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Doing enactment within the logics of policy privatisation: how inclusion policy can be interpreted and translated for English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) students

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ABSTRACT

The logics of policy privatisation in schooling, including decentralisation, school autonomy, and discretionary funding mechanisms, shift responsibility for particular types of students onto individual schools and their staff. Burch (2021) asks to what extent the most disadvantaged students in government schools are able to access services most beneficial to them, under these emerging forms of privatisation. With this question in mind, this paper considers the delivery of English as an Additional Language/Dialect (EAL/D) services under the umbrella of the Queensland Department of Education Inclusion policy, in two Queensland government secondary schools. We tease out how the Inclusive Education (IE) policy, of which EAL/D is a subset, is interpreted and translated (Ball et al. 2012) in the situation of privatisation practices. We found that inclusion was understood as primarily targeted at students with disabilities, and that mainstreaming of all learners was considered unsustainable for teachers. In interpreting and translating inclusion for EAL/D, both schools pushed back against the 'mainstreaming' discourse, and instead, EAL/D service was provided through targeted programs, staffed with key specialist personnel. In both cases, privatisation logics enabled the 'EAL/D aware' principals to justify and enact specialised EAL/D services. In this policy context, there is a need for widespread professional development to ensure all principals understand and apply appropriate supports for EAL/D learners.

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Introduction

The privatisation of education policy, often under the umbrella of 'educational reform' is having significant effects on public systems of schooling. Privatisation of education policy is different to the privatisation of schooling. The latter, which Ball and Youdell (2008) term

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exogenous privatisation, opens up the delivery and management of schools to the private sector (such is the case with Charter schools and Academies). The privatisation of policy is more aligned with what Ball and Youdell (2008) call endogenous privatisation, that is, the importing of ideas, practices and techniques from the private sector to make schools more like businesses and business like. The logics of policy privatisation call for less central bureaucratic control over education, and more autonomy for individual schools to respond to their unique local contexts. It also calls for more choice and competition within the public school sector, where schools are more transparent and accountable for the performance of their students (and staff), and parents are encouraged to move schools if they are not happy as 'clientele'. Indeed, school leaders are asked to speak the language of privatisation and make (high stakes) decisions with their devolved budgets to increase their school's 'effectiveness' (see Thompson et al. 2020). This paper focuses on how this context affects the work schools do, particularly in support of vulnerable students.

The focus of this study is on students with English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D) in Queensland state secondary schools. Until recently, EAL/D students migrating to Queensland with limited English were enrolled in an intensive English language school (Phase One), and then placed in one of a select few secondary schools with specialist EAL/D programs and staff (Phase Two) (see Creagh 2019). These schools supported students to transition into regular 'mainstream'[1] classes across all subjects. Two recent policy changes have meant this Phase Two pathway has been disbanded. The first is that all students must now attend their local catchment school regardless of specific educational need. This aligns with the second policy move around the Inclusive Education (IE) agenda whereby students with specific educational needs must not be segregated outside of mainstream classes into specialised programs or pathways. The nine categories of students under the IE agenda are diverse with very different needs (including, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students with disability, culturally and linguistically diverse students, refugee students, students in out-of-home care, students with mental health needs, LGBTIQ+, gifted and talented students and rural and remote students), and the policy has been critiqued for its generality and 'catch all' approach (Creagh et al. 2022)). In support of attending their local public school, for each EAL/D student schools receive an additional $7,000 in funding to support their specific educational needs. However, there is no system of accountability as to how these funds are managed or spent on this individual student. The research question animating this project was how do these policy reforms affect EAL/D provision in public schools that are now largely autonomous with devolved budgets?

Our empirical contribution is focused on two secondary schools in Queensland. The first is one of the schools – that until recently – offered a specialist EAL/D program for students. This school is therefore dealing with a rapid decrease in EAL/D student enrolments and a decreased need for their EAL/D support teachers. The second school is one located in a migrant corridor in outer Brisbane that is home to many recently arrived refugees. This school has now seen an influx of EAL/D students and is working to upskill their current teachers with necessary EAL/D training. Both schools are led by principals with significant EAL/D awareness and training. The schools are located within the Queensland government education system overseen by a central office responsible for policy and performance, and a number of geographically distributed regional offices with infrastructure and staffing for the support of policy implementation within schools. The argument we posit in this paper is that the current policy context in Queensland is complex and contradictory. Our

participants suggested that to deliver appropriate support for EAL/D students in their schools necessitated the segregation of EAL/D students into specialised learnings pathways until they reached minimum language proficiency to re-enter mainstream classrooms. Our point is not that this approach is right or wrong, but simply that it should not be unexpected in a system that asks school leaders to focus on student performance, school effectiveness and systemic competition. Ultimately, we suggest that the IE agenda cannot succeed alongside the logics of policy privatisation, as principals can persuasively argue that they are operating in the best interests of their students.

