... So it's stimulating conversation. (Principal, Oleander)

This engagement cultivated an inquiry-oriented disposition, evident in teachers' recognition of the questioning and discussion occurring within this school about how to improve students' learning:

Well we've been engaged in a lot of discussion within staff meetings and outside the staff meetings on the teaching of reading and writing. Dylan⁴ set up a board in the staff room with all the levels of kids in Years 1 to 3, and it's a discussion point. So teachers put their kids up there, and at first some teachers sort of viewed it as, you know, like, 'Oh my gosh, all my kids are here [pointing to lower levels of achievement]!' But, and eventually, the discussion turned around to, 'Well how can we help those kids,' not why are those kids there and who's to blame, but, 'Look at these groups of kids; look at the way that our students are spread that we have such a range in certain year levels. How can we help these kids; how can we get them moving...?' Yeah, huge discussions around that.

(Teacher-librarian, Oleander)

At the same time as evidence of the principal as 'policy enforcer' (Ball *et al.*, 2011a), the use of the data revealed a teacher habitus borne of ongoing opportunities to explore how to improve students' learning in depth and detail. Such a habitus was evident in support for analysing data as a valuable part of teachers' learning:

Analysing data has been a heavy focus for this school. We went and did – it's called Pat-R and Pat-M test – the reading and a maths test. And they get marked

⁴ Pseudonym for principal.

for us, and then they send the data back to us. So we have been analysing that and working out where we can help bump our kids up. (Year 6 teacher, Montesquieu)

A more educative disposition was evident in how NAPLAN data was beneficial, even as its limitations as ‘point in time’ tests were acknowledged:

I think it's good. I don't think that the testing is necessarily [problematic] - I think that there's a more balanced view being put out by the federal government and the state government and schools about the fact that these are only ‘point in time’ tests. And that there's a whole range of data that gives a better picture of your child. But in terms of, you know, this is a mechanism to make us focus. I don't think that's a bad thing. (Teacher-librarian, Oleander)

NAPLAN was directly attributed to stimulating teachers’ learning, particularly around literacy. Again, as part of this process, a logic of appropriation of more performative and political pressures was evident in how some NAPLAN test items were recognised as encouraging higher order thinking, which was seen as moving beyond simple word identification activities:

Yeah well I think NAPLAN's brought about this whole focus on literacy and ... looking at how we can professionally develop ourselves. It's also made us think about higher level thinking, particularly in reading comprehension, because a lot of the NAPLAN testing is really looking at higher order thinking and ...

comprehension rather than finding basic facts in a passage, which really is the true nature of reading and what reading's all about – that higher thinking and connecting with text and your own experiences and that sort of thing. (Teacher-librarian, Oleander)

However, this focusing was not unproblematic, and contestation within the field of schooling practices was evident in how learning from students' test results in the form of raw data was considered stressful by some teachers, with principals seen as important intermediaries for interpreting data in 'lay' terms:

Luckily Dylan reads it and looks through it first, and then he can give it to us in 'layman's' terms, because I probably wouldn't understand it. ... I find it a bit stressful. And a bit pressuring and those sorts of things... (Year 1-3 teacher, Oleander)

As an 'imperative/disciplinary' policy (Ball *et al.*, 2011a), teachers and principals were expected to enact the policy ensemble around NAPLAN. This was not done passively, however, but instead stimulated administrators to identify what one principal described as the 'dirty dozen' – those questions on the NAPLAN tests in which students did particularly poorly:

We have a data web in this school that tomorrow I'll be happy to show you, if you like. Most of the data that teachers get, for example for NAPLAN, is raw data; it

tells you kids in the upper band, it tells you the mean. You actually have to drill down into the NAPLAN data to get specifics on year level ... we try and drill down and get things like what we call the 'dirty dozen.' So in other words, what are the 10 questions in Year 3 reading that our children did poorly in compared to say the national average? So there's no point in us looking at questions where we're only 2% different to the national average, because our kids are performing at the national average. ...What are the top 12 questions or 10 questions or 8 that are significantly different for us? (Principal, Oleander)

