

A Critical Discourse Analysis of the Malaysian Smart Schools (MSS) Conceptual Blueprint and Implications to Implementation

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Abstract

*The paper discusses a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) (Fairclough, 1992, 2001) of the **Malaysian Smart School Conceptual Blueprint**, a policy document of the Ministry of Education of Malaysia for the implementation of the Malaysian Smart Schools (MSS). The main purpose of the study was to identify discourses that represent commonly held assumptions about what different participants and teachers in particular, as represented in the text in question, are constructed in terms of how these discourses represent continuity of particular practices and/or constitute a platform for change. Analysis showed that, the Malaysian Smart School Blueprint policy can be considered a hybridised text containing competing discourses, where discourses for inclusion of best educational practices sit alongside the more traditional discourses of student (and teacher) deficit or need. Analysis also revealed that the discourses evident in the Blueprint can be seen as speculative, evolving and filled with discursive tension which may leave readers feeling apprehensive of the rhetoric used in the persuasive document. The outcome might be a facade of change, well-developed policy rhetoric but an enormous challenge to achieve a significant impact on schools.*

Introduction

The paper discusses an analysis carried out on the **Malaysian Smart School Conceptual Blueprint**, a policy document of the Ministry of Education of Malaysia for the implementation of the Malaysian Smart Schools (MSS), using Fairclough's three-tiered Critical Discourse Analysis framework (Fairclough, 1992, 2001) as an investigative tool. The paper explores the discourses evident in the blueprint and the ways in which discourses are constituted through particular linguistic choices. The purpose of the study is to identify discourses that represent commonly held assumptions about what different participants and teachers in particular, as represented in the text in question, are constructed in terms of how these discourses represent continuity of particular practices and/or constitute a platform for change. In so doing, we hope to identify and explore the implications for curriculum, teachers and pedagogy and more particularly to ask 'what new notions of teachers, pedagogy, curriculum do these new forms generate?'

CDA is used as a tool to make visible the less explicit facets of policy discourse: what is being communicated about ways of acting and interrelating and ways of representing, through looking at the genre of the policy, the discourses used and the styles of interacting respectively. Such ways of acting, representing and identifying are all dialectically related within texts (Fairclough, 2003). Amalgamating social theory and discourse analysis together, CDA can be used to describe, interpret, and explain the ways in which discourse constructs, becomes constructed by, represents, and becomes represented by the social world (Rogers 2005, p. 366). CDA therefore can help to make transparent the connections between discourse practices, social practices, and social structures, connections that might be opaque to the layperson.

However, a caveat pertaining to reflexivity and our roles as researchers (Rogers et al, 2005) is due at the outset. As members and ex-members of the teaching community directly involved in Smart School innovation, we are consciously aware that we are not merely text analysts who remain on the periphery, but we also bring with us histories of participation, what Fairclough (1992) calls "members resources", or what Gee (1999) refers to as "cultural models" that includes beliefs, assumptions and values within these contexts, which might affect our claims to knowledge and reality pertaining to the analysis of the education policy.

The first part of this paper provides an overview of what CDA entails and its uses in policy analysis. Next, the methodological framework of the paper is outlined, in particular the theoretical framework and the background of the MSS policy document. Then using CDA as an analytic tool, the Blueprint is analysed. Finally, implications of the reform proposal on its implementation in MSS are discussed.

What is CDA?

CDA is generally viewed as the study of 'the relationship between discourse and power' (van Dijk, 2001, p. 363), a study that addresses social problems (Fairclough and Wodak, 1997). Widdowson (1998) views CDA as the uncovering of implicit ideology in texts. Gee (2004: 32-33) sees CDA as an approach to language analysis that considers texts as parts of specific social practices that have political implications about issues of status, solidarity, and of distribution of social goods and power. According to de los Heros (2009: 173), CDA examines how texts represent and construct reality within a specific ideological system through implicit messages based on what is said and left unsaid. Therefore, CDA reveals how the ideological system is created and recreated by discourse/texts as well as social practices that serve certain groups maintain their privileges, power and access to goods and services in society by naturalizing their discourse and convincing people that their ideological interpretation is just reality.