In what follows, we first provide a brief contextual overview of contemporary literature concerned with the mainstreaming of EAL/D provision both in Australia and internationally. We follow this with a précis of the policy literature which has informed our analysis, and, in describing the IE agenda and provision of EAL/D within that, we note the tensions that surround relations between policy text and policy enactment (Ball et al. 2012), and the inherent difficulties that generalist educators face in being responsibilised for IE as non-experts. Next, we present our empirical contribution involving a case study of two Queensland state schools, both with 'EAL/D aware' principals. Utilising Ball et al.'s (2012) policy enactment framework of interpretation and translation, we present qualitative interview data on the perspectives of bureaucrats, school leaders, EAL/D specialists and teachers regarding what appropriate school-based support for EAL/D students should look like. Finally, we offer some caution around the effects of the logics of policy privatisation, and how decentralisation, autonomy and discretionary funding mechanisms work to shift responsibility for particular types of students onto individual schools and their staff, many of whom are not prepared for these challenges.

The challenge of interpreting inclusion as mainstreaming for EAL/D

The decentralization of specialised education support services is considered an important aspect of the IE agenda. The idea here is that this devolved structure, with an onus on autonomous schools, is able to create the conditions for every child to flourish in mainstream classes. Indeed, the IE policy of Queensland state schools fundamentally advocates that all students should be able to access and participate in high-quality education, in a safe and supportive environment, at their *local* state school (Queensland Government, Department of Education 2021). Indeed, mainstreaming is globally understood as socially and academically beneficial for students with disability when schools are resourced appropriately, and teachers are upskilled suitably (UNESCO 1994).

Much research highlights the challenges of mainstreaming for generalist teachers. In the context of EAL/D for instance, studies in Australia have identified that classroom teachers require specialist mentoring to appropriately understand the needs of EAL/D students (Nguyen and Rushton 2023), and that this complexity increases from pedagogical language models to whole-of-school support structures when catering for refugee-background students (Miller et al. 2018). Similarly in the U.S., Harklau and Ford (2022) have identified significant gaps between the expectations education policy has for teachers in mainstreaming and their actual (low and inconsistent levels of) training and preparation for mainstreaming. They argue that teacher education, ongoing professional development and professional identities all need to be aligned to make institutional change that supports IE appropriately. The danger according to Costley and Leung (2013) researching in the context

of the UK is that IE is merely a symbolic policy rather than a material reality that positively affects curriculum and pedagogy for EAL/D students. They argue that many schools in England share a broad rhetorical commitment to IE through mainstreaming, while actually engaging in teaching and learning practices that are commensurate to educational segregation on the basis of students' language and cultural background. This was not a callous or calculated move, but rather an unintended consequence in the translation of policy into practice (Slee 2011; Costley and Leung 2013).

Policy literature utilised in the data analysis

In this paper we utilise Ball's policy sociology work (Ball 1994). He talks about a policy cycle with three interrelated and interactive contexts, namely context of influence, text production and of practice (Bowe et al. 1992). We are concerned in this paper with the relationships between the context of production, more specifically the IE Policy in Queensland schooling, and practices of schooling for EAL/D students. In subsequent work, Ball focused on policy practice, where the distinction is made between policy implementation and policy enactment and translation. The latter allow for some policy agency at school and classroom levels (Ball et al. 2012). Ball et al. (2012) explain policy interpretation as a 'making sense of policy' that encompasses institutional priorities and possibilities. They argue that 'Interpretations are set within the schools' *position* in relation to policy… and the degree and type of imperative attached to any policy alongside the contextual limitations of budget, staff, etc.' (p. 44). The point that Ball and colleagues make is that policy is always assigned a value and a priority, and that this affects how policy is translated into and enacted in practice, as do other extant policies and practices. They suggest that there is often a tension in policy enactment between the 'political' or the public rhetoric in relation to – for instance, the importance of Inclusive Education – and the 'technical' or material realities of how mainstreaming can be successfully enacted in practice. This means that it usually falls to school leaders to decide what can and cannot be done, with what resources and which staff. Ball et al. (2012, p. 50) refer to this as a fine balance between 'making policy palatable and making it happen' and of creating links between big political issues 'out there' and the more immediate demands and processes of policy practice within a school.