As well as such detailed practices of exploring student performance at individual item level, an active teacher learning disposition was also evident in other ways, including through an 'action research' initiative generated from concerns about students' responses on specific NAPLAN questions:

Our action research plan is actually tied into this: the kids struggled with the NAPLAN question last year about angles. They were looking at internal angles, and they should have been looking at external angles. So we've decided to have a really strong focus on that area, and link that in with a new maths project called 'YuMi Deadly Maths.' (Year 6 teacher, Montesquieu)

In these ways, a logic of active appropriation of the NAPLAN performative political agenda was evident; NAPLAN test results were not simply valued capitals in and of

themselves, but were instead employed diagnostically by teachers, and in association with other programmes to improve students' understanding in areas of identified need.

Analysis: A logic of appropriation

The data reveal that the field of schooling practices is not simply dominated by concerns about how to improve NAPLAN results for purely performative purposes, but is also a site of active engagement and struggle by teachers and principals concerned about how best to facilitate students' learning. While there is evidence of how NAPLAN has played out and influenced practice in profound ways – of the policy field upon the field of practice (Author, 2008) – in terms of policy enactment, this process reveals active position-taking on the part of school-based practitioners involving engaging with NAPLAN results and political concerns for improved test scores, and using this focus to inform discussion, debate and learning to improve practice. In relation to strong performative pressures associated with NAPLAN, this work constitutes what can be described as an ongoing 'logic' of appropriation.

As well as providing evidence in support of Ball *et al.*'s (2011b) categories of policy actors such as transactors, enthusiasts, translators, critics and receivers, there is evidence of teachers as recipients of policy framed by the performative conditions within which they work and learn and, simultaneously, as actively involved in particular constructions of their work. In keeping with Ball *et al.*'s (2011b) call to consider both more agentic responses as well as contextual influences, but in a more explicitly mutually constitutive,

dialectical fashion, a disposition is evident amongst teachers and principals in these schools which is reflective of a strong focus upon improving NAPLAN results as markers of student learning, and which is simultaneously actively created by educators in schools. However, this is not a simple process, with teachers and principals as agents working in sites of ongoing, competing/contested practices. In the practices presented, this contestation was typically not overt, but manifest in teachers taking a pro-active stance in appropriating political and performative concerns about the focus upon poor NAPLAN test scores to ensure such tests were used to stimulate more substantive student and teacher learning opportunities. A Bourdieuan approach enables understanding of this process as one amongst a variety of potential practices, and not to be taken for granted.

The data reveal schooling practices have been influenced by the broader push for improved standardised literacy and numeracy test results in Queensland. On occasions, the capitals valued are NAPLAN scores, as evident in teachers and principals' awareness of their state's relatively poor performance on the test. In part, this recognition was also stimulated by the interviewer, with his questioning about these results. At the same time, the push for improved NAPLAN results does appear to constitute part of a more imperative/disciplinary policy ensemble (Ball *et al.*, 2011a). The way in which teachers and principals described the increase in accountability which accompanied the publication of NAPLAN results through the *MySchool* website reveals the panoptic effects of a sustained gaze upon individual schools and states' literacy and numeracy results within the field of schooling practices. A habitus influenced by such concerns is evident in how Education Queensland was described by one principal as being

‘embarrassed’ by the comparatively poor state-wide results of individual schools on NAPLAN. That NAPLAN data could be used for comparative purposes to discipline principals and teachers reflects a field of practice influenced by performative pressure to improve NAPLAN results. Under these circumstances, teacher learning involves the explicit analysis of NAPLAN data as valued capitals, and principals are important mediators and translators of this process within the field, and not simply narrators (Ball *et al.*, 2011b). NAPLAN results are invoked as evidence of a need to focus upon student literacy and numeracy practices, and poor results on this data responsible for more targeted PD initiatives. Insecurities cultivated by concerns surrounding NAPLAN – reflected in how some teachers expressed reliance upon the principal and other members of the leadership team to ‘translate’ NAPLAN data, and the confidence placed in the principals to assist with this work – are indicative of a habitus responsive to accountability concerns, and demands for improved results.