Although there are many ways of conducting CDA, Rogers et al, (2005) observe that most analysts seem to center their analysis on both the choices of linguistic elements in a discourse and on the "texture" of that discourse. Halliday & Hasan (1976, p. 293) refer texture to the manner in which different elements in a text are associated or tied together to form a cohesive unity, which also "expresses the fact that that it (the text) relates as a whole to the environment in which it is placed. According to Rogers et al (2005: 180), many CDA analysts have adopted and adapted *Systemic Functional Linguistics* or SFL as an analytical tool where language use (i.e., speaker's language choices) is examined in relation to its functionality within the social world. This is evident in the work of Fairclough, (2003); Gee, (2004, 2006); and Meyer & Wodak, (2004), where meaning is interpreted as the result of the user's selection and realization of linguistic forms based on three metafunctions of language; (a) representational: how language serves to interpret the world, (b) interpersonal: how relationships between interlocutors (i.e., social distance) are manifested in language in the text as well as the "attitude" encoded in it, such as feelings, attitudes and judgements of the speaker/writer, and (c) textual: how language creates discourses and ideas by connecting different linguistic levels and manipulating its resources (i.e., use of connectors, selection of words, etc.)

In this paper, the analytical framework utilized here consists mainly of Critical Discourse Analysis or CDA with some essential notions taken from Systemic Functional Linguistics or SFL. The selection of CDA and SFL as analytical tool is related to their focus on the examination of how language functions in society playing an important role in the construction of hegemonic ideologies that some social groups benefit from.

Why look at policy?

The relationship between policy and change is an ambiguous one (Taylor et al., 1997:153), given that change certainly occurs regardless of policy interventions, and that policy can result (intentionally or otherwise) in little or no change. So, why does policy matter at all? What do we hope to achieve via policy?

According to Alford (2005), educational policy matters as it conveys to educators and the interested community the what, how and why of institutionally prioritised educational beliefs and practices. Alford further adds that policy texts, as instruments of such communication, carry with them certain values. Such values are mediated by words and reified as a range of conversing discourses. To Fairclough (1989), and Gee (1996), discourses are conceived of as "socially determined" (Fairclough 1989: 23; Gee, 1996), and thus are not unitary and homogeneous but instead are characterised by diversity and by power struggle (Fairclough 1989. p. 24). Stevens (2003) opines that critical analysis of policy relating to education is useful in order to make visible its possibilities and limitations. Taylor (1997) argues that CDA helps enhance the scope of policy investigation in a range of ways, not just focusing on policy as texts or products of social structures but also in relation to making policy processes within

broader discursive fields in which policies are generated and implemented. As Codd (1988, cited by Alford 2005) succinctly puts it:

Policy documents can be said to constitute the official discourse of the state. Thus policies produced by and for the state are obvious instances in which language serves a political purpose, constructing particular meanings and signs that work to mask social conflict and foster commitment to the notion of universal public interest. In this way, policy documents produce real social effects through the production and maintenance of consent. (Codd 1988, p. 237)

Ball, Goodson & Maguire (2007: x) in their summary of educational policy published in *Journal of Educational Policy* in the past two decades or so conclude that 'education policy be read as a 'political response to the challenges and opportunities' which arise from the decomposition of Fordism and the economic tendencies of globalisations. The Malaysian Smart School Blueprint is certainly a document that reflects new education in new times which has adopted a technicist or scientific management form of rhetoric to explain the need for change.

The analysis in this paper is based on the understanding that texts are instances of social practice and are therefore selected and organized syntactic forms whose "content structure" represent and construct the ideological organization of a particular area of social life (Kress 1990). Our interest is carrying out CDA of the Smart School Conceptual Blueprint concerns the discourse constructed about the Smart school teachers in the Blueprint document. The purpose is to identify discourses that represent commonly held assumptions about what different participants and teachers in particular are constructed in terms of how these discourses represent continuity of particular practices and/or constitute a platform for change. In so doing, we hope to identify and explore the implications for curriculum, teachers and pedagogy and more particularly to ask 'what new notions of teachers, pedagogy, curriculum do these new forms generate?'

