CHAPTER 1

RESEARCHING THE PRACTICES AND PROCESSES OF POLICY MAKING

INTRODUCTION

This book explores the relationship between space, place and identity and multiple processes of policy making in education. It's main purpose is to try and understand these processes in terms of the values and principles which work through policy making in relation to 'provision'. By 'provision' I am referring to the structures, places, assessment procedures, allocation of resources, curricula and ways of naming made in relation to disabled children and young people, and other learners at risk of exclusion in education systems. Possible alternative ways of understanding how policy processes create, or contribute to, exclusions in education are explored through a number of different lenses as a means of teasing out some of the contradictory or obscured mechanisms at work which produce particular constructions of difference and 'needs'. Legislation has been both slow and weak in counteracting exclusions and reducing discrimination; in fact, policies which are presented as being concerned with widening participation in some areas may strengthen forms of marginalisation in others. This book seeks to contribute to an understanding of the ways in which policies are made and interpreted and to explore some possible implications for social justice.

Although there is a focus on spatialization and policy making in relation to disability and learning difficulty in education, the ideas and arguments put forward are connected to other forms of exclusion and inclusion. The kinds of approaches used to examine policy making in education – theories of space and place borrowed from social and cultural geography, critical historical enquiry and discourse analysis – could also be applied in relation to other groups such as girls and women, or boys and men, in particular education or work settings and career structures. They could be applied to an exploration of policy making in relation to the experience of young asylum seekers in education systems. They can be connected to values and practices informing decisions about planning in towns or rural communities and local economies, as well as in terms of the role and location of different schools, public transport systems, the design of buildings and opportunities for communities to develop and flourish. These are inseparable from issues relating to inclusion and exclusion in education which are about local, national and global policy developments relating to social and economic change, as well as about the making of education policies. As Bill Morris (General Secretary of the Transport

and General Workers Union, UK) pointed out in commenting on the proposal to set up detention camps contained in the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Bill in October 2002:

> Let's get one thing clear: these centres are not for accommodation; they are for detention. Founded on the socially repugnant objective of separating refugees and their children from society ... they will be a constant reminder that, in 2002, this country legislated in order to discriminate ...
>
> In perhaps the most graphic example of discrimination inherent in this policy, the children of asylum seekers will be barred from local schools and educated apart from the children of this country. In doing this, the Government is not only in clear breach of UN guidance on the rights of the child, it is also sending out a dreadful message about the value our society places on these children. (Morris, B., 2002)

The social, political and economic changes taking place internationally, therefore, and their ramifications at the macro and micro levels of social life in different parts of the world, have an impact on the kinds of issues we face in terms of overcoming barriers to inclusive education. These issues extend to the whole of society and cannot be confined to a narrow interpretation of inclusion as being concerned with disabled children and those described as having 'special educational needs'. This is not to argue that the processes of stereotyping and discrimination take the same form or are experienced in uniform ways across all marginalised groups.

At this point, I am already stumbling over the language of 'marginalization' and 'marginalized groups'. Marginalization only has meaning in particular social, temporal and spatial locations. There is a real danger in identifying groups as excluded based on the familiar paradigms of ethnicity, gender, class or disability, and of actually contributing to the processes of exclusion by positioning some groups as *naturally* the subject of marginalization. In later chapters we shall examine some of these issues in relation to language and the creation of identities.

INCLUSION: PRINCIPLES, DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

When I set out to write this book, my original purpose was to examine policy making relating to inclusion and exclusion in education. I was interested in how policies are interpreted and work their way through to changes in the educational and social lives of children and communities, especially in a historical period in which 'inclusion' has become an everyday discourse of governance. At the same time the notion of inclusion can be interpreted in ways which challenge exclusionary and unjust values and practices.

In the context of this book, my interpretation of inclusion refers to a set of principles, values and practices which involve the social transformation of education systems and communities. It does not refer to a fixed state or set of criteria to be used as a blue-print, but seeks to challenge deficit thinking and practice which are 'still deeply ingrained' and too often lead 'many to believe that some pupils have to be dealt with in a separate way' (Ainscow, 1999, p. 8). In the following chapters,

I will try to explore ways in which spatialized and disabling discursive practices take place through the technical and bureaucratic procedures of categorization, labelling and placing and how these processes and procedures may be absorbed and absolved within official versions of inclusion itself. Roger Slee raises disturbing questions which challenge dominant interpretations of the notion and practice of inclusion in which:

> ... discursive practices form an alliance that pursues an assimilationist agenda described in a language of 'inclusion'. In other words, residual professional interests of those working in the field of special education have necessitated resilience over changing political imperatives. Predominantly unchanged practices are described in new terms. Inclusion is practised, in traditional ways, by those who presided over exclusion. The aim is to have 'othered' children fit the schools we provide with a minimum of fuss and without disrupting the institutional equilibrium. This is assimilation. Inclusive education ought to suggest a process of cultural reconstruction. (Slee, 1999, p. 127)

This cultural reconstruction has to be situated within a critical appraisal of the discourses and values articulated through the physical environment and the use of space as well as of the discourses used in relation to students, curricula, schools and communities.

What is needed is a close examination of the multiple levels and conduits through which exclusions take place. Inclusion, then, is concerned with cultural change in all areas of social, personal and political life (Armstrong *et al.*, 2000a; Booth, 2000; Corbett, 2001; Potts, 2003a). In this study inclusion is seen as a process or set of processes involving a re-evaluation of the premises on which education systems are based. As Barton explains:

> Inclusive education is not merely about providing access into mainstream school for pupils who have previously been excluded. It is not about closing down an unacceptable system of segregated provision and dumping those pupils in an unchanged mainstream system. Existing school systems in terms of physical factors, curriculum aspects, teaching expectations and styles, leadership roles, will have to change. This is because inclusive education is about the participation of *all* children and young people and the removal of *all* forms of exclusionary practice. (Barton, 1998, pp. 84–5)

A friend recently complained to me that 'the disability movement has high-jacked the inclusion agenda, and other groups and issues relating to race, gender, sexuality and class are being pushed aside in the debate'. I would argue that, on the contrary, the rights of disabled children to attend their local school have been consistently denied and ignored in debates about education and inclusion until very recently, but this comment does emphasise the dangers of compartmentalizing groups and their perceived interests. It is a contradiction to see the struggle for inclusion as taking place – and being lost or won – in relation to the discrimination, or levels of participation, experienced by particular groups. (This is illustrated by the hypothetical example of a disabled person gaining physical access to a local school or college, only to find themselves discriminated against because of practices

CHAPTER 2

SPACE, PLACE AND POLICY MAKING: DEVELOPING A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores some possible theoretical frameworks which could provide a starting point for discussing policy processes. This will involve a critical engagement with some ideas from different disciplines concerning notions of space and place, especially as they relate to discourse and the making of education policy. In this context the term 'critical engagement' is concerned with a commitment to social justice and to joining with the work of others in different fields to contribute to the same ends as that described by Dutton for architecture:

> An architecture of social responsibility (worthy of the name) resists dominant social trends in order to promote social justice and 'radical democracy' and works towards liberation by helping groups achieve a spatial voice in new forms of community and solidarity, conceived within difference. (Dutton, 1996, p. 159)

Could the research process itself provide an arena in which the voices of others, those involved in, or affected by, the issues being explored, would find a space? What would it mean to promote social justice and 'radical democracy' through the research process, or would it be enough to explore these issues through the research questions, data collection and analysis? I cannot claim to have shared power in the design and process of the research and the voices of children and young people are rarely heard. What I have tried to do is to make visible some of the obscured processes through which decisions are made about where some children go to school, and to raise questions about these in relation to issues of democracy, transparency and equality. This has involved borrowing ideas and terminology from different disciplines, and using them to provide fresh vantage points from which to explore familiar issues.

Terminology

Some of the terminology used in this and later chapters is more usually associated with social and cultural geography or with other disciplines, but – of course – as in any discipline, geographers themselves don't all use terminology in a uniform way. Some of the sharpest struggles within individual disciplines are about language and meanings. I make no claims for my use of borrowed terms, or for their linguistic

or disciplinary legitimacy, except that they have extended the vocabulary at my disposal and made it possible to think and write about everyday issues from a number of different angles. As soon as you begin to use words like 'boundary' or 'place' in ways which are both physical and political in relation to schools, for example, you have a new set of concepts with which to critically evaluate political or historical accounts and rationales applied to education.

Here, and in later chapters. I use the term **landscape** to refer to the shape, the history, the practices and the constant changes associated with particular spaces or contexts. This use of the term encompasses temporal, spatial and cultural qualities as well as the attitudes, memories and associations of communities and individuals. The term **space** is used to refer to amorphous areas – metaphorical and literal – in which, and through which, places, practices and identities are formed and reformed. The terms **place** and **site**, used interchangeably, are defined by 'specific social activities with a culturally given identity (name) and image' (Shields, 1991, p. 30). Spaces and places are known by their physical shapes and appearance, as well as by their purpose, history and reputation. Place identities, as well as being shaped by consensual, public meanings, also connect to individual autobiographies and associations.

The term **arena**, in the context of the discussions which follow in later chapters, is distinguished from *place* and *site* in that it is used to refer specifically to areas in which policies are advanced, opposed, made and mediated through practice and discourse – or '... wherever there is debate and decisions are made' (Fulcher, 1999). There are stable, permanent, or semi-permanent arenas such as parliamentary or council meetings, and meetings of parent-teacher associations or trade union members – and more informal, but none the less regular, arenas such as gatherings of parents at the school gates at the end of the school day. There are also arenas which are created bureaucratically, such as task forces, focus groups or think tanks, with the specific purpose of controlling the selection of participants and defining agendas. Bodies such as these give the appearance of democracy and consultation often without actually being invested with any power to decide on their own composition, what may and what may not be discussed, or on the kinds of recommendations which can be made.

Arenas, like places, may also be created by **events** –or suddenly emerge out of situations. An example comes to mind of the occupation of a nursery school by parents and members of the local community in South Oxford in the 1970s. Through their actions the protesters created or transformed a place (the nursery school) into an arena for political debate and struggle. This transformation involved the emergence of new, if transient, democratic and political practices and discourses in which those involved deployed the language of struggle – that of values, commitment, roles and discipline. The notion of arenas, then, is associated with the processes and discourses of policy making. Of course, different sites – or places – are always characterized by particular discourses and ways of talking, but these are not necessarily connected with making policy though they may well be essential in maintaining existing policies and power relations.

The notion of the **state**, in the context of these chapters, refers to structures and apparatuses (institutions of government such as parliament and local councils, and structures through which government policies are disseminated such as schools, job centres, benefits offices, social services offices, hospital trusts) as well as the processes, practices and discourses which both inform and reflect the management of power relations in society. But the state is located in the world, and operates and is operated on, in complex and less visible ways than might be suggested by listing its offices and practices. Whitty argues that:

> ...current changes in education policy are themselves linked to a redefinition of the nature of the state and a reworking of the relations between state and civil society. (Whitty, 2002, p. 86)

> ...as education appears to be devolved from the state to an increasingly marketised civil society, consumer rights will prevail over citizen's rights. This will reduce the opportunities for democratic debate and collective action. (Whitty, 2002, p. 87)

Later, in Chapter 7 some examples of policy making processes are explored in which democratic debate becomes sidelined and fragmented through the orchestration of 'consultation' procedures and the more powerful claims – in terms of their effectiveness – of economic rationality and market forces working through the education system.

The state is not one thing, but many, and it is constantly changing. In England the move away from the kind of welfare state which followed the Second World War and the Beveridge Report, has ushered in a state which is overtly committed to a market culture (Harris, 2003), in which the old state machinery and its servants have been replaced by a slicker market driven version of policy making and implementation and in which 'democracy' has been rationalised to serve the needs of efficiency. This affects the ways in which individuals and communities are involved in policy making and the ways in which the state is managed. As Gewirtz explains:

> In the **post-welfarist** era the formal commitments to Keynesian economics and distributive justice were dropped and replaced by formal commitments to market 'democracy' and competitive individualism. Key welfarist orthodoxies were challenged, in particular the view that welfare was best provided within bureaucratic organisational formations. Now welfare bureaucrats and professionals were held to be the source of major problems rather than the source of solutions. (Gewirtz, 2002, p. 2–3)

Welfare rights have become reinterpreted as being linked to notions of deservingness as measured by social usefulness and participation in productivity (Armstrong, 2002), rather than being founded on a commitment to a shared social project of welfare for all. 'Social' areas such as crime, health and housing have been partially privatized as a means of increasing efficiency and decreasing government expenditure as well as undermining the foundations of welfarism as an ideology and as a financial responsibility of government.

CHAPTER 3

PROCESS, PRACTICE AND EMOTION: RESEARCHING POLICY AND SPACE WITHIN A CROSS-CULTURAL FRAMEWORK

INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses on the context and methodological framework for the research which forms the basis for this book and the experience of carrying it out. It includes a discussion of the processes and ideas which led to its conceptualization as a distinctive project and the approaches adopted and the particular difficulties and issues which emerged. It endorses a view of social research as placing 'the researcher as positively present in empirical study' (Coffey 1999). This *presence* relates to the feelings, reflections and responses of the researcher to the unfolding research landscape as well as to her personal and professional history and its influence on the choice of research question, tools and analytical procedures. As Coffey remarks:

> Emotion is a real research experience and our intellectual autobiography
> is constructed and reconstructed through social research (Coffey, 1999,
> p. 11).

There is also a concern to recognize the '... potential of conventional research activity for reproducing, and even creating, disablement and oppression' (Moore, *et al.*, 1998, p. 36), and of the possibility that my research could have similar discriminatory effects; it does not follow that a piece of research is non-discriminatory because it breaks with particular conventions, such as an assumed objectivity.

My choice of research area has been influenced by my own educational and personal history such as my experience as a learner and as a teacher during many years. Others are harder to establish. To what extent has my experience as a non-disabled person living in a society which has routinely excluded disabled people, hidden them from view and represented them in ways which are patronizing and demeaning, been absorbed into the way I conceptualized the research? It would be difficult to measure the impact of the interaction between personal history and the wider social context in terms of the development of research questions and practices; but as Skeggs argues '... our social location, our situatedness in the world will influence how we speak, see, hear and know'. (Skeggs, 1994, p. 77).

BACKGROUND TO THE ENQUIRY

Much of the policy making which has a direct or indirect impact on education refers to domains outside what is formally thought of as 'education' , such as the design of buildings (e.g. Building Bulletin 91, DfEE, 1999a), town planning or government financial directives and budgetary decisions made at central and local government level. Financial interests have played an important role in debates which have taken place concerning the future of the staff and students of Freelands School. Frequently budgetary considerations and discourses relating to the 'efficient and effective use of resources' have taken centre stage, forcing issues relating to education or social justice onto the sidelines. All these processes have a sustained impact in terms of the power relations, the availability of opportunities and the marginalisation of some groups in society. At the centre of these issues is a concern with the social construction of differences between individuals and groups through practices relating to attitudes, the allocation of resources and categorization, partitioning and segregation in relation to particular groups and particular sites.

In 1993 I began to carry out research into education policy responses to disability in France. This has been an on-going project and has involved ethnographic work in some schools and institutions in or near Paris. In 1997 I began to investigate policy making concerning disabled children and their education in an English city. In both national contexts, which are discussed in Chapters Five to Eight, I have investigated the historical background to the emergence of special education and tried to make connections with current issues and practices.

The present study is situated within an ethnographic framework in which I have adopted practices which are intended to open up opportunities for different kinds of knowledge and diverse perspectives to emerge which would inform the on-going development of research questions and practices. Although I wanted to 'discover' issues and formulate questions as the research progressed, rather than determining what was important before starting the fieldwork, I started out with a broad focus on teachers' work lives and their perceptions about how policy is made. This broad focus was to change quite early on in the research process.

My research practices were formed in different ways as my enquiry changed in shape and focus as unexpected issues and questions surfaced. In the early stages of my fieldwork I began to interview teachers using a semi-structured schedule which asked them questions about policy making. But Potts has emphasized the complexity and the importance of 'understanding the relationship between events and experience and people's personal accounts'. She argues that:

> ... part of interviewing an individual or a group of people will be this exploration of the meanings assigned by the interviewees themselves to the events and feelings they describe. (Potts, 1992, p. 335)

The semi-structured interview schedules did not allow opportunities or space for such an exploration. Recognizing that this had implications both in terms of establishing a relationship of equality and mutual respect and in terms of fulfilling

the goals of my enquiry, I was able to develop an alternative approach in which the interview became a shared project within which either interlocutor could introduce new topics, challenge what the other said, seek clarification, speak or remain silent. This opened up new opportunities and perspectives which, in turn, led to a shift in my research focus. It also involved re-negotiating my relationship with those I talked and listened to (rather than 'interviewed') and sharing responsibility more equitably. Here is an extract from my research diary:

> 17 April 1997
> ... I interviewed PG today using the schedule. We talked for nearly two hours, and we still didn't get through the schedule. It got quite tense. I felt I was chivvying her along, when in fact a lot of what she was saying was interesting and relevant. The schedule doesn't allow for anything really unexpected to crop up. PG started talking about her involvement with conductive education which – it became clear – has become an important issue surrounding the proposed closure of Freelands for parents and teachers. She was very insistent about pursuing this theme and then I could see why. In the end, I stopped using the schedule and PG took over!

Like Peters (1995), I '... quickly found that people were much more interested and articulate in talking about particular situations and their emotional responses to them' (Peters, 1995, p. 64). I also observed that out of these responses emerged historically and experientially situated knowledge which opened up new issues or provided alternative perspectives on questions. It was particularly interesting, for example, to listen to the historical accounts of teachers' own experiences, and the connections which they made between their own personal and professional lives and wider social contexts. Here is an extract from a discussion with G.B., a teacher at a special school, in which he weaves a story from his own autobiography and the educational values, structures and policies of the time, starting in the early 1960s when many disabled children were excluded from the education system in England and attended special residential institutions:

> My Dad was a quarryman, my granddad was a quarryman and I should have been a quarryman, but I passed the 11+ and went to grammar school. I intended going in for vetinary work – working with animals – and I only got two A levels so to save messing about – I was 18 and my mates were earning money – I decided to go to teacher training college instead, rather than stay on another year. This was 1961. So three years in training college and on my final teaching practice I was working with a small group of kids that were supposedly educationally subnormal and my tutor at the time suggested that I might be better in special education, and perhaps he was right because I wanted to be a vet and this is the same kind of work really ...
> So having got one job during the three months between college and September in a normal school somewhere in Lancashire – about ten days before I was to start I was offered another one in a residential special school. They were all educationally subnormal children and they were educationally subnormal because they had never been to school ...
> It was handy for me because I got home two weekends in three. It was