However, such a rendering of teachers and principals’ responses to NAPLAN alone does not capture the simultaneously active appropriation of the NAPLAN political agenda by teachers and principals within the schools, and the multiple ways in which educators sought to channel the attention surrounding NAPLAN for more educative purposes. These educators were creating the conditions for more substantive learning, just as they were creating and ‘created’ by the focus upon standardised test outcomes. While improved test scores represent academic capitals valued within the field, teachers also seek to contest a simple reification of test results for the sake of test results alone. On occasion, teachers resisted more reductive effects of the focus upon such capitals. This

took the form of various strategies put in place within schools, such as ability grouping of students in response to broader concerns about students' learning needs, rather than simply concerns for NAPLAN results. Activities focused on test taking, and increased opportunities for students to practise NAPLAN tests, are not only designed to effect improved NAPLAN results, but reflect significant concerns on the part of teachers to address students' substantive learning needs. That the field of schooling practices is not simply test-score oriented *per se* was evident in how teachers elaborated upon the more educational benefits of the testing process, and how the tests could provide useful information to stimulate conversations about how best to effect improved student learning more generally, and how they were also recognised as only 'point in time' indicators of student learning. A more educative habitus was reflected in how teachers resisted the potentially reductive effects of the use of test scores by construing them as useful vehicles for building students' esteem, to help set learning targets, and encourage development of personal learning goals. Test scores were also potentially useful for providing some information to inform decisions about the nature of classroom experiences appropriate for students at particular year levels. Teachers and principals also recognised the need to 'build stamina,' but not just for purposes of maximising NAPLAN scores. In these ways, more broadly political demands for improved NAPLAN test results were nuanced by a more educative disposition. The myriad and ongoing ways in which this occurred reflects not just evidence of the appropriation of this more performative agenda, but a strong *logic* of appropriation – an appropriation which was embedded, habituated, within teachers' practices.

Conclusion

Teachers and principals' dispositions have been forged from considerable engagement with NAPLAN test-taking and test results, but in complex and nuanced ways. The data presented in this paper reveal that in the context of strong national and state policy and political pressure to improve NAPLAN results, teachers and principals are influenced by performative policy effects. However, teachers and principals simultaneously seek to appropriate these more performative demands, alongside educative applications of NAPLAN more generally, to assist them to focus more fully and carefully upon this more educational nature of their work. While current literature positions those in schools as translators, transactors, critics and receivers of policy, amongst others (Ball *et al.*'s, 2011), and that these positions need to be understood in context, a Bourdieuan approach to policy enactment provides a coherent means of capturing the mutually constitutive and competing pressures intrinsic to the dialectical interplay between teachers' enacted practices, and the broader policies and political contexts which influence these practices. The notion of a logic of active appropriation is developed in this paper to try to capture the integral nature of this nuanced interplay between broader performative policy and political pressure for improved NAPLAN results, and teachers and principals' concerns for more sustained, educative approaches to student and teacher learning. Teachers, principals, system personnel and other policy-'makers' need to recognise the intrinsic nature, the *logic*, of such appropriation capacities to understand how strong policy support for improved test scores may play out in practice, to inform subsequent policy-making.

It is important to acknowledge that such appropriation is but one position within a field of multiple possible stances and outcomes. The schools reported in this research were sites which were considered to be striving to improve their students' learning. Further research into school sites struggling to engage students and teachers under these policy conditions would seem important to provide a fuller picture of the multitude of possible schooling practices in the context of such strong policy effects. It would also be beneficial to undertake further inquiries into how not just practitioners, but also policy-makers understand the push for improved NAPLAN results in Queensland, and what current practices mean for subsequent policy development processes.

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