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Analysing the policy text – 10 steps

Pre-text stage: 3 steps

1. Consider the **general context**: what do you know before you read the text?
2. **Identify** the text/s, what text/s surround it, chronologically, contemporarily or geographically?
3. **Locate** the text/s

Reading the text: 5 steps

4. **Initial impression** of the text: what, and how much, is in the text. Consider its **presentation** and the effect of this. Consider the **cover**, or front page, what does it tell you, and what is the effect of this? Consider any **visual images**, particularly on the cover. Refer to the additional page on reading the visual text.
5. **Content analysis**
Identify and count key words and/or phrases. Consider any surprises in this. Are there words/phrases that you didn't expect, or words/phrases that you did expect but which are not there. The absences can be as important as the presences.
6. **Metaphor/imagery**
Identify the metaphors or other linguistic imagery that is used. What does this suggest? Are there any identifiable patterns in the way in which the imagery is used.
7. **Subjects**
Identify the subjects (either human/social group or organisational/institutional).
Identify the activities that are associated with particular subjects.
Identify and consider the relations between them.
Consider what this begins to tell you about the policy.
8. **Discourse**
Further consider the relations that exist between the identified subjects.
What argument is presented, or story told, about the subjects.
What view of the world, or social structure, is constructed through this text? Who, within this text, would benefit or lose from this?
How does this analysis relate to your analysis of other texts, either contemporary, chronologically or geographically?

Post-text: 2 steps

9. **Thinking more about the discourse/s**

Refer to related readings. Summary of the key points from Ball (2008: 13):

Discourses construct the need for policy reform – that is, they construct the problem that is to be solved.

Discourses provide the ‘obvious/necessary’ policy response, the ‘solution’.

Discourses, both their constructions and their rationales, privilege particular social goals and human qualities over others.

Within the policy, the discourse constructs systems of value, and symbolic systems that include ways of accounting for and legitimating political decisions.

‘... the language of policy is important. Part of the work of policy is done in and through policy texts, written and spoken, and the ways in which these represent policy subjects – teachers, learners, managers, etc. Policies to greater or lesser extents have a semantic and ontological force. They play their part in the construction of a social world of meanings, of causes and effects, of relationships, of imperatives and inevitabilities. By attending to the changing language and rhetorical constructions of education policy we can begin to see the ways in which policies have histories and the way that they “join up” within and across different policy fields. Such attention also highlights the contradictions and incoherences that are embedded within policy.’ (Ball, 2008:13)

10. **Theorizing**

For this you turn to the existing knowledges and literatures that relate to your study and your developing analysis. These literatures may be substantive (that is directly related to the actual subject of your study), methodological (related to your approach to the study, the actual research process), or theoretical (related more to philosophical/sociological/psychological/critical underpinning theories and concepts).