Spillane (2004) talks about 'utility maximisation' and how school leaders might create space for creative policy enactment, particularly if they understand policies as 'muddled' or 'weak'. This might happen in low stakes policy environments where there is limited accountability for stringent policy enactment. Indeed, an important part of understanding the Inclusive Education policy in Queensland, and the way that funding is allocated on a per student ratio is that there is very little accountability for how that funding is spent (Creagh et al. 2022). Instead, as Ozga (2020) notes, accountability in the context of education policy privatisation is mostly conceived as performance outcomes embedded in standardised tests and the way that associated comparative data on whole school performance is transparently displayed, for accountability, choice and competition. In Australia, a key focus of accountability sits with schools' performance on the National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), the annual suite of standardised assessments for students in years 3, 5 7 and 9. However, these tests are designed for monolingual speakers of English, and are therefore not inclusive of EAL/D learners (or many of the other IE categories) (Creagh 2014; Nguyen and Rushton 2023). This disconnect between policy rhetoric for

inclusion and the accountability mechanisms to measure school 'success' is primed to create the muddled policy environment Spillane (2004) refers to.

Importantly, the point we make here, echoing Ball et al. (2012), is that education policies are translated alongside and against various contextual factors, and require the constant identification of responsibility and allocation of resources. While school leaders are often seen as central to this process, Ball et al. (2012) argue that there are multiple subjectivities and positions that shape how policies are understood and enacted in different school contexts and in different classrooms. They suggest that there are eight types of policy actors or policy positions which are involved in making meaning of and constructing responses to policy (see Table 1). We draw on and elaborate on these in the analysis that follows. Ball and colleagues highlight that these positions are not fixed, or attached to specific individuals, and people will move between these roles, or combine them in aspects of policy work: 'For example, SLT [senior leadership team] members may be *transactors* and *entrepreneurs* as well as *narrators*' (p. 50). Indeed, school leaders are usually emphasised as key in the policy enactment process – a point we expand on in our empirical contribution below. Importantly, we depart from Ball et al.'s (2011) argument that *critics* are only unions' representatives and/or union activists. We argue that the school leaders in this study bring counter-discourses to their 'making sense' of IE policy, and through this, become enthusiastic entrepreneurs about the way that their interpretation and translation of policy works in the best interests of EAL/D students. Our intent in doing this work is not to suggest that the IE policy is wrong, but rather highlight the contradictions 'mainstream' educators face in being responsibilised for IE as non-experts (Bourke et al. 2023). As Bourke and colleagues caution in their review of IE policies across various states in Australia, there is little chance that individual schools will deliver the 'intended' IE policy position, given the constrained possibilities of autonomous local responses.

The schools

The case study schools were two government (state) secondary schools, both located in metropolitan Queensland, though in differing socioeconomic sites. School One was located in a middle-class suburb and School Two, in an outlying working-class area of the city. These schools were chosen because of the nature of their student populations, characterised by highly diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, thus ensuring that at both sites, EAL/D provision was a priority of school management (Table 2).

School One has traditionally enrolled a high proportion of students from outside its catchment area, because it has offered a specialised EAL/D program. However, the

Table 1. Policy actors and 'policy work' (cited in Ball et al. 2012, p. 49).

Policy actors	Policy work
Narrators	Interpretation, selection and enforcement of meanings
Entrepreneurs	Advocacy, creativity and integration
Outsiders	Entrepreneurship, partnership and monitoring
Transactors	Accounting, reporting, monitoring/supporting, facilitating
Enthusiasts	Investment, creativity, satisfaction and career
Translators	Productions of texts, artifacts and events
Critics	Union representatives: monitoring of management, maintaining counter-discourses
Receivers	Coping, defending, dependency

Table 2. School demographics.

	School One	School Two
Student population (rounded)	800	1600
Proportion of student population with EAL/D needs	55%	50%

instigation of the state-wide IE policy along with the requirement that students attend their local catchment school, coupled with the relocation of refugee housing from inner city suburbs to the outer metropolitan area, has resulted in a decline in the EAL/D student population and an associated decline in EAL/D funding to the school. Historically, the school has invested heavily in specialist EAL/D teachers and ancillary staff (bilingual teacher aides, cultural liaison officers, psychologist, and art therapists) to support the EAL/D population. School One provides scaffolded access to the Australian curriculum, largely because of the design of its EAL/D program, with parallel classes in years 7, 8, 9 and 10 for English, maths, science and humanities, taught by specialist teachers with skills in EAL/D pedagogy.

School Two has always had a highly diverse student population previously supported by a small number of specialist EAL/D teachers providing individual student support. The principal has replaced this system with a program of intensive support in the school for EAL/D learners, with specialist EAL/D teachers and a Head of Department (HOD) leadership role. School two described the identification process for EAL/D students on enrolment, which would allow them access to funded EAL/D support. Government funding, in the form of targeted EAL/D funding is provided if a student is identified as coming from a household with a language background other than English and has achieved less than a grade of C in subject English (in the A to E grade system) in the previous reporting period. The principal indicated that this process worked well for students, particularly of refugee or Pacific Island background, who lived in large households with socio-economic disadvantage, perhaps without a literate tradition at home. These changes made to the school's EAL/D service has seen funding reallocated away from individual student out-of-class support with assignments, to the establishment of an EAL/D unit managed by an EAL/D HOD, enabling more equitable access to support, and allowing students some immersion in a school developed curriculum, related to the Australian curriculum, until they are ready to transition to the mainstream.

Both schools offered different, unique insights into the delivery of EAL/D services in Queensland state secondary schools. This delivery is influenced by the contextual factors prevalent at each site. School One has for considerable years prioritised EAL/D services, as part of a region wide system and as such provides insight into the processes designed for this purpose, albeit whilst now undergoing a decline in student numbers necessitating the rolling back of some of this service. School Two has not the same history of EAL/D delivery, however, under new leadership has used EAL/D funding to install a more equitable model of support.

Data were generated through in-depth interviews with principals, Heads of Department with responsibility for EAL/D, and teachers working with EAL/D students. In addition, we interviewed officers who worked in the field of EAL/D within the regional office corresponding to both schools, to better understand how EAL/D services are distributed across these settings. This is useful because in Queensland, the Education Department is structurally organised by a 'central office' that generates policy and 19 'regional offices' that work to support schools in implementing policy. In total, we completed nine interviews: three in School One, four in School Two, and two in regional offices. Interviews were conducted face-to-face at

School One, School Two and at the two regional offices. Interviews were undertaken in 2022 and focused on questions of EAL/D provision in schools, including funding, program structure, curriculum enactment, purchased resources, available support and staffing. To do this we had Human Research Ethics Approval (HE00033) from the University of Queensland, and permission to approach schools, granted by the Queensland Department of Education.

We analysed data inductively to construct broad themes. Next, using our conceptual framing of policy translation we deductively identified the type of policy work that was happening in these two schools and the ways in which school leaders, Heads of Departments and EAL/D teachers acted on policy specific to EAL/D, sitting under the umbrella of IE. We argue that our participants were critical of the IE policy because of the way it shrouded or diluted the specific needs of EAL/D students within a broad agenda they felt uneasy with. They then became entrepreneurial narrators to argue for an approach to EAL/D that sat in tension with the IE policy that calls for the mainstreaming of all students at all times. We explore these policy actor roles in more detail below. To maintain participant anonymity, we use pseudonyms in the reporting of data, including S1 and S2 for School One and School Two respectively. Abbreviations used in the analysis are: P (principal), HoD (Head of Department), T (teacher), RO1 (Regional Officer 1) and RO2 (Regional Officer 2).

Interpretation and translation of the IE agenda to support EAL/D learners

Critics

In our research we found that the two school principals were critics of the IE policy. This is in contrast to Ball et al. (2012), who writing about the English policy context, noted that critics of policy – in reference to union activists – tend to hold marginal and muted positions. In their data, collected across six English schools, they saw little evidence of 'principled and political' critique. They did, however, note that the role of the critic is to maintain counter-discourses that serve as a potential challenge to and critique of new policy. In our two schools, however, we see a broad and stark misalignment of policy and values. In this regard, RO1 described:

> EAL/D students have been identified as an area that we need to pay attention to through our inclusion policy. As a result of that, there is specific work that relates to EAL/D learners, incorporating [or mainstreaming] EAL/D learners, on all our supporting resources and documentations and things like that.

Yet, both principals pushed back against the inclusion of EAL/D and refugees in principled critique. They believed the Inclusion policy was intended to address disability.

> EAL/D, refugees, are completely different type of students and they have different issues to address. … EAL/D refugees are only a small part of a bigger agenda of inclusion, and I might add that people that are probably driving that [inclusion policy] are more of the SWD, students with disability, focus… (P, S1)

> [W]hen we were following a version of the inclusivity policy of the refugees coming here and being in mainstream classes and being given support, it was a disaster… The inclusivity policy of the Department isn't producing – if you took it to its extreme, it would create an impossible situation for teachers. Where you've got to virtually work with each child as an individual. You haven't got enough hours in the day. People would say sod this… (P, S2)

From the perspective of these two school leaders, subsuming EAL/D students into a mainstream classroom as an interpretation of the inclusion policy is not an effective way to support EAL/D students. As described by a teacher at S1, this isn't about 'segregating' EAL/D students, but understanding the high levels of support they need, and moreover, that mainstream teachers do not have the requisite experience and knowledge to provide the appropriate support required by EAL/D students: 'We have great teachers within the public system. But are they EAL/D aware? All those strategies that are really imperative for those children to get as much out of a lesson as possible, do they all have them is questionable' (HoD, S1). Even RO1 conceded that with:

> Our inclusion lens on, it's fabulous, because they're going to mainstream schools, they're having opportunities that every student should have… We're working with schools about what they'd like to see… and there is strong feedback that if they're not at Bandscale 4[2] level it's really hard to have them in class.

These critics are not against the IE agenda but are concerned about how the IE agenda can effectively support the EAL/D program. The officer and principals' expressions reveal that tensions exist in the interpretation of the policy across actors positioned at different levels. As principal of S2 argues,

> We set up an EAL/D unit and we say, the children in that unit are not going to be doing the Australian curriculum because they can't succeed in it. We will give them a temporary period of time doing a school developed curriculum related to the Australian curriculum until they are ready to go into the mainstream. When they are, they will… I think one of the services we have provided … by having the EAL/D unit is we've reduced their differentiation… So it must have made their lives better. We're committed to equitable ethical outcomes for kids, and this is the way we provide it.

As explained by this participant, they have a justifiable reason for not making an 'official' interpretation of the policy. From their perspective, there is a strong equity argument for continued specialist programs in support of EAL/D students. Their narrative is that inclusion is possible once students have sufficient facility with academic English to engage with the mainstream curriculum.

Entrepreneurial narrators

Educators from both schools, particularly the two principals, pivot from their role of critic to being advocates for their interpretation of policy to support EAL/D learners. The role of entrepreneurs is an uncommon one according to Ball et al. (2012), but they observe that these actors work to advocate for particular principles of integration, are usually personally invested with policy ideas and have 'persuasive personalities' that make them forceful agents of change. 'They rework and recombine aspects of different policies, draw on disparate ideas, examples of 'good practice' and other resources to produce something original, and crucially they are able to translate this into a set of positions and roles and organisational relationships which 'enact' policy' (Ball et al. 2012, p. 53). While our two schools cannot claim originality in their creation of EAL/D units to support students, they have drawn on a variety of discursive sources to create a structure, set of roles and techniques that they understand to be defensible. As the Principal of S1 observes, 'You need principals that really understand what EAL/D and

refugee education requires.' The Principal of S2 similarly argued that if anyone was to ever challenge their EAL/D unit,

> I've got the evidence to say, this is why we're doing it. This is what the outcomes are. This is why we're going to continue to do it. So for example, we had a young fellow called [student name] came down here from [location] to live with his sister to do studies from year seven to 12. Now [student name] speaks Torres Strait Creole. So he's in the EAL/D unit to help him settle. Imagine coming from [location], 46 kids, to a school like this. So perfect way to help settle him, which is something I really learned … about being settled before you can learn. Then when [student name] is more confident in his English language skills, he will leave and go into the mainstream.

There was a sense of frustration from both principals that a lack of knowledge in schools was impacting support for EAL/D students. They argued that there was a need to spend money 'wisely' and to upskill mainstream teachers with appropriate professional development to ensure they had 'understanding of the issues facing students from multi-lingual backgrounds' (Principal, S2). While RO2 didn't comment on their perspective of a school having a pathway for specialist EAL/D support outside of mainstream classrooms, they agreed that 'there needs to be more of that explicit teaching [of EAL/D], which I don't think is happening at the moment.' They continued, 'I've had countless discussions with deputies et cetera about what does inclusion mean, [and they] just assume that if you throw kids into a classroom, [because] they all have to be in there together, that they will somehow pick it up' (RO2). In fact, from the point of view of another regional officer, there are broader accountabilities that schools need to meet than *just* the inclusion policy,

> If we talk about accountability of student attainment, every student needs to succeed, so there's questions and there's accountabilities and the principal's supervisor would be asking them questions around why is this child receiving a D or an N? What are you doing for it? What support? In the structure of state schooling, the ARD or the assistant – there's a regional director who oversees the region, there's assistant regional directors and they're the ones who work with principals and companion principals and their supervisor, and then there are directors that sit under them. That's the hierarchy. The ARD would hold the principal accountable for academic attainment of those students, and wellbeing.

These competing accountabilities set up a tension between EAL/D policy and enactment, and as these two principals argue, it is entirely defensible for a school to set up an EAL/D unit and to defend their practices 'with evidence' (principal S2). As Ball et al. (2012) argue, there is a fine balance between making policy palatable and making it happen and the job of a principal is 'to join up policies into an institutional narrative, a story about how the school works and what it does – ideally articulated through an 'improvement' plan of some kind' (p. 51).

This plan was reflected through staff at both schools. Both schools had a Head of Department role for EAL/D and this position brought oversight and management of the EAL/D program within the school. Management entailed the organisation of classes, from year to year, based on student numbers, and the co-ordination of the teachers working with the EAL/D classes.

> So what we do, at the end of each term I'll approach my EAL/D teachers and say, go through your list, is there anyone you think that has worked really hard and is able to transition into the mainstream? They'll base it on marks, on skills, on their attitudes, their homework. So they look at a whole range of things and then they make the recommendation. There are some

> students that will go from EAL – they'll start in Year 7, they'll still be there in Year 8, they may even be there in Year 9. So the transition takes time. Others that may be just there for half a year and then they move on and they fly. (EAL/D HoD, S1).

As both principals argued, their structure allows EAL/D students to move into mainstream classes with the English language skills needed to cope with the Australian curriculum.

Transactors and translators

Many policies need to be seen to be done, that is, reported about and accounted for. Transactors of policy might 'generate, work on, or work with data' – because policies are calculable and schools become accountable for their effectiveness (Ball et al. 2012, p. 57). Importantly, they observe that transactors might also be 'creative accountants and fabricators of policy responses' (p. 57). In Queensland, funding for the support of EAL/D students is a per capita model, with funding for English language support attached to a student for three years. Additional funds are allocated to students of refugee background. The two schools in this study were experiencing contrasting situations in terms of enrolment and resource support. School One had a declining EAL/D population, described by the principal as a 'diminishing resource' and school Two with solid numbers of EAL/D students was attracting considerable funding, which the principal was using to renew and redesign EAL/D support systems in order to replace a situation described as 'teacher goes off and works with individual kids'.

Both schools recognised the value of 'refugee dollars' and the potential to use these funds to build expertise in the school. School Two had established a specialist EAL/D program, employing a Head of Department and three EAL/D teachers with the combination of EAL/D and refugee funding. School One was lamenting the loss of this income, with declining EAL/D student numbers and recognised that in downsizing, this entailed a loss of expertise.

> Refugee dollars are really valuable to schools, it's $7000 for every student that is a refugee. So if you've got a school of 100 of them, it's a lot of dollars coming into your school. We've had that in the past. We're not getting it, and as a result, we're starting to downsize and losing, I dare say, the expertise… (Principal, S1)

Within both schools, student funding had been allocated to building expertise and leadership in the delivery of EAL/D programs, including the employment of key ancillary personnel, such as bilingual teacher aides to support classrooms. Ball et al. (2012) highlight that these specialist staff are important policy transactors, given collective policy enactment usually depends on them and the experience, training and expert knowledge they bring to bear. Yet, keeping these expert staff was becoming harder, especially in School One that was losing EAL/D and refugee funding. RO1 agreed that one of the problems facing schools – particularly with a low EAL/D enrolment – is the funding model as it becomes nearly impossible to fund teacher aide hours. As the EAL/D HoD (S1) explained, they was currently negotiating with other departments – particularly with the HoD of Inclusion to absorb some of their EAL/D teacher aides, 'that way I still have them on staff somewhere'. Similarly, in School One, EAL/D expertise was being repurposed as literacy and while teachers reported some useful overlaps across EAL/D and literacy, the same was not apparent for the broader field of inclusion. Teacher (S1) said, 'Even though I'm not familiar with

mainstream literacy as much, I'd be – which I am, willing to try that. But I feel like the inclusion with all the disabilities and things, that's outside my scope … I'm a language teacher.'

Furthermore, the funding schools receive for EAL/D and refugee students is 'discretionary' meaning that a school has very little accountability for how those funds are used. Both principals believed that this discretionary funding was a good thing as it allowed them flexibility in establishing their EAL/D support structures and pathways. However, RO2 described issues with this across the broader school system,

> Schools are going, 'well I know we've got 50 kids who are recently arrived, but … the money that we get with that allocation, we could use that to create another HOD position'. So schools make decisions about how they're going to [spend that money] and you get HOD positions, head of wellbeing and head of inclusion and head of senior and junior and this and that. Very nebulous and there's not a clarity about sometimes what these people actually do…. I mean people are being put on because they've taught English in Japan for six months or they put on people who was a French teacher or an English teacher, but I'd really like to work with EAL kids, or just you're available on that line. That's what it boils down to.

This highlights a tension between a budget perspective which suggests more non-qualified staff are employed, against a quality perspective, which stresses the need for experienced staff to do policies well (Ball et al. 2012). As Ball and colleagues argue, money is always key and budget is an important interpretative frame through which policy is viewed and policy translation activities are funded and staffed. Even when School One had more funding, the principal reflected that it was never enough, and they needed to use their resources strategically to enable a sustained program better suited to evidence-informed understandings of how long it takes to learn academic English.

Outsiders

The research reported here demonstrated that not all significant policy actors are based inside schools (cf Ball et al. 2012). Edu-businesses, consultants and departmental advisors play roles in 'introducing or interpreting policies and initiating or supporting translation work' (p. 55). As we discussed previously, regional offices in Queensland have an explicit responsibility to help schools enact policy mediating between central level policy generators and school level policy actors. As RO1 described, 'my role is to be the conduit between what happens in schools and what's being generated in central office… I guess if we were to really simplify it, we are here to serve the schools, so when they have a need, we support them with their needs'. However, schools are responsible for seeking regional support. Moreover, this support often comes at a cost. As explained by the same regional officer, regions receive no central funding as all the money 'goes out to schools and so we say to schools, we can provide additional support if you want to contribute to the region and pay for the teachers'. This participant argued that this isn't 'a money-making venture, but an investment in regional staff'.

There was a certain sense of frustration from the regional office that the central office no longer managed the 'allocation of resources' or provided 'strategic advice' for schools. Regional officers have a range of support structures they could provide schools, including instructional advice over the phone or through school visits and even 'cluster classes', as well as resources through 'Ed Studio'[3] and professional development options. As

summarised by RO1, 'there's lots of programs and initiatives that we have access to… the school has lots of avenues if they're finding they're having trouble'. Yet typically, schools were more often contacting them about particular online teaching materials and programs available for purchase from commercial providers, despite the range of 'in house' services that regional officers have access to. In particular they were concerned that these external products were not aligned to the Australian curriculum and the specific needs of EAL/D learners.

There was little discussion of regional office support in the two schools. The EAL/D HoD in S1 reported they attended a regular meeting of EAL/D HoDs (where these exist) for sharing expertise organised by their regional office; 'How is the program running, what does your curriculum look like? It's that professional exchange.' Similarly, a teacher at S1 observed that if a school 'buys-in' to regional support, they can opt for their level of support, and that some of the resources such as, 'adapted workbooks, essentially for a whole unit, are fantastic'. A teacher at S2 however had only just learnt of the regional resources prior to the research team interviewing them,

> There's a lot of resources on the metropolitan blah, blah, blah, EAL something, something… Yeah. I only discovered it at the end of last term, and I only know this biography unit. I haven't really delved into anything else… It's really comprehensive. It even has the bandscaling skills, so that you could see – you know, if they're reading a biography, you can see where they would sit in terms of that particular text. So, that's really useful as well.

While seemingly useful, this teacher had only just learnt of this support material and still lacked clarity on who could access these, citing the need for an access code, having to wait for approval and that it's *'not for everybody'*. Thus, we see that rather than the Department leading policy interpretation work, they are instead acting as consultants, offering support with translation activities.

Discussion/conclusion

This paper presents a small snapshot of how two schools interpret IE policy for EAL/D students, against a backdrop of privatisation logics, including for instance, accountability for student performance. Interpretations of policy do not operate uniformly across schools, and the interpretations and translations of policy made in these two schools should not be assumed to represent the case in other schools across Queensland. Indeed, this is the point about autonomous schools with discretionary funding; they are free to make their own decisions in the interest of their particular community of students. But we also see how these decisions are enabled by values and interests and necessarily constrained by school-specific context. The two school principals in this study were 'EAL/D aware', both with a long history of working with EAL/D students. They brought these values into their critique of the IE agenda, and the necessity of interpreting the policy in a different way. In a related study in the US, where control over schools is also decentralised, school principals have considerable control over the selection and use of programs, like those provided for the support of students with English as an additional language (Menken and Solorza 2015). As we have determined in this study, Menken and Solorza found that principals were gatekeepers for appropriate language support programs, in their case, for bilingual students, and that those principals who both understood the theories and practices associated with this language

pedagogy, and who could negotiate the system and use resources appropriately were crucial to the success of the program (Menken and Solorza 2015). In addition, Menken and Solorza (2015) found that many principals lacked access to the professional development that would enable them to administer specialist language programs in their schools, and so recommended mandated TESOL programmes for all school leaders. We would argue that similar support needs to be provided for school leaders in Australia, where our school population is characterised by linguistic and cultural diversity.

Across the interviews we found that interpretation of the inclusion policy for EAL/D students was muddled and confused. All our interviewees uniformly interpreted IE as referring to students with disabilities ('*its students with disabilities by and large*'…'*do you mean involvement in things like the students with disability and so forth?*'… '*not knowing English is not a disability*'). We argue that there is a policy discourse problem here, that not only affects EAL/D students, but all students. Inclusion is being interpreted within – at least these two schools – as a policy for disability. Yet, students with disability is only one of the nine categories of students referred to within the IE policy. We argue that further research should be conducted to understand how the IE agenda is being interpreted to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, students who identify as LGBTIQ+, students from rural and remote communities, students with mental health needs, students living in out of home care, gifted and talented students *and* students with a disability. This seems particularly pertinent for those students who do not have a per capita funding amount attached to them. For instance, there is a burgeoning concern of how students with mental health needs and LGBTIQ + students are being supported in schools in what many consider a policy vacuum of funding, resources and/or targeted support (see Seeley and Bedford 2023). As RO2 argued in this study, the 'vagueness' of the IE policy is a problem: 'I think when they came up with the inclusion policy, I don't even think they considered EAL/D. I think it was driven out of disability and we've kind of come along for the ride because it's diverse … This is what we're seeing at schools, there's no longer EAL/D HoDs or EAL/D teachers. They're moving towards inclusion teachers and heads of inclusion, deputies who look after inclusion.' The concern here as articulated by this regional officer is that an unintended effect of the IE agenda is the eventual loss of specialist expertise that best supports the inclusion of all students into mainstream classrooms.

For the moment, in the two schools in this study, EAL/D improvement is still woven into the structures of schooling as its own unique area for validation. As Ball et al. (2012) claim, this policy 'contradiction' is held together by 'fragile structures, more or less convincing narratives and a great deal of raw commitment (of some different sorts and degrees to students and to schools) and much goodwill' (p. 70). These principals and their EAL/D staff have found a way to carve out a space for durability in the face of de-stabilising policy change. But as Ball et al. (2012) caution, schools are a 'creaky social assemblage, that is continually re-validated and underpinned and moved on by the various efforts of networks of social actors with disparate but more or less focused interests and commitments' (p. 70). As funding moves to support the IE agenda, as specialist staff with EAL/D expertise move on, it is likely that enactment will be done differently.

The point we make here is that this difference isn't necessarily good or bad; that is a question for ongoing research. Our point is that this change has been driven by logics of policy privatisation, that is, how decentralisation, school autonomy and discretionary funding mechanisms work to shift responsibility for particular types of students onto individual

schools and their staff. We think there is a danger in this approach. Particularly given the emergent concern for teacher stress, burnout and attrition from the profession. Now too, they are responsible for all of our most vulnerable students within their mainstream classrooms – often without the knowledge or confidence to sustain them. The two schools in this study are trying to maintain programs of support for EAL/D learners that are evidence informed, but this is reliant on having a critical mass of EAL/D students within a school to have enough funding to employ expert staff, and also requires leadership that is confident that this approach – contradictory to policy – is the right one. Even the mechanisms that exist to support school's enactment of policy are insufficient. We would argue that the fact that schools need to pay for regional office support in enacting the IE agenda is akin to the creation of an internal quasi-market within the state. Essentially if schools need help enacting policies from central office, they need to pay regional officers as consultant advisers. As Ball and Youdell (2008) have cautioned, endogenous privatisation paves the way for more explicit forms of exogenous privatisation. We argue that conditions in the public education system in Queensland are ripe for uptake of further privatisation practices in the outsourcing of the IE agenda, including EAL/D provision, to private sector design, management and/or delivery.

Notes

1. Mainstreaming has different definitions in different contexts. In Queensland, mainstreaming is the inclusion of all learners into general educational settings/classes/classrooms in regular schools. All students participate in learning "alongside similar-aged peers, supported by reasonable adjustments and teaching strategies tailored to meet their individual needs" (Queensland Government, Department of Education 2021).
2. Bandscale levels are indicators of English language proficiency. Students at Bandscale levels 1-3 require intensive English support in order to access the curriculum. Students at Bandscale level 4 continue to require some level of differentiated language support.
3. In-house departmental on-line resource repository.

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