Using CDA in policy analysis

In terms of policy analysis in education, Taylor's (2004) illuminating literature survey shows that approaches to policy analysis in education have been to a wide extent influenced by discourse theory perspectives. This perspective, as pointed by Taylor (2004), sees policy making as 'an arena of struggle over meaning', where policies are seen as the outcomes of struggles 'between contenders of competing objectives, where language - or more specifically discourse - is used tactically' (p.435). Furthermore, Taylor points out that such an approach has been valuable in 'illuminating the politics of discourse in policy arenas and in exploring the relationship between policy texts and their historical, political, social, and cultural contexts'. However, Taylor acknowledges that these earlier approaches have only been able to suggest preferred readings and likely effects of policy texts, and not being able 'to augment social analysis with fine grained linguistic analysis' (p.435). She argues for the use of CDA in education policy analysis. Taylor (2004) suggests that CDA is particularly appropriate for critical policy analysis because it allows a detailed investigation of the relationship of language to other social processes, and of how language works within power relation. She argues that CDA provides the framework for systematic analysis, thereby allowing researchers and analysts to go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts *work*, or as Fairclough's (2001a, p. 240) puts it, 'the interdiscursive work of the text materializes in its linguistic and other semiotic features.' The obvious advantage of using CDA as an investigate tool in whatever the case or object of investigation is, as Meyer (2001) argues, is that 'CDA follows a different and a critical approach to problems, since it endeavours to make explicit power relationships which are frequently hidden, and thereby to derive results which are of practical relevance' (Meyer, 2001, p. 15).

Methodology

The next section outlines the methodological framework of the paper, in particular the analytical framework adopted and the socio-historical background of the policy document.

Analytical framework

The research design for this paper is modeled on Fairclough's framework (1999, 2001a). In this framework, discourse is seen as being "...simultaneously a piece of text, an instance of discursive

practice and an instance of social practice" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). In Fairclough's terms, text refers to the language analysis of texts, discursive practice to the nature of the processes of text production and interpretation, and social practice to "issues of concern in social analysis such as the institutional and organizational circumstances of the discursive event, and how that shapes the nature of the discursive practice" (Fairclough, 1992, p. 4). This model is based on three analytical traditions: close textual and linguistic analysis, macro-sociological traditions of analyzing social practice in relation to social structures, and the interpretivist, micro-sociological traditions of seeing social practice as something people actively produce and make sense of (Fairclough, 1992, p. 72).

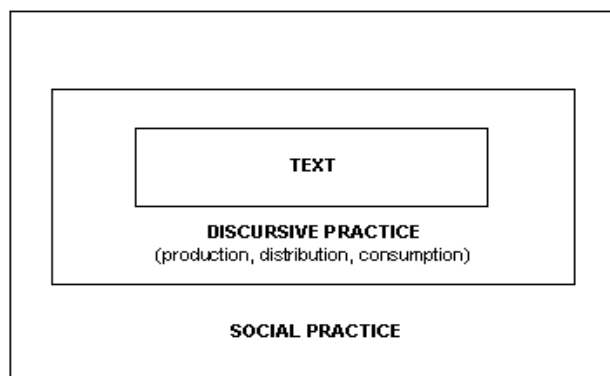


Fig.1 Fairclough's three-dimensional conception of discourse

Fairclough sees discourse as constructing, not merely reflecting, the social world. His "three-dimensional conception of discourse" (Fairclough 1992, p. 72), brings together three indispensable aspects, i.e. textual and conversational analysis, 'macro' level sociological analysis of the broad social practice, and a 'micro' level sociological perspective, based on an interpretivist analysis of discursive practice (see Figure 1 above).

Fairclough (2001, 2003) later updated his framework of CDA to amalgamate Bhaskar's concept of 'explanatory critique' (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 125) to his three-dimensional framework, giving rise to a 5-stage framework (see below).

The five-staged framework is presented as follows:

1. Focus upon a social problem which has a semiotic aspect.
2. Identify obstacles to it being tackled, through analysis of
 - a. the network of practices it is located within
 - b. the relationship of semiosis to other elements within the particular practice(s) concerned
 - c. the discourse (the semiosis itself)
 - structural analysis: the order of discourse
 - interactional analysis
 - interdiscursive analysis
 - linguistic and semiotic analysis
1. Consider whether the social order (network of practices) in a sense 'needs' the problem.
2. Identify possible ways past the obstacles
3. Reflect critically on the analysis.

(Fairclough, 2001a, p. 125)

Here, Fairclough is proposing a more robust framework which can be used in social scientific research. This framework tries to incorporate the view of language as an integral element of the material social process. This version of CDA 'is based upon a view of semiosis as an irreducible part of materi-

al social processes' where semiosis is seen to include 'all forms of meaning making-visual images, body language, as well as language' (Fairclough, 2001a, p. 122). According to Fairclough, semiosis figures in three ways of social practices – as a part of the social activity within a practice; in representations; and in the 'performances' of particular positions within social practices (p. 123).

Referring to the semiotic aspects of the framework, the key semiotic concepts associated with networks of social practices are *genres*, *discourse*, and *styles*. These are understood as: genres as ways of (inter)acting or relating (interactions); discourses as ways of representing (representations); and styles as ways of beings or identities. All three concepts are said to be dialectally related in that 'discourses are enacted in genres, discourses are inculcated in styles, actions and identities are represented in discourses' (Fairclough, 2003, pp. 19-20). The semiotic aspect of the social order is an order of discourse, which Fairclough (2001a) describes as a particular way in which social practices are networked.

Applying the above conception to text analysis then, the model which Fairclough (2003) describes as a 'relational approach to text analysis' (p.35) explains that the relational view of texts and text analysis takes place as follows:

the 'internal' (semantic, grammatical, lexical (vocabulary)) relations of texts are connected with their 'external' relations (to other elements of social events, and to social practices and social structures) through the mediation of an 'interdiscursive' analysis of the genres, discourses and styles which they draw upon and articulate together. (p. 38)

Any analysis is selective and the textual features in focus in CDA are those that are most significant for a critical analysis, an analysis designed to contribute to understanding of power relations and ideological processes in discourse (Fairclough, 1989). Through an analysis of both syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations in a text, CDA can inform one's reading of a text by providing evidence for identifying underlying experiential, relational and expressive values in the choices made in relation to vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures. As Hanrahan (2002:5) puts it, 'CDA looks for clues in the text indicating ideological assumptions being made, including the way "difference" is handled or ignored, the way in which various voices are included or excluded, both within the text and intertextually, the way social events are represented, styles expressed, and values realized.'

Background of MSS policy document

The birth of Malaysian Smart School can be traced back a decade and a half ago in 1991, when the former Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamed, then declared in a speech to the Malaysian Business Council, of the Malaysian government's intention to transform Malaysia into a fully developed nation by the year 2020. To spearhead such a move, the Malaysian government embarked on an ambitious plan to leapfrog into the information age by providing intellectual and strategic leadership plans. These plans were conceptualized in the form of Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC). MSC is an integrated environment with seven unique elements and attributes, termed as 'flagship applications, to create the perfect global multimedia climate to "help companies of the world test the limits of technology and prepare themselves for the future" (MDC, 2000, cited by Kabilan, 2003).

The MSS is one of the seven applications of the MSC (other applications include Electronic Government, Multipurpose Card (Smart Card), Telemedicine, Research and Design Cluster, World Wide Manufacturing Webs, and Borderless Marketing). In general, the concept of Smart School revolves around the notion of using ICT as one of the tools to support and enhance the teaching-learning cycle. The idea of MSS is dedicated to the task of regaining excellence in Malaysia education by restructuring the entire teaching and learning environments in school with technology being the main catalyst of transformation. Starting from a nucleus of 90 pilot Smart Schools in 1999, the Smart school teaching concepts and materials, skills and technologies will eventually be rolled out to the rest of the 10 000 primary and secondary schools nation-wide by 2010.

The Smart School initiative has 5 main goals (Ministry of Education, 1997):

1. to encourage all-round development of the individual covering the intellectual, physical, emotional, and spiritual domains,
2. to provide opportunities for the intellectual to develop his or her own special strengths and abilities,
3. to produce a thinking workforce that is also technologically literate,

4. to demonstrate education such that every child has equal access to learning and,
5. to increase the participation of all stakeholders such as parents, the community and the private sector, in the education process.

The policy document (The Malaysian Smart School Conceptual Blueprint – available online at <http://www.mscomalaysia.my/codenavia/portals/msc/images/pdf/ss-blueprint.pdf>) is an official document produced by the Smart School Project Team, a selective team of experts chosen from industry representatives, Multimedia development Corporation officers and officers from the Ministry of Education. After almost 6 months of intensive collaboration in which members of the team mobilised and harnessed their expertise and experience together, conducted study visits to Smart School in various parts of the world, and sought consultations and advice from a wide range of experts in the field of education and industry, the Blueprint document was finally produced in June 1997. The culmination of this high profile effort was the production of a 173-page document called the “Smart School Flagship Application: The Malaysian Smart School - A Conceptual Blueprint”, which in essence is the reform proposal for the implementation of the Smart Schools. The Blueprint reflects the Malaysian Smart School concept and together with the Malaysian Smart School Implementation Plan and the Concept Requests for Proposals (CRFPs), provides the guidelines and implementation strategies for the reform.

Critical Discourse Analysis of the Text

In the analysis that follows, we will be examining the linguistic and semiotic choices and the ideological work that have been made in the writing and layout of the policy document. Citing Edwards and Nicoll (2001), Taylor (2004) reminds us that policy texts use rhetoric and metaphor to persuade and influence the reader. The analysis in this paper is based on the understanding that texts are instances of social practice and are therefore selected and organized syntactic forms whose ‘content structure’ represent and construct the ideological organization of a particular area of social life’ (Alford, 2005).

The analysis will focus specifically on two major sections of the document (that have relevance to teaching and learning), namely, *The Malaysian Smart Schools: Executive Summary* (p.8-17) and *Smart Schools in Malaysia: A Quantum Leap* (p.129-141).

Social analysis

For this part of the analysis, Fairclough (2001b: 251) suggests one should ‘go outside the text, using academic and non-academic sources to get a sense of its social context.’ I will begin by examining the historical context before attempting to identify the social problem in its semiotic aspect. “It can be no accident that there is today no wealthy, developed country that is information-poor and no information-rich country that is poor and underdeveloped...” (Dr Mahathir Mohamed, “The Way forward - Vision 2020”, 1991 cited in Harris, 1998)

The above remark made by the then Prime Minister of Malaysia, Dr Mahathir Mohamed in 1991 is the catalyst behind Malaysia’s response to the onslaught of globalization and the change of world order. In that speech, he challenged Malaysians to work towards developing Malaysia as an industrialised nation by the year 2020. He argued that the country would need to change the balance of its economic activities from predominantly manufacturing to being a major service provider, particularly for other Asian countries, if it were to survive the information age. Following that speech and various governmental policies later, the idea of ‘knowledge-based economy’ is represented to a large extent via the semiotic process of restructuring and rescaling of orders of discourse, involving new structural and scalar relationships between genres, discourses and styles in various subsequent government policies, notably among them are the concept of Multimedia Super Corridor (MSC) and the Malaysian Smart School (MSS). In short, global capitalism is presented as a social problem, one that is external, unchangeable, and unquestionable – one that must be responded to, the quicker and more comprehensive the response, the better it is for the country.

The Blueprint exemplified the interweaving of global and local elements which characterize contemporary policy making, and it is obvious that the document is a distinctive response to rapid global pressures for industry restructure and the implementation of a training reform agenda (Ball, Goodson & Maguire, 2007: x). The Blueprint has neatly interwoven economic priorities and social goals into its framework. The reform agenda of the Blueprint is towards building social capital as well as human

capital, and a strong commitment to public schooling. Smart Schools have a key role to play in building social capital in communities to face the global economy of the 21st century.

This Vision (Vision 2020) calls for sustained, productivity-driven growth, which will be achievable only with a technologically literate, critically thinking work force prepared to participate fully in the global economy of the 21st century. (p.9)

It also seems that public informational elements and political elements are interwoven with the more conventional policy genre in this policy document. As Fairclough has observed, semiosis 'in the form of essentially promotional genres ... are a crucial element in producing change' (2001a:254). Fairclough (2001b) further maintains that communication has become increasingly important in contemporary life, and often for governments this means 'communicating with or to the public in a one-sided way – even when the process is ostensibly public 'consultation'. Fairclough (2001a) argues that through promotional genres perceptions are 'managed', new discourses are articulated and become institutionalized.

Interdiscursive analysis

According to Fairclough (2001b:241) interdiscursive analysis 'works both paradigmatically in identifying which genres and discourses are drawn upon in a text, and syntagmatically in analysing how they worked together through the text.'

The Blueprint seems to be directed at the wider public, but the educational community is the obvious primary target, especially the major stakeholders mentioned in the document: teachers, principals, learners, Ministry of Education Officers, support staff, and parents. Its genre is hybrid, containing elements of policy genre interwoven with political material. The document is presented in a book-like format with a glossy dark blue cover, with headings and layout indicative of most governmental document - i.e. the use of an official government emblem and the bold phrase of 'Government of Malaysia' placed at the top centre of cover page. At the bottom page is the Multimedia Super corridor logo, signifying that the Blueprint as part of a larger government initiative to transform Malaysia towards achieving a developed nation status by the year 2020 (popularly known as 'Vision 2020'). (See Appendix 1)

The genre evident in the Blueprint is one of informational and political, and the main purpose seems to be to 'sell' the reform to parents and the wider community. The text is written persuasively as a message from the leader wanting the best for its people, explaining the government's vision for the reform. The discourses are interwoven around the notion of a 'developed nation' by 2020, with a focus on the **future** and **change**.

Malaysia intends to transform its educational system, in line and in support of the nation's drive to fulfil Vision 2020. This vision calls for sustained, productivity-driven growth, which will be achievable only with a technologically literate, critically thinking work force prepared to participate fully in the global economy of the 21st century. (p.9)

Change is a major theme of the document: Change is promoted at every level of the hierarchical system, from state, department, school and individual.

*Malaysia needs to make the critical **transition** from an industrial economy to a leader in the Information Age. In order to make this vision a reality, Malaysians need to make a fundamental **shift** towards a more technologically literate, thinking work force... (p.130)*

As a result of these **forces of change**, the document argues for educational change:

*To make this shift, the education system must undergo a radical **transformation**... (p.130)*

*The schooling culture must be **transformed** from one that is memory-based to one that is informed, thinking, creative and caring, through leading-edge technology... (p.130)*

Change is promoted at every level of the system involved: hardware, software and people ware. For instance, the various 'stakeholders' such as teachers, principals, learners, Ministry of Education Officers, support staff, and parents; school management and governance and infrastructure are slated for change.

Education system needs to change:

The current system stretches the weak students and restricts the smartest. In the Smart Schools, technology will help provide the flexibility to remove this stress in the system... (p.131)

... *Smart Schools will lead to the full democratisation of education* (p.130).

Schools need to change:

By the year 2010, all the approximately ten thousand Malaysian schools will be 'Smart Schools'. In these schools, learning will be self-directed, individually-paced, continuous and reflective... (p.130).

Principals need to change:

With school management computerised and on-line, the principals will be able to plan, manage and utilise both human and physical resources effectively... (p.132)

Teachers need to change:

Teachers will now play the role of 'a guide on the side thus doing away with their traditional role of 'the sage on the stage' (p.131)

Students need to change:

...students will learn to exercise courage in making decisions and assuming responsibility... (p.130)

...students will learn to process and manipulate information... (p.130)

In a text imbued with discourse of change, *discourse of uncertainty* however is not as pervasive as one would anticipate. This is rather surprising considering that most discourse related to 'new times' reflects change, challenges and uncertainties that symbolises post-modernity and post capitalism. Perhaps being an important document, adopting a positive overture might be more advantageous to spur and motivate the public. However, leaving speculation aside (not the purpose of this paper anyway), here are some fragments on the discourse of uncertainty found in the text:

*The **challenges** ahead is a great one...* (p.134)

*Implementing Smart Schools successfully in Malaysia will be a **complex task**...* (p.16)

The *rhetoric of globalization* is quite dominant and is used as leverage for much of the needed change. As Fairclough (2001a:129) argues, global capitalism in its neo-liberal form is pervasively constructed as external, unchangeable, and unquestionable – the simple 'fact of life' which we must respond to.

The Smart School initiative represents an investment in the future productivity of Malaysia's work force and a down payment on the nation's future prosperity (p.17)

Smart Schools is therefore no longer a fashionable luxury but the only way forward. (p.130)

Sitting alongside the rhetoric of globalization are distinct **economic metaphors** such as 'stakeholding' and 'investment', illustrating the instrumental, exchange-value logic that underpins the mechanisms to achieve the Malaysian government's goal of social justice. For example:

Transforming traditional schools into Smart Schools represents a major undertaking. ...Success will require:

- *Support from many stakeholders, including all agencies in the educational system;*
- *Sufficient funds to establish and maintain Smart Schools; ...* (p.17).

*The Smart School initiative represents an **investment** in the future productivity of Malaysia's work force and a **down payment** on the nation's future **prosperity*** (p.17).

These statements are instantiations of the 'substantive shift in schools policy rhetoric towards greater economic responsiveness' according to Mulderrig (2003:3). In her critical analysis of social actors in New Labour's education policy, a key theme she found running through reforms in education has been their central function in economic competitiveness, manifested in the proliferation of educational strategies aimed at producing a better skilled workforce. The same theme seems to resonate in the Blueprint as well.

Another theme evident in the Blueprint document is 'nation-building', underpinned by the National Philosophy of Education. The philosophy of education clearly outlines the main objective of education in Malaysia as to develop the potential of individuals holistically in an integrated manner; to contribute to the harmony and betterment of the family, the society and the nation at large; and to inculcate a sense of Malaysian-ness and patriotism (MoE, 1997). This is hardly surprising considering Malaysia is a multi-racial country and education is used as a tool for unification and promotion of a Malaysian nation.

Linguistic analysis

Fairclough (2001b) cautions that language analysis can be 'a complex and many-sided process' (p.241) and he suggests that one might have to be 'selective and schematic' about it. To do that, we will adopt Taylor's (2004:437) approach to analysis, which entails analyzing the following aspects of the texts:

- Whole text organization (structure, e.g. narrative, argumentative, etc.),
- Clause combination,
- Grammatical and semantic features (transitivity, action, voice, mood, modality), and words (e.g., vocabulary, collocations, use of metaphors, etc.).

Whole text organization

The Blueprint is organised rhetorically in the form of problem-solution structure, albeit not in the typical sense (for instance it does not follow Fairclough's (2001b:258) prototypical framing of 'objective + problem + solution + evaluation of solution'). Here, the Blueprint only foregrounds the 'objective' and 'solution', whilst downplaying the 'problem'. Nevertheless one could easily infer that the Blueprint is in fact the Malaysian government's response to the challenge of globalisation, with the proposed educational change as its key solution. According to Taylor (2004), such text structure is an aspect of the promotional character of the document. The Blueprint conveys the government's reform propaganda with the purpose to inform and persuade the public to throw in their undivided support. It sets out by highlighting the urgent need to transform the educational system (objective) and delineates what and how changes ought to be made (solution). On the whole the document consists of a persuasive but well-thought out change guidelines for the whole educational system. The whole text organization has the intertextuality of a mishmash of policy statement element, public information element and political persuasion element.

Clause combination

Simple sentences predominate the text, but compound and complex sentences are seen as well. The document is written as a set of assertions and is mostly presented as a series of declarative statements with high density of the use of modals such as **needs to** (expressing obligation), **must** (expressing necessity), to indicate a sense of urgency:

...needs to make a critical transition

...the education system must undergo a radical change...

...the schooling culture must be transformed...

The syntax is mainly 'paratactic' rather than 'hypotactic' (Fairclough, 2001b: 260), i.e. compound rather than complex. As suggested by Fairclough (op cit) paratactic combinations are particularly obvious with the list of bullet points. This Fairclough argues 'sets up a non-dialogical divide between those who are making all the assertions, and those they are addressed at – those who tell and those who are told' (p.260). Having said that, however, there is a section of the document that is ostensibly more dialogic than others, *Policy Implications* (p.16-17). Here, questions are apparently directed to teachers, for example, '*What policies need to be amended, if students are to progress at their own pace according to their own capabilities, and if students are to be free to learn in a variety of ways?*' (p.16). Although these questions appear to represent the voice of teachers, they are, according to Taylor (2004:442), "part of a strategy often used in policy documents to persuade the readers to take up the ideas (discourses) being advanced".

Grammatical, Semantic Features and vocabulary

Turning to time and tense, one can detect a constant alternation between the use of the present tense and the future tense in the sentences used. Sentences such as these: "The Malaysian Smart School **is** a learning institution that has been systematically reinvented...To function effectively, the Smart School **will** require appropriately skilled staff, well-designed supporting processes..."(p.10) are commonly featured in the document. However, the use of present tense is more prominent in sections

where explanatory (informational) notes are given. For instance, on the section of '*The Malaysian Smart School Vision of Curriculum*' (p.28), sentences such as 'The curriculum "emphasises", "develops", "reflects", "fosters", "focuses", etc.' are presented.

In terms of voice and modality, the pervasive use of the 'will' modal with the declarative mood gives the sense of a government in perfect and solitary control. One notes that the blueprint is imbued with the voice of authority, where the language of telling predominates. Most of the sentences are declaratives, indicating statements of facts. Authority is further reinforced by the use of modal verbs expressing a high degree of certitude: 'Malaysia **needs to** make a critical transition from an industrial economy to a leader in the Information Age. Malaysians **need to** make a fundamental shift ... To make this shift, the education system **must** undergo a radical transformation.' (p.130). This voice of authority is reinforced by the use of **numbers**: 'By the year **2010**, all the approximately **10, 000** Malaysian schools will be "Smart Schools" (p.130). At the same time as creating an authoritative tone, the use of emphatic '**will**' also introduces a sense of urgency: 'Smart Schools **will** lead to the full democratisation of education.'; 'The curriculum **will** therefore...'; 'The schools **will** nurture...'. This urgency is supported by the following example: 'Smart Schools is therefore no longer a fashionable luxury but **the only way forward**.' The expression 'the only way forward' is not just a 'voice' of promotion, but also a call to action. Overall, the document presents the government as a far-sighted actor and mover in the change endeavour, which Fairclough (2001b) suggests is another promotional character of the document.

In terms of vocabulary used, there are examples of new hybrid terms such as *knowledge economy*, *information age*, *learning society*, *Smart Schools*, *managers of learning experiences*, etc. Many words used also draw on the discourse of change: *change*, *future*, *driving force*, *transition*, *adapt*, *move*, *transform*, *reinvented*, *reconceptualised*, *aligning*, etc. The emphasis upon neo-liberal words of change appears to legitimise the theoretical, cultural and ideological significance of the reform agenda.

Implications to the implementation in Malaysian schools

What are the implications that arise out of this analysis? To what extent does the constructed discourse of the policy represent continuity of particular practices or constitute a platform for change?

The new teaching and learning agenda envisaged in the MSS opens up a lot of ambivalences and uncertainties for teachers who are trying to do their best for learners in schools. Managing the shifting orientations of learners to knowledge is one of the major challenges facing the teaching profession. The teaching and learning processes alluded to briefly earlier seem to advocate the development of schools as 'knowledge-building communities' (Scardamalia & Berietter, 1999, cited in Edwards et al. 2002). The outcomes of these communities are not necessarily the tangible products so frequently offered as proof of work completed, such as a report or a webpage. Instead, as Edwards *et al.* suggest, 'they (the outcomes) include the contributions made to developing understanding within a group of pupils, new understandings that are shared, a capacity for effective problem-solving and reflective revision of previously held ideas' (2002:121). To what extent are Malaysian teachers ready and willing to embrace these transformations? More importantly perhaps is how these transformations are being constructed and played out in the reform proposal.

For a start, the reform proposal itself makes no secret of the monumental task confronting Smart School innovation. In fact, a section of the document policy on *Policy Implications* acknowledges the complexities involved – "implementing Smart Schools successfully in Malaysia will be a complex task, requiring changes to existing policies, procedures, and practices, both written and unwritten" (Ministry of education, 1997). The section on *Teaching-Learning processes* identifies three main challenges confronting Malaysian Smart Schools:

Table 1: Teaching-Learning Processes (MoE, p. 16)

Teaching - learning	What policies need to be amended, if students are to progress at their own pace according to their own capabilities, and if students are to be free to learn in a variety of ways?
Assessment	What will be the best regime for comprehensively and periodically assessing student aptitudes, and what supporting infrastructure will that require? How can tests be administered fairly in multiple ways, including on-line?
Selection of materials	What changes will be needed in the process for selecting teaching-learning materials to ensure that the “best” Smart School materials are chosen?

Of particular interest is the absence of explicit agency in the questions posed, an obvious departure from the more dominant authoritative discourse demonstrated in the earlier discussion. Here, one realises the discourse is more dialogic, and less authoritative. There is no direct statement as of which institutions or bodies are responsible to oversee the changes. One cannot help but notice the strategic shift of agency from the government to the use of an inanimate subject, specifically the persistent use of objective modality, ‘the Smart Schools ...’, which serves to deflect or reduce the responsibility on the part of the government as the actor or mover. In so doing, the agency of enacting change is shifted to an entity which has yet to be formalised (the Smart Schools). Could it be a case, as Flowerdew (2004, p. 590) quoting Bargiela-Chiappini (n.d.:5) puts it, of ‘depersonalisