



Against the tide: Enacting respectful student
behaviour polices in 'get tough' times

Johnson & Sullivan

Student behaviour at school:

- problematic and contested field of inquiry,
- many interest groups have a stake.

- How do schools interpret, reconcile and make decisions about what student behaviour research, legislation and advice to consider when developing local student behaviour policies?
- What micropolitical skills and understandings do they employ to do this work?

Drawing on Ball, Maguire & Braun theoretical toolbox:

Policy is a composite of directives, policies, legal requirements, procedures, and local practices.

Policy work is “a process ... subject to ‘interpretation’ as it is enacted (rather than implemented) in original and creative ways within institutions”. (Braun et al., 2011, p586)

“Policy is always contested and changing (unstable) – always ‘becoming’”. (Ball et al, 2012, p119).

Schools receive policies and then they ‘do policy work’, that is they construct, translate, interpret and enact policies.

‘Actors’ in various roles do this policy work.

As a result, schools do policy work in unique ways “within the limitations and possibilities of context(s)” (Braun et al., 2011, p586)

Various contextual dimensions influence the enactment of policy. These dimensions include:

- Situated Context
 - eg locale, school history & population
- Professional Cultures
 - eg ethos, teacher values & ‘policy management’
- Material Contexts
 - eg staffing, budgets, buildings
- External Contexts
 - eg broader policy context, system support (Ball et al., 2012)

The Challenge For Schools

Policies can complement and/or contradict each other. When doing policy work, schools have to interpret, translate and enact the plethora of policies.

“The policy texts that schools produce and the enactments generated are complex, but sometimes ‘untidy’ co-constructions – sophisticated, ramshackle and flawed”.

Furthermore, this work is complicated by the involvement of numerous actors both from within and outside the school.
(Ball, et al., 2012, p119)

What is Micropolitics?

- ‘use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations’ (Blase, 1991, p11)
- ‘the strategies and tactics used by individuals and groups in an organisation to further their interests’ (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p107)
- ‘occur in any organisation, in processes of collaboration as well as in resistance, and within the organisation as well as in the interactions with the external environment’ (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p107)

- In-depth case studies within the South Australian context.
- 5 diverse schools chosen across Government and Non-government (Primary and Secondary).
- School tours and interviews with Principals, school leadership, teachers, school assistants.
- Photos, policy documents.
- 5-10 interviews conducted at each school.

Sectors of schooling	Students
Government	66%
Catholic	20%
Independent	14 %

Two levels of government responsible for schooling;

Federal

State/territory



- Anti-bullying and Harassment
- Attendance
- Assessment, Reporting and Evaluation
- Child protection
- Classroom behaviour/rules
- Code of behaviour
- Cyber
- Grievance
- ICT
- Internet use
- Mobile Phone
- Safe School
- Uniform
- Yard Behaviour

What did schools do?

How did schools enact student behaviour policies?

They:

- rejected deficit views of students
- promoted core values
- emphasised student engagement rather than behaviour management
- changed the physical environment
- recruited and retained compatible and skilled staff

Rejecting deficit views of students

“We changed the conversation from the deficit view of the child and their family, and the community, all that blaming stuff”
(Primary principal)

“Feral! That’s what they used to get called – ‘those naughty feral children’. Feral was used all the time for our kids”
(Primary principal)

“Every child is worthwhile - there is no such thing as a bad child; unfortunately sometimes they’ll just get it wrong.”
(Secondary teacher)

Promoting core values

Slogan, Motto or Mantra	Values
School A	
'Firm in principle, gentle in manner' 'Rigour, relevance and respect'	Compassion, respect, justice and fairness, and having a fair go.
School B	
'We are here for the kids first and foremost' 'The kids come first'	Respect, resilience, responsibility, honesty, community
School C	
'A learning community working happily together in a safe and caring environment'	Respect, excellence, acceptance, cooperation and honesty.
School E	
Respect of self and others	'4 Rs': relationships, relevance, rigour and resilience

Promoting core values

“there is an underlying culture which is based on our Christian faith that each of them are valuable individuals”

(Secondary teacher)

“we don’t often get those extreme behaviours because of the work that we’ve done in developing this school culture”

(Primary teacher)

“the school values define our school as opposed to behaviour management”

(Secondary principal)

“One of the most important parts of my job is culture development “

(Secondary principal)



Emphasising student engagement rather than behaviour management

We didn't set out with the aim to improve behaviour. We aimed to improve kids' education and as a result of what we've done we've seen the behaviour improve markedly. We have seen the behaviour improve because the kids' learning is personalised, they have autonomy over their work, they can choose what they work on, when they work on it, who they work with, and where they work. (Principal, High School)

Recruiting & retaining 'compatible' staff

<u>Strategy</u>	<u>Tactics</u>
Use positive features of the staffing process	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Postpone declaring staff vacancies to avoid external 'placements'• Describe teaching positions tightly and specifically to target 'compatible' applicants• Advertise leadership positions and appoint 'compatible' leaders• Reject 'incompatible' applicants (even if incumbents)• Look for particular skills/interests in applications• Utilise external support (i.e. staffing officers and regional directors)

Changing the physical environment

“I think the physical environment impacts on learning and even behaviour management”
(Primary principal)

“There’s a relationship between the infrastructure and the support provided by the community... The physical environment can have an impact on beliefs and in so doing, also impacts on children’s learning”
(Primary principal)







- Behaviour policies weren't adopted or implemented. They were enacted locally.
- The process was complex and protracted and never 'finished'.
- It was values driven, usually by politically 'savvy' school leaders.
- Schools were prepared to 'go against the tide' to enact respectful & dignified behaviour policies, rather than coercive & punitive policies – courageous and risky business.

© University of South Australia 2014 All rights reserved.

Attribution: You must attribute the work to the original authors: Bruce Johnson and Anna Sullivan, 2014.

Acknowledgement: Modified by [#####], year

This work is copyright. You may download, display, print and reproduce and edit this material for your personal, non-commercial use or use within your organisation. You must attribute original authorship to the authors listed above and acknowledge changes made to the original work.

Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, all other rights are reserved. Requests and inquiries concerning reproduction and rights should be addressed to Dr Anna Sullivan at University of South Australia.