A CRITICAL POLICY TRAJECTORY STUDY OF
LOCAL AREA EDUCATION PLANNING IN BUNBURY,
WESTERN AUSTRALIA, 1998-2000

by

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This thesis is a report of an investigation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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November 2009
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary educational institution.

Signed

Murdoch University
November 2009
“The quality of research from a critical theory standpoint is not based on the ability to tell a good tale but on the ability to participate in a human struggle – a struggle that is not always vicious or visible but a struggle that is always present. Research should be part of a larger human struggle rooted in the right to participate in the construction of meanings that affect our lives.” (Deetz cited in Putnam, Bantz, Deetz, Mumby, & Van Maanen, 1993, p. 227)
ABSTRACT

The Local Area Education Planning (LAEP) Framework was released in Western Australia in 1997 and enacted in the regional centre of Bunbury, Western Australia, in the period 1998-2000. In a similar way to many other policies within Australia and overseas, LAEP aims to reform and restructure the public education system through involving community participation in educational decision-making. The enactment of LAEP was a highly contested process over the nature of community participation and a widespread view at the local level, that the Education Department of Western Australia had a pre-determined agenda to close schools and to introduce a senior campus and middle schools. In contrast to the major regional centres and metropolitan areas of Western Australia, where there have been school closures and amalgamations, as well as the introduction of middle schools and senior campuses, the LAEP outcomes for the Bunbury Education District, on this occasion, did not result in major structural changes to the delivery of education services. Located in the broad domain of critical social research, this study applies a critical ethnographic methodology and draws on 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews and secondary data sources to examine how key participants understood, experienced and responded to the enactment of LAEP. A Critical Policy Trajectory Framework informed by critical social theory, provides the theoretical lens through which to describe and explain the LAEP policy formation and enactment process at the macro structural (global, nation-state, state), middle-range agenda-building and micro lived experience levels of the policy process. A major conclusion of the study is that the social activism at the micro level of the policy trajectory interrupted the introduction of the Minister’s and the Education Department of Western Australia’s education reform agenda in Bunbury. However, the macro level discursive constraints associated with global level economising discourses and the centralisation tendencies of the neo-liberal state saw the Education Department of Western Australia’s Central Office policy elites steer at a distance (Kickert, 1995) to produce a policy settlement that retained the option for the State to pursue a neo-liberal education restructuring agenda in the longer term. To move beyond policy analysis frameworks that describe and analyse the factors influencing policy, this study synthesises some of the key ideas, insights and lessons emerging from the research, to develop a critically engaged policy perspective in the areas of policy, research and practice.
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEC  Australian Education Council
AGOs  Alternative Government Organisations
BPS  Bunbury Primary School
BSHS  Bunbury Senior High School
Coalition  Liberal/National Party Coalition Government
CPTF  Critical Policy Trajectory Framework
DET  Department of Education and Training of Western Australia
ECU  Edith Cowan University
EDWA  Education Department of Western Australia
Framework  Integrated Multilevel Policy Analysis Framework
IGOs  Intergovernmental Organisations
IMF  International Monetary Fund
IPS  Independent Public Schools

LAEP Framework  Local Area Education Planning Framework
LAEP  Local Area Education Planning Process
NGOs  Non-Governmental Organisations
OECD  Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development
OPEC  Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
P & C  Parents and Citizens’ Association
SBDMGs  School Based Decision Making Groups
SSTUWA  State School Teachers’ Union of Western Australia
TAFE  South West College of Technical and Further Education
TEE  Tertiary Entrance Examination Scores
TMOs  Transnational Media Organisations
TNCs  Transnational Corporations
UNESCO  United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WACSSO  Western Australian Council of State School Organisations
Referencing Note

1. In this thesis the State (first letter capitalised) refers to the State of Western Australia. The state (without capitalisation) refers to a nation’s collective political governance or a theoretical representation of ideas in relation to the state.

2. When referring to a particular Government in relation to Western Australia or elsewhere, Government is capitalised. When government is referred to in a generic sense lower case is used.

3. In relation to position titles, the Principal is capitalised when referring to a specific Principal. Lower case is used to represent principals in a generic sense.

4. Prior to 1987 the Western Australian State education bureaucracy was titled the Education Department of Western Australia. During the period 1987-2001 the Ministry of Education of Western Australia was renamed to Education Department of Western Australia and then Department of Education of Western Australia and in 2003 to Department of Education and Training of Western Australia. The title of the Western Australian state education bureaucracy used at a particular point in time is used in this thesis.