

**Critical Policy Research and Special Education Policymaking: A Policy
Trajectory Approach**

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Abstract

Special educational policymaking is a discursive struggle, a power/knowledge interplay constituted within a realm of contradictory beliefs, values and discourses that frame the context within which the education of disabled children is envisioned and realised. The prevalent policy landscapes are precarious and ever-changing, as different ideological, structural and discursive dynamics ascend and influence the policymaking process and the struggles inherent in it. The article aims to pursue a historical analysis of the dominant discursive realities underpinning the Cypriot special education ‘policyscape’ since 1978, along with the struggles and power imbalances that preceded the voting of the current Special Education Law. This kind of approach constitutes part of the macro-level policy trajectory approach that, amongst other things, is concerned with the evolution of policies over time and space, and the ways in which the constellation of policy dynamics are intertwined, contested and infiltrated in the official policymaking process.

Policy trajectory approach and the role of discourse

This article, whilst deploying some insights from a macro-level policy trajectory approach,¹ aims to provide some historical insights into the changing ideological platforms upon which special education policy has been predicated, and identify the struggles and the unequal power relations inherent in the process of special education policymaking in Cyprus. The aim is to make transparent the ever changing and precarious discursive realities influencing the policymaking process over time, and pinpoint the diverse and contradictory values and beliefs vying for ascendancy, with a view to influencing and determining the official special education ‘policyscape’.² In parallel, this attempt also involves challenging individualistic and deficit views of children with special educational needs and/or disabilities, by

¹ Ball Stephen, ‘Policy Sociology and Critical Social Research’. *British Journal of Educational Research*, 23, no. 3 (1997):257-74

² Ball, S. (1998) Big Policies/ Small World: an introduction to international perspectives in education policy. In *Comparative Education*. 34, no.2 (1998), 119-130.

identifying and exploring the interplay of power relations and the role of key social actors in the policymaking process.

Relatedly, Gale, whilst analyzing different approaches of critical policy analysis explicates the ways in which policy historiography can be *specifically* applied (policy genealogy can be also utilized for this purpose), in order to identify ‘substantive issues of policy at particular hegemonic moments’, thereby enabling the researchers ‘to trace the process of educational change and to expose the possible relationships between the socio-political present and the socio-political past’³. This is particularly important in the field of inclusive and special education whereby policy agendas have been constantly evolving, in much the same way as the ‘politics of disablement’⁴ have been variously understood and theorized throughout the years. At the same time, he utilizes Foucault’s genealogy as a means to explore the subtleties of the policymaking process along with the ways in which ‘alliances are formed and reformed around conflicting interests in the policy production process’.⁵

The transition period of special education policy changes in Cyprus has been characterised by intense negotiations or as otherwise stated, by ‘crises’ and ‘settlements’⁶, whereby powerful social actors vied to impose their own ‘will to truth’⁷ according to their beliefs and vested interests. The voting of the latest Special Education Law⁸ has shown, however, that there is not such a thing as a ‘settlement’ in educational policymaking. Rather, policymaking is an ever-changing discursive assemblage of contesting and unequal power relations subjected to incessant reconfiguration and reconstitution. Hence, the introduction of the new Law has been the harbinger of a new cycle of negotiations and intense ‘discursive agonism’⁹, thereby vindicating the contention that educational policymaking is indeed an ongoing, precarious and difficult to depict process.

³ Gale Trevor, ‘Critical policy sociology: historiography, archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis’ *Journal of Education Policy* 16, no.5 (2001), 385

⁴ Oliver Mike, *The politics of disablement*. (London: Macmillan, 1990)

⁵ Gale, T. Critical policy sociology: historiography, archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis. 389-390.

⁶ Gale,, ‘Critical Policy Sociology: historiography, archaeology and genealogy as methods of policy analysis’, 386

⁷ Foucault Michel , Discourse, Power and Knowledge, in *The Will to Truth*, Ed. Sheridan, A, (London: Tavistock: 1980)

⁸ Ministry of Education and Culture, The 1999 Special Education Act (N.113(I)/99 and 2001 N. 69 (I) for the education of children with Special Educational Needs, Nicosia: Government Press (1999 and 2001)

⁹ Dreyfus, H. and Rabinow, P, *Michel Foucault. Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Great Britain: the Harvest Press, 1982)

The different approaches of critical policy analysis pursued in this research, will be achieved by analysing various documents obtained through the archive of the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Parliament. Of crucial importance are also the White Papers presented to the parliament for discussion between the years 1995-1999 culminating in the introduction of the latest 1999 Special Education Law¹⁰. The incessant alterations of the Papers reflect the struggles embroiled in the policymaking process, as well as the changes of the ideological platforms of those who have been at the forefront of this process. Despite the fact that the latest Special Education Law has espoused a more inclusive vocabulary, it is nevertheless, still imbued by a number of linguistic minefields that undermine the attempts towards transformative change. The discursive struggles over the linguistic and ideological vestiges of special educational thinking are ongoing; the crucial point is to engage in debate and discussion over the ways in which the critical dimension of policy studies can contribute to these struggles.

Documentary Analysis and Critical Special Education Policy Research

This research is predicated on a combination of historical and sociological tools, the aim being to provide a critical account of the evolution of special educational policymaking within a particular socio-political context. Brariun and Graff as early as in 1977¹¹ point out the value of historical perspectives in social science research and the extended possibilities they can give to the researcher. The compilation of policy reports constitutes an important part of historical research¹² and their analysis should be the result of critical and multi-dimensional consideration. According to McCulloch and Richardson¹³, it is important that the focus extends beyond the arid analysis of the text, to issues relating to the author, the context, the audience, the influence of the work, as well as the processes involved in its production and the interests that underlie its developments. In other words, the ‘sociological

¹⁰ Ministry of Education and Culture, The 1999 Special Education Act (N.113(I)/99 and 2001 N. 69 (I) for the education of children with Special Educational Needs, Nicosia: Government Press (1999 and 2001)

¹¹ Robson, C, *Real World Research* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002)

¹² Scott, J, *A Matter of Record: Documentary Studies in Social Research* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990)
McCulloch , G and Richardson, W. *Historical Research in Educational Settings* (UK; Open University Press, 2000)

¹³ *ibid*

imagination'¹⁴ should inform any endeavour for historical research, thus offering fresh perspectives and opening up new possibilities for textual analysis.

In this respect, the analysis should take place within an eclectic conceptual framework,¹⁵ whilst the researcher should bear in mind some critical considerations regarding the scope and the purpose of textual analysis, always in relation to a particular piece of research. Thus, what does text analysis involve and what parameters does the researcher consider? How can textual analysis be established as an illuminative and simultaneously, a trustworthy historical and sociological tool for the analysis of special educational policy? How can the researcher adopt a pluralistic, albeit eclectic, methodology for textual analysis?

As far as the scope of this piece of research is concerned, it is primarily important to focus on the meaning of the text, thus making transparent the ideologies and by extension, the theoretical underpinnings of the dominant discourses that imbue the text. Generally, it is crucial as Scott¹⁶ writes, to 'decipher the script and translate the language into the linguistic forms current in the community of researchers of which the investigator is a part'. Through this procedure it will be possible to expose the dominant discourses that surface within the text, and influence special education policymaking. Moreover, it is also important to explain the processes that might have taken place prior to the production of texts. Reiterating McCulloch '...documents need also to be interpreted in the light of specific factors involved in their production and context, such as personal, social, political and historical relationships.'¹⁷

The analysis of the text and its dominant discourses, primarily presupposes the identification of recurrent patterns that constitute the prevalent discourses. The identification of patterns enables the researcher to justify her claims regarding the discursive constitution of the text, that is the presumed dominant discourses that emanate from the text.¹⁸

It can be held however, that the search for patterns and exceptions alone cannot serve the scope and aims of policy analysis research. This is because policy is occasionally incoherent, fragmented and fraught with incessant struggles over its constitution and definition. Therefore, in order to depict the tortuous complexity of

¹⁴ Mills, C. W. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959)

¹⁵ Cresswell, J. W. *Research Design* (London: Sage, 1994)

¹⁶ Scott, A matter of Record, 28

¹⁷ Mc Gulloch, G. *Documentary research in Education, History and the Social Sciences* (London and New York; Routledge/Falmer, 2004) 4

¹⁸ Wood, L. and Kroger, R *Doing Discourse Analysis* (London: Sage 2000) 117-118

educational policy, we should move beyond the conventional analytical boundaries of historical research. Foucault inaugurates a new kind of historical research and by extension, of textual analysis, which emanates from hermeneutics¹⁹ and constitutes an open-ended and ever-changing process. Barriers are annihilated and new perspectives, once being unthinkable and inconceivable, emerge and inevitably, alter the ‘scene’. As Marshall²⁰ writes;

Instead of reaching outwards towards an objective truth, history turns inwards for Foucault, becoming story plot, myth, fabrication. It is something that is to be used in the present and for the future; it is not something that captures ‘reality’, and certainly not a reality of the past..... ‘historical truths’ rest upon complex, contingent and fragile grounds.

These ‘complex, contingent and fragile grounds’ emanate from context and time specific ‘snapshots’ of intense and incessant confrontations, between antithetical forces for control and ascendancy. Not surprisingly then, history is constituted by power and knowledge relations whilst the notion of causality is disavowed. ‘The analytic grid is power-knowledge. The methodological imperative then is to examine processes of modern power....’²¹ This is especially important in educational policy analysis whereby ‘the significance of the power discourse at the national legislative level cannot be underestimated’²². Power is enshrined in the dominant discourses as they authoritatively promote ‘certain subjectivities and meaning systems over others’.

²³ Even though the Foucauldian history has been characterised as anti-history²⁴ and has been vehemently criticized²⁵, the annihilation of any forms of binarism, as conceived and explained by post-modern and post-structural accounts²⁶, allows the researcher to fuse the two historical perspectives and provide a pluralistic framework

¹⁹ Scott, A matter of Record

²⁰ Marshall, J. Foucault and Educational Research. In *Foucault and Education. Disciplines and Knowledge*, edited by Ball, S. (London: Routledge 1990) 18-19

²¹ Ibid 22

²² Cookson, P The power discourse: elite narratives and educational policy formulation. In *Researching the Powerful in Education*, ed. Walford, G. (UK; UCL Press, 1994) 119

²³ Ball, S. Education Reform. A critical and post-structural approach (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1994)

²⁴ Marshall, J. , Foucault and Educational Research

²⁵ Gutting, G., Foucault and the history of madness. In *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*, ed. Gutting, G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

²⁶ Peters, M. (Post-)modernism and structuralism: affinities and theoretical innovations, *Sociological Research Outline*, 4, no.3 (1999). Available online at:

www.socresonline.org.uk/4/3/peters.htm (accessed October 2007).

for text analysis and by implication, for educational policy analysis. This seems not only a legitimate but also a necessary element in pursuing a robust analysis of educational policymaking. As Ball²⁷ writes:

...no one interpretational mode or set of theoretical tools or interpretational stance is adequate or exhaustive of the analytical possibilities of policy analysis. The same data can be subjected to very different types and levels of interpretation.

In much the same way, Armstrong²⁸ whilst drawing the distinction between 'traditional' and 'effective' history writes that:

Traditional histories tend to iron out unevenness, discontinuities and contradictions. Effective history, in contrast, seeks to render more complex, eschewing generalities and simplifications.... An awareness of the complexity of the education landscape made up of so many fractured and contradictory policies, ideologies and practices needs to be informed by sources and voices other than those of 'traditional history'.

One of the roles of the historian, then, in whatever discipline, is to make transparent the prevalent forms of legitimised and sanctioned knowledge and the relations of power inherent in them, as they are evinced and disseminated through the institutionalised structures of a given socio-political system. The discourses of power are historically located and interrogated thereby enabling the provision of 'a sort of multiplication or pluralization of causes'.²⁹ As Goodson and Dowbiggin³⁰ write:

The task for the historian...is to recover the complex patterns of structuralisation and distribution of power that influence the way in which a society selects, classifies, transmits and evaluates the knowledge it considers to be public.

²⁷ Ball, S. Researching inside the State: Issues in Interpretation of Elite Interviews. in *Researching Education Policy*. Ethical and Methodological issues, ed. Halpin, D. and Troyna, B. . (London: The Falmer Press, 1994) 109

²⁸ Armstrong, F. 'The Historical Development of Special Education: Humanitarian Rationality or a "Wild Profusion of Entangled Events?" In *History of Education*, 31, no.5, (2002), 447-450

²⁹ Tamboukou, M., 'Writing Genealogies: an exploration of Foucault's strategies for doing research'. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 20, no.2 (1999) 201-218

³⁰ Goodson, I. and Dowbiggin, I., Docile bodies: Commonalities in the history of psychiatry and schooling, in *Foucault and Education: Disciplines and Knowledge*, ed. Ball, S. (London: Routledge 1990), 106

Evidently, data analysis becomes an even more multidimensional and demanding task, if we are to provide a comprehensive framework of educational policy analysis. It would be inappropriate to lose sight of the compounded constitution of texts, which in turn compound the ways that education policy is conceived and realised within a particular socio-historical context. As Apple and Christian Smith³¹ write, ‘...our readings of what knowledge is “in” texts cannot be done by the application of a single formula’.

Emancipatory change³² towards an inclusive discourse implies the necessity to engage in a constant interrogation of the power knowledge grid that produces the each time prevalent orthodoxies underpinning the policymaking process. The traditional interlinking of special education with the scientific and functional regimes of truth consolidated and perpetuated erroneous forms of thinking, which distorted the political and contested nature of the field. The impact of this form of thinking on special education policy and practice produced a certain kind of knowledge that arguably, acted to the detriment of disabled children and their advocates. The individualistic gaze concentrated on children’s deficits and obscured external parameters. Simultaneously, the normalizing judgement construed disabled children as abnormal and deviant who should be disciplined and brought to line, through an array of ‘rationalised’ technologies of power imposed on them.³³ There was little room for other considerations or alternative ‘regimes of truth’. The overarching influence of such thinking is still prevalent and continues to permeate, albeit more subtly, the discursive constitution of the dominant thinking, in spite of the attacks that its pseudoscientific axioms have so far received.

The existence of certain and achievable ‘ends’, which have been so rigorously pursued though functionalist historical analyses of disability and SEN,³⁴ equates with a theoretical impasse that consolidates and perpetuates the discursive entrapments of the status quo. Foucault eschews the existence of such an ‘end’ as his

³¹ Apple, M. and Christian-Smith L. *The Politics of the Textbook*. in *The Politics of the Textbook*. Ed. Apple, M. and Christian-Smith L (Great Britain: Routledge 1991).

³² Barton, L. ‘Emancipatory Research and Disabled People: Some Observations and Questions’, *Educational Review* 57, no.3 (2005), 317-327

³³ Foucault M. *Discipline and Punish: The birth of the prison*.(New York: Patheon Books, 1977)

³⁴ Armstrong, F. ‘Disability, Education and Social Change in England since 1960’, *History of Education* 36, No. 4-5 (2007) 551-568

problematizations and interrogations never stop. As Kendal and Wickham³⁵ so succinctly write about Foucault's history:

When we use history, if we are to gain the maximum benefit from the Foucaultian method, we must ensure that we do not allow this history to stop, do not allow it to settle on a patch of imagined sensibleness in the field of strangeness; as Foucault himself says, albeit in a different context, we should seek 'to use it, to deform it, to make it protest'.

In effect, theory should emanate from a political stance, and should encompass a holistic investigation of meaning, significance and the social and historical contexts³⁶ within which theories emerge and get reified. Context thus acquires a pre-eminent position and constitutes a sine qua requirement in any critical endeavour. Having said this, theories should be regarded as precarious and contingent conceptual constructs that are discursively constituted within an interlocking and reciprocal framework of historical, social and political dynamics. As Gutting³⁷ puts it, whilst explicating Foucault's interminable critical inquiry towards his own theoretical and philosophical predilections:

...the theories devised are not intended as permanent structures, enduring in virtue of their universal truth. They are temporary scaffoldings, erected for a specific purpose, that Foucault is happy to abandon to whomever might find them useful once he has finished his job.

The conventional methods of special education have been used for a long time and their effectiveness have been widely contested and questioned. Disabled children have been significantly subjected to various discursive impositions that were legitimated by an array of scientific exegeses. The gaze of individual pathology subjugated their individuality and at the same time, disillusioned and rendered them unable to supersede the corrosive and disciplinary technologies of power³⁸ that were ostensibly working towards 'their best interests'³⁹. Even though science has avowedly contributed to some extent to the improvement of the educational experiences and living conditions of many disabled people, it has been concomitantly manipulated and

³⁵ Kendall G. and Wickham G. *Using Foucault's Methods*. (London: Sage Publications, 1999) 4

³⁶ Thomas G. and Loxley A., *Deconstructing Special Education and Constructing Inclusion*. (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2001)

³⁷ Gutting, G. Foucault and the history of madness, in *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault*. ed Gutting, G. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994) 17

³⁸ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*

³⁹ Tomlinson, S. *A Sociology Of Special Education*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982)

used as a legitimised means to masquerade a plethora of powerful impositions and vested interests that arguably caused more harm rather than good to these children.⁴⁰

Given these considerations it is palpable that there is nothing wrong, when, reiterating Ball⁴¹, we dare to ‘think otherwise’ and utilize alternative theoretical tools in order to ‘identify’ and ‘assess’ the unequal and intricate interplays of power and vested interests⁴² that traditionally held sway over the field. At least these alternative theoretical predilections eschew the dogmatism of functional analyses, which have traditionally focused on individual pathology perspectives, and seek to establish diversity as well as interrogation the core elements in the incessant ‘agonism’ over greater inclusive education policy and practice.

This contention chimes with Foucault’s theorizations of “antifascistic ethics” that necessitate, according to McWhorter, “recognizing and challenging the fascism in us all, in our heads and in our everyday behaviour”. This kind of ethical behaviour entails working “ourselves free-to the extent possible- of entrenched presuppositions and theoretical totalities, that we keep ourselves open to an ever opening intellectual and political future..... that we opt for questions more often than answers...”⁴³

Thus, whilst acknowledging that the existence of certain achievable “ends” is a theoretical chimera, inclusion should be regarded as being a process and not an ‘end,’ for it necessitates a perennial and reflexive engagement with the contentious and complex issues at hand⁴⁴. Nevertheless, in spite of the fact that there is not a ‘univocal rule’⁴⁵ operating in the social world, a human-rights approach to disability and difference should constitute the discursive backdrop against which the struggles for inclusive education should be taking place.

Inclusion is indeed a demanding and complicated process that presupposes an incessant struggle, an intense ‘agonism’ between varied power relations within the

⁴⁰ Brantlinger, E., ‘Using Ideology; Cases of Nonrecognition of the politics of Research and Practice in Special Education. in *Review of Educational Research*’ .67, No.4 (1997) 425-460.

⁴¹ Ball, S. *Education Policy and Social Class. The selected works of Stephen J. Ball* (London: Routledge, 2006) 4

⁴² Tomlinson, S *A Sociology of Special Education*. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982).

⁴³ McWhorter, L. (2005) Foreword. In Tremain, S (Ed) *Foucault and the Government of Disability*.USA; The University of Michigan Press. xvi

⁴⁴ Barton, L. Foreword. In Gabel, S. and Danforth, S (Eds) *Disability and the Politics of Education*. (New York; Peter Lang Publishing, 2008)

⁴⁵ Olssen, M., Godd, J. and O’Neill, M. *Education Policy. Globalisation, Citizenship and Democracy* (London, Sage, 2004) 32

different arenas of educational policymaking.⁴⁶ If we are to talk about emancipatory change we should ensure that there is a constant interrogation and problematization of the prevalent discourses that constitute inclusive education policy and practice and therefore, inclusion should be perceived as a process of becoming rather than being. The identification of the ideological and institutional dynamics that undermine inclusion should be considered as an urgent, necessary and continuous task, if we are to combat the subjugating effects of power along with its ideological and institutional discursive embodiments.

The new legislation and the struggles that preceded it

Educational policymaking is characterised by incessant struggles that are interlinked with economic, ideological, political and social considerations.⁴⁷ What follows is an attempt to provide an analysis of the changing role of ideology, politics, economics and interests groups during the 1999 policymaking formulation process.

In so doing it will be possible to gain some insights into the power struggles or the ‘hard bargaining’ of various social actors with differing objectives and unequal power relations,⁴⁸ that had officially taken place eight years prior to the voting of the current Special Education Law. Put differently, the attempt will be to expose, through the utilization of both historical and sociological tools, the ‘relationships between interest groups; in seeing who impacted on whom and with what effect; in identifying those who made the decisions; in short the process of policy formulation’.⁴⁹ Simultaneously, the aim will also be to provide a historical analysis of the prevalent ‘regimes of truth’⁵⁰ that have shaped special education policymaking in the Cyprus context, as they are evinced in the various documents compiled. The documents reflect two different discursive realities that have prevailed within the Cyprus policymaking landscape.

⁴⁶ Fulcher, G. *Disabling policies? A comparative approach to education policy and disability*. (London: The Falmer Press, 1989)

⁴⁷ Barton L. and Tomlinson S. *Special Education and Social Interests*. (U.K: Croom Helm LMD, 1984)

⁴⁸ Drake, R. *Understanding Disability Policies*. (London: McMillan Press LTD, 1999) 23

⁴⁹ Kogan, M., *Educational Policymaking. A study of Interest Groups and Parliament*. (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd 1975) 21

⁵⁰ Foucault, M. Truth and Power. in *Power/knowledge; Selected Interviews and other Writings 1972-1977*. ed. Gordon, C. (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1980)

Idem *Discourse, Power and Knowledge. The Will to Truth*. ed. Sheridan, A. (London: Tavistock Publications 1980)

Documentary analysis and the evolution of Special education

The official concern for the education of children with SEN started in 1978, four years after the debilitating consequences of the Turkish invasion in Cyprus. The first official discussion in the Cyprus parliament, as one of the summaries of the parliamentary minutes of that period suggests, took place on 21 December 1978. The discussion concentrated on the first special education White Paper that led to the voting of the 1979 Special Education Act⁵¹.

Notwithstanding the fact that the concerns expressed regarding disabled children, were starkly segregating in nature, the parliamentary discussion was an important step forward. This is because there was, for the first time, an official proposal that the education of these children should have been brought into the aegis of the government. As the following quotation from the parliamentary minutes on 21 December 1978⁵² suggests:

Special education is not currently completely provided by the government. Thus, the White Paper under discussion, lays the foundations for the gradual arrangement of the problem in both administrative and financial terms .

In a homologous fashion, the report of the Educational Committee of the Parliament (1978) indicates the necessity that the government should undertake the full responsibility of the functioning of special schools.

The Ministry of Education has responded to the urging of the committee and submitted a detailed note which analysed the current problem regarding the **backward** [sic], the measures that have been taken so far, so as the various special schools that currently function, with the initiatives of the private sector and especially the parents, to become under the auspices of the state (my emphasis).

⁵¹ Ministry of Education and Culture *The 1979 Special Education Act (N.47/79) for the education of children with special needs*. (Nicosia;Government, 1979) Press [in Greek].

⁵² Extracts are translated into English by the author

What is striking, however, in this official document, besides the concern to provide a legal basis for the function of special schools, is the use of a very offensive word for disabled children (Kathisterimena-backward [children]). Even worse, the noun 'children' is not used in the document. The adjective is simply used as a noun and therefore the attribute of disabled children is limited to the insulting term, as no reference is made to them as also being children. Nowadays this is considered an insulting word (both as an adjective and noun) and is no longer used. I was curious to see if the same word is used in the 1979 Act. Notwithstanding the use of a different word, its meaning is similar, albeit a bit less insulting (askisima).

Given the fact that 'there is no such thing as an innocent reading',⁵³ the language used reflects the disparaging ways in which children were regarded. It is no wonder, then, that more than two decades after this report, the well-entrenched diminution of disabled children is still evident⁵⁴. However sad this may sound, it will really need time to remove 'bad mouthing',⁵⁵ and its interrelated deep-seated prejudice that poses great impediments to the realisation of an inclusive discourse within the Cypriot schools and the society in general.⁵⁶

The Special Education Act of 1979 is the result and simultaneously reflects the philosophy of the period. The 'individualistic gaze' concentrates on children's presumed 'deficiencies' and 'deviation' from an arbitrarily constructed notion of normality. The idea is clear and explicitly articulated: disabled children should be segregated and incarcerated in special schools because they are 'less than normal', according to the expert opinion of those who 'know best'.⁵⁷ The prevalence of the medical model of disability leaves no space for other considerations under the pressure of the scientific 'regimes of truth'. As we read in the minutes of a discussion of the Educational Committee of the parliament regarding the parliamentary discussions on the White Papers prior to the 1979 Act:

⁵³ Slee, R. 'Inclusion in Practice': does practice make perfect?' In *Educational Review*, 53, no.2, (2001) 114

⁵⁴ Liasidou, A. Critical Discourse analysis and inclusive educational policies: the power to exclude. *Journal of Education Policy*, 23, no.5 (2008) 483-500

⁵⁵ Corbett, J. *Bad-Mouthing; The language of Special needs*. (London: The Falmer Press, 1996).

⁵⁶ Phtiaka, H. 'The power to exclude; Facing the Challenges of Inclusive Education in Cyprus', in *International Journal of contemporary sociology*. 40, no.1, (2003)139-152

Liasidou, A. 'Inclusive Educational Policies and the feasibility of educational change' in *International Studies of Sociology of Education*, 17, no.4, (2007), 329-347

⁵⁷ Tomlinson 'Sociology of Special Education'

Analysing the provisions of the White Paper under discussion, Mr.....said that the White paper adopts the most prevalent scientific methods of categorization of ‘intellectual delay’ of these children for the adoption of which we took into consideration the opinions of all participants⁵⁸.

The whole document is fraught with essentialist perspectives of individual pathology. The idea is that disabled children and their ‘deficits’ should be ‘treated’ within segregated schools, in segregated procedures, and by specialists. The technologies of power both construe and manipulate the deviant subject through the institutional legitimised disciplinary technologies of normalisation⁵⁹. Given these considerations, the document further suggests that there should be created a separate department of special education within the Ministry in order to tackle effectively the problems of special schools. Moreover, it indicates the necessity to create a separate school to educate ‘specialized’ teachers. As the following quotation reads:

The government should consider the creation of an institution for the education of teachers for special education subjects, something...that is absolutely necessary for the successful implementation of the Law⁶⁰.

The document reflects a deeply entrenched professionalism. Professionals are given excellent credentials for their ability to handle the ‘deviants’ in ‘scientific’ ways. Ordinary teachers are not deemed capable of handling these pupils and therefore the special teacher came into being. The vectors of power/knowledge prevailing at the time hatched the ‘new’ professional who was given all the credentials to handle and ‘normalise’ the ‘deviant’.

Professionals are, thus, statutorily and institutionally empowered to impose their ‘will to truth’ through the ritualised processes of identification and assessment, which are very carefully described and explicated throughout the legislative document. As Morton and Gipson⁶¹ write: ‘...This makes the professional the expert,

⁵⁸ Parliamentary minutes regarding the Education of Disabled children White Paper of 1978, (April 1978), 2.

⁵⁹ Foucault Discipline and Punishment

⁶⁰ Parliamentary minutes regarding the Education of Disabled children White Paper of 1978, (April 1978), 3.

⁶¹ Morton, M. and Gibson, P. *The Rhetoric and Practice for Partnership; Experiences in the Context of Disability*. Paper presented at Connecting Policy Research and Practice; The social policy Research and evaluation Conference, Ministry of Social Development, Wellington Convention Centre, 29-30 April 2003, 10

with great authority to pronounce upon the individual, the client. These roles are seen as the natural state of affairs'. Scientific expertise legitimises their hegemonic role and perpetuates relations of domination. The overall aim as stated in the document is the 'welfare and rehabilitation' of disabled children. The word 'welfare' implies 'children's best interests' and is used to mask and embellish the arbitrary and destructive 'rehabilitation' processes emanating from the 'ideology of expertise',⁶² which aims at the adaptation and normalization of those deemed to be 'deviant'.

Notwithstanding the fact that it constituted a policy milestone, the 1979 Law⁶³ was short-lived, since it was implemented for less than a decade. Later, certain stakeholders, who pursued higher studies in special education abroad and especially in the UK, introduced the word 'integration' in Cyprus. Phtiaka,⁶⁴ whilst referring to the early integrative attempt in Cyprus, writes that they were the result of a constellation of 'personal ambitions and goals' and 'international circumstances and influences'.

The whole idea of integration was based on the romantic idea to make ordinary schools accessible to all children⁶⁵ without, however, pursuing organisational, structural and pedagogical school reform. The massive 'maindumping'⁶⁶ was the result of the exercise of rationalised 'sovereign power'⁶⁷ from certain policy actors without initially serious resistance. Policymakers managed to consign convincing rhetoric that obscured the abusive dimension of power and concomitantly managed to foreground the fact that they were ostensibly working towards children's 'best interests'.

The voting of the new legislation in 1999 was the result of a string of negotiations that were gestating since 1991, when the government appointed a special committee in order to examine the general framework of the education of disabled

⁶² Fulcher, G. (1986) Australian policies on Special Education: towards a sociological account. In *Disability, Handicap and Society*, 1., No.1, 42

⁶³ Ministry of Education and Culture, *The 1979 Special Education Act (N.47/79) for the education of children with special needs*. Nicosia; Government Press [in Greek].

⁶⁴ Phtiaka, H. *Special Education in Cyprus: a critical historical account*. Paper presented in the International Special Education Congress 2000. University of Manchester. 2

⁶⁵ Barton, L. (1997) Inclusive Education: romantic, subversive or realistic? In *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1., no. 3, 231-242

⁶⁶ Karagiannis, A., Stainback, S. and Stainback, W. (1998) Rationale for inclusive schools. In *Inclusion. A guide for educators*, ed. Stainback, S. and Stainback, W. (Baltimore: Brookes, 1998)

⁶⁷ Popkewitz, T. and Brennan M. (1998) Restructuring of Social and political Theory in Education: Foucault and the Social Epistemology of School practices. In Popkewitz, T and Brennan M (Eds) *Foucault's Challenge. Discourse, Knowledge and Power in Education.* (New York: Teachers College Press 1998).

children and submit suggestions for its improvement. President of the committee assigned, was John Constantinides, an attorney of the supreme-court. A letter sent to him by the Ministry of Education on the 25 January 1991 explained the reasons and simultaneously mirrored the philosophy that necessitated the constitution of the committee:

The necessity for the revision of special education framework is considered necessary after the enactment of the 1989 Law for the intellectually backward [sic] people (117/89 Law)...The Law stipulates that the needs of this category of people should be tackled as a matter of priority within the economic potentials of the state. The responsibility for the allocation of chances for education is not exhausted to the creation of special schools only. The need is wider and extends to every sector of learning, so as these people to be enabled to utilise to the greatest possible extent their intellectual potentials...

The committee worked for almost two years and prepared the so-called Constantinides Report ⁶⁸ in 1992 upon which the new legislation was supposed to be based. As it is indicated within the Summary of the report regarding the framework of the proposed legislation:

The 1979 Law (47/79) has been a landmark in the evolution of Special Education in Cyprus. The responsibilities of the state towards disabled children have been institutionalised and given the circumstances of that era, the foundations for a new start were laid. Thirteen years after the voting of that Law, new conceptions have emerged and contemporary trends are adopted by all education systems

Thus among the suggestions made by the committee in order to reshuffle the education system were the following:

- The integration of legislative stipulations of special education to the general educational legislation

⁶⁸ Constantinides, G. *Report of the Special Committee for the Study of the Ways of Providing Help to Children with Special Needs-A Summary.*(Nicosia, 1992) 1

- Expansion of special education for the children above the age of eighteen and under the age of five.
- Institutionalisation of the state's responsibility for:
 - Definition of mechanisms for the early identification of children
 - Scientific assessment of each child
- The ordinary school is the natural place of education and the withdrawal of children from it should be done with well-defined stipulations.

The suggestions of the Constandinides Report gave the impulse and indicated the imperative need to radically amend and modernize the existing legislative framework. The first attempts for the creation of a framework for the new legislation took place in 1994 whereby a legislative team within the Ministry of Education and Culture prepared a draft plan for the new legislation. There was a virulent criticism regarding the stipulations of the draft plan, as it was incompatible with the suggestions of the Constantinides report. The association of educational psychologists, starkly influenced by the international philosophical trends, and in particular, by a programme of the European Union, noted the following:

The proposed Law is immensely segregating and constitutes regression even in relation to the existing Law of 1979, which is supposed to modernise. The conceptual content and the way of organization of special education depicted within the White paper are characteristics of 'policy' at the start of our century... The draft plan puts great emphasis on the allocation of special education in specialist places whilst the avowed integration policy of the Ministry of Education is neglected. Reference is made not only to entirely segregated places but also to schools that specialise in particular aspects of disability (e.g moderate intellectual disability, severe emotional problems etc) Such a kind of segregation and categorization collide with the contemporary conceptions of the European Union....⁶⁹

Similarly, the Pancyprian Organization of Parents of Disabled Children characterizes the draft as unacceptable because for instance, it categorizes and institutionalises children. Simultaneously, it undermines the role of the parents, in the sense that parents are presented to have only obligations and not any rights regarding the education of their children. Moreover, they commented that even the creation of a separate Legislation for disabled children, came in direct opposition with the

⁶⁹ Archive No. 115/77, 18th May 1994; 4 -5 [in Greek]

suggestions of the Constantinides Report. Similar views were expressed by the Association of Parents of Deaf children who, in a letter sent to the General Director of the Ministry of Education on 31 May 1994.

It needs noting however, that in certain cases criticism was starkly instigated by vested interests and not from a benign concern for disabled children. For, instance the association of educational psychologists criticized the White Paper because it gave great power to a single person the so-called ‘Supervisor’ and therefore, they demanded ‘devolution of power’. What they actually claimed, however, was their own ascendant role within the various decision-making processes. As they write:

The proposed ‘ Inter-sector Special Education Service’ constitutes and hypertrophic, over-centralised, bureaucratic mechanism that will be administered by the Supervisor who concentrates ALL powers; administrating, scientific, pedagogic. The extent of the over-power concentrated in one and only person is depicted by the fact that the word Supervisor is presented 34 times within the text of the White paper. On the contrary, the contribution of the other specialists, educational psychologists and special therapists is provocatively subordinated, as they are not even named....⁷⁰ (emphasis in original).

Educational psychologists obliquely, albeit poignantly, attempt to ascertain their own hegemonic role within the various procedures. Behind their benign concern for devolution of power lies their prodigious desire to secure their vested interests and establish greater domination. The same applies for the Association of Clinical Psychologists that sent a similar letter and corroborated the previously expressed position.

Bearing in mind Tomlinson’s⁷¹ contention that: ‘Indeed an understanding of the competition and alliances among interest groups in special education is crucial to understanding its expansion’, it is interesting to note that the psychologists’ vested interests are also evinced in another document regarding a later White Paper. In that case they explicitly demanded that the educational psychologists assigned in the Assessment Committee should have been from the ‘**public sector**’, a clarification that was later included in the stipulations of the Law⁷². Evidently, educational

⁷⁰ Letter sent to the Educational Committee of the Parliament by the Association of Educational Psychologists (1994) 6

⁷¹ Tomlinson, S. A sociology of special education. in *Inclusive Education. Readings and reflections*. ed Thomas G and Vaughan M.(London: Open University Press 2004)

⁷² Ministry of Education and Culture, The 1999 Special Education Act (N.113(I)/99 and 2001 N. 69 (I) for the education of children with Special Educational Needs, Nicosia: Government Press (1999 and 2001) Article 21.2

psychologist's claims for 'devolution of power' were congruent to the extent that their vested interests remained untouched. Therefore, it was crucial to ensure that other psychologists working in the '**private sector**' were statutorily encumbered to 'usurp' their own hard to gain ascendant role in the decision-making processes. What has just been described constitutes another example of the hypertrophy of the public and governmental sector in Cyprus and the concomitant subordination and disempowerment of the private sector, something that still, bears a profound and an adverse impact on the attempts to establish greater democratic processes and procedures on the island.⁷³

Another intervention starkly instigated by vested interests, is evinced within a letter sent to the Ministry of Education by the general director of the Ministry of Finance on 21 October 1994, who expressed the following views regarding the draft White Paper:

We particularly believe that there should not have been a separate Law for the education of children with SEN, but as it is suggested in the special document of the committee: 'Special schools should be integrated in the common educational sector within the frame of a unified educational legislation'. Finally, I would like to stress that the Ministry of Finance is opposed to the creation of a new structure at the Ministry of Education for Special Education, because we believe that with the modernization of the existing ways of handling issues of special education, the gaps identified will be covered.

Even though it cannot be argued that the integrative attempts in Cyprus took place as a 'saving money exercise', the proposed integrative arrangements were, nevertheless, in alignment with the economic interests of the State. By no means had the general director of Ministry of Finance expressed a view in favour of 'children's interests', unless these interests were congruent with the economic interests of the state.

After the criticisms that the draft White Paper received, the Committee continued its work for its improvement and issued the first official White Paper. The Ministry of Education in a circular dated 10 February 1995, commented on the improvements introduced in the new White Paper and simultaneously, referred to the

⁷³ Mavratsas, K., *Ethniki omopsihia kai politiki omophonia*. (Athens: Katarti 2003) [in Greek]

conflicts and the problems that the multiple and contradictory values of the various interests group pose on the formation process. In particular it is stated that:

...whilst attempting to compromise the contradictory positions and views of the interested parties, there are disagreements on some articles of the White Paper, especially by parents who insist on the rightness of their views, something that renders its [White Paper] promotion to the parliament for acceptance, problematic....

Amongst the most important stipulations of the Paper was the expansion of the definition of 'special needs children' and the de-categorization of children. The most important stipulation, however, was the provision that the education of disabled children will start from birth until the age of 18.⁷⁴

The Paper has since then been subjected to constant alterations, the most interesting of which was the age of the children that the state was responsible for their education. Economic considerations played a crucial role in the alterations. Disabled children's best interests were in this case easily sidestepped because they colluded with the economic concerns of the State. As it is indicated in the report issued by the Committee of Ministers regarding the White paper of 1995:

During the examination of the 1995 White Paper we submitted various suggestions for its alteration, which basically were intended to the formulation of an easy to implement policy and to render the Paper **financially feasible and flexible**⁷⁵ [my emphasis].

The economic considerations and the pressures that powerful social actors within the government exerted, led to the modifications and the creation of the White Paper of 1997⁷⁶ whereby the state assumed responsibility for the education of disabled children at the age of three and not earlier. Interestingly, there were even further speculations to limit the responsibility of the state at the age of six, a suggestion that reflects the fact that the education of children was starkly driven by other than

⁷⁴ Ministry of Education and Culture The Special Education Act of 1995, *White Paper* (Nicosia, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1995) [in Greek].

⁷⁵ Committee of Ministers-Report on Special Education (21.06.1995), 1

⁷⁶ Ministry of Education and Culture (1997) The Special Education Act of 1997, *White Paper* (Nicosia, Ministry of Education and Culture). [in Greek]

educational considerations. According to a circular issued by the Planning Office and the Public Administration Service and Personnel in March 1997:

The issue of the legislative endorsement of pre-school education should be examined, because it will **create great demands and will immensely increase the cost of the allocation of services**. For this reason the Ministry [of Finance] should **assess the preliminary cost of implementing the allocation of special education to pre-school children**, before this is inserted as an organised programme and covered by the legislation [my emphasis] .

As a result of these speculations, it was eventually decided that the responsibility of the state for the education of disabled children, should have started at the age of 6. Thus, the White Paper of 1998, which was prepared by the government and submitted to the parliament, stipulated that: ‘ “Child” means child after the completion of his/her enrolment in the primary school [at the age of six] until the completion of the age of eighteen’.⁷⁷ Moreover, the stipulation regarding the allocation of pre-school education was deleted.

There was an implacable opposition to the proposed stipulations of the 1998 White Paper and it was characterised as utterly unacceptable. For instance, the Association for the Protection of Intellectually Disabled People sent a letter to the President of the Parliament on the 30 April 1998 in order to protest against the particular stipulations of the Paper. The Association used the declarations of supranational organizations in order to wield power to the government, the aim being to reinstate the basic right of disabled children to a proper education. As the quotation reads:

...the deletion of all the stipulations related to the allocation of education from the age of three to six is unacceptable. The early allocation of special education to children with intellectual disabilities is a serious and necessary responsibility of the State, because it aims to decrease the degree of disability at a later stage...Any alterations of the Paper regarding the early intervention for short-term financial considerations, will lead to long term adverse consequences when these people grow up and get greatly dependent on the provisions of the State. Our position is supported by the Rules of the UN, the declarations of UNESCO and the European Committee for equal opportunities of learning, as well as the European Possession that we are obliged to follow. The committee condemns any decisions that lead to regression, and it assures

⁷⁷ Ministry of Education and Culture, *The Special Education Act of 1998, White Paper (No.1)* (Nicosia, Ministry of Education and Culture, 1998) 2. [in Greek]

you that it will struggle in every way to bring the Paper back to its initial provisions.

Eventually, the pressures exerted by the various social actors outside the governmental terrain, forced the Parliament to re-introduce and include in the new legislation the stipulation according to which the responsibility of the government for the education of disabled children starts at the age of three. Had it not been for the pressures exerted by certain social actors, financial considerations would have outweighed the official declarations of the government regarding the rights of these children to receive proper education. It also needs noting that implacable criticism towards the rather delayed intervention age, has also been vociferously exerted by certain academics in the Educational Department of the University of Cyprus who tried variously and persistently to persuade the Government regarding the immense benefits of early intervention.⁷⁸

The incessant modifications of the 1998 White Paper took place between 9 June 1998 and 25 May 1999. The Law was eventually voted on 28 July 1999 despite the fact that some members of the parliament asked to postpone its voting. This was because it was thought that the Law should have been further subjected to scrutiny since some of its articles could have been better articulated. Other members however, rejected the suggestion pointing out the negative cost that a further delay would have on education, indicating that the voting of the Law was a politically and ethically urgent issue.⁷⁹

These are but a few examples of the struggles over meaning as they are evinced within the draft White Papers. Despite, however, the linguistic amendments the 1999 Law is arguably, still significantly informed by the anachronistic discourses of functional thought that impede the attempts for the effective realisation of inclusion. The linguistic changes attempted were not substantial and the exclusionary language of individual pathology still reigns, albeit in more unobtrusive and opaque ways, within the legislative document⁸⁰.

⁷⁸ see Diakidou and Phtiaka Nursery Education or Care; A Pedagogical Dilemma. In *Pedagogiki Epitheorisi*, .27, (1998) [in Greek]

⁷⁹ Summary of the parliamentary minutes, 28/07/1999.

⁸⁰ Liasidou, A. 'Critical Discourse Analysis and Inclusive Educational Policies; The power to exclude' in *Journal of Education Policy*

Conclusion

Documentary analysis, supplemented by the utilization of sociological and historical tools of analysis, has enabled me to delineate some specific aspects of the evolution of special education policy in Cyprus. Segregating discourses were gradually and after intense political struggles, substituted by more inclusive discourses aimed towards the empowerment of disabled children. Not only did the existence of several discussions and alterations of the proposed policy document vindicate the metaphor of educational policymaking as a struggle, but it also makes transparent the pervasive impact that written policy is perceived to have on enacted policy. Written policy exerts discursive ‘governmentability’⁸¹ over the context of implementation, as it sets the discursive contours within which policy ‘contextualization’ and ‘recontextualization’⁸² are taking place. The intricate interplays of power are endemic in the policymaking process and its evolution through time, as various social actors attempt to ‘impose’ their ‘will of truth’ and safeguard their vested interests. The analysis has made transparent that policy texts are the result: ‘... of compromises at various stages (at points of initial influence, in the micropolitics of legislative formulation, in the parliamentary process and in the politics and micropolitics of interest group articulation)’.⁸³ The struggles towards the negotiated single solution in special education policymaking is a painstaking and precarious process that needs to be critically examined, if we are to fully understand the highly political and contentious nature of education policy, disability, special educational needs and inclusion.

The aim has been to make transparent the unequal interplays of power and the multiplicity of changing vested interests, perspectives and beliefs embroiled in the policymaking process. Children’s ‘best interests’ have been contingent on an array of institutional, social and political dynamics, whilst disabled people’s voice has been simply non-existent in the struggles over policy constitution and dissemination. Not

⁸¹ Foucault, M, ‘Governmentability’. in *Ideology and Consciousness*, .6., (1979).

⁸² Bowe R and Ball S. and Gold, A. *Reforming Education and Changing Schools. Case Studies in Policy Sociology*. (London: Routledge 1992).

⁸³ Ball, S. What is Policy? Texts, Trajectories and Toolboxes. in *Discourse*. .13, no. 2, (1993) 11

only have the functional analyses of special educational needs and disability promoted a deficit-oriented and individual pathology discourse, but they have also obscured the ‘politics of disablement’ and the power imbalances inherent in them. The exclusion and marginalization of disabled people have been sanctioned on the basis of scientific wisdom and humanitarian concern⁸⁴, which ironed out the power imbalances underpinning the political nature of disability and special educational needs.

Despite the ostensible progress achieved so far towards greater inclusive policies, it is still the case that the rights of disabled children and their advocates are substantially transgressed and violated. Notwithstanding the ‘linguistic surgery’ that the latest Special Education Legislative⁸⁵ documents have undergone throughout the last few years, the historical imperatives of special educational thinking are still at the fore, thereby corroborating the concomitant resurgence and ascendancy of exclusionary values and practices.⁸⁶ The power centres that uphold the status quo are well institutionalised and sanctioned, in spite of the attempts to tilt the balance away from special education imperatives towards the tenets of an inclusive discourse. Although the attempts to expunge the yoke of special education thinking are visible, it is nevertheless evident that these attempts are in their incipient stages and it would really need plenty of time and genuine commitment to dissipate the intricate nature of the power web that bolsters and perpetuates the status quo and undermines inclusion.

Even the existence of a separate legislation specifically concerned with children with presumed SEN, acts as a great impediment towards the realization of an inclusive discourse⁸⁷. Arguably, the next step, at a policy level, should be the introduction of a unified educational legislation stipulating inclusion as a means of respecting and accommodating learner “diversity” rather than “need”. Separate policy trajectories pertaining to special and mainstream education perpetuate and proliferate a series of binary oppositions (e.g., normal/abnormal), which accentuate the

⁸⁴ Tomlinson *Sociology of Special Education*

⁸⁵ Ministry of Education and Culture, *The 1999 Special Education Act (N.113(I)/99 and 2001 N. 69 (I) for the education of children with Special Educational Needs*, Nicosia: Government Press (1999 and 2001)

⁸⁶ Liasidou ‘ Critical Discourse Analysis and Inclusive Educational Policies; The power to exclude’ in *Journal of Education Policy*

⁸⁷ Liasidou ‘ Critical Discourse Analysis and Inclusive Educational Policies; The power to exclude’ in *Journal of Education Policy*,493

“Othering” image imputed to certain individuals, on the basis of their presumed deviation from an arbitrary conception for normality.

The road leading to change is indeed fraught with hindrances and the reversibility prospects need to be struggled for, in urgent and politically informed ways. The complicated character of special educational policymaking, calls for theoretical and methodological openness and convergence, and involves raising questions and providing a critical analysis of the assumptions, ideas and related practices within the field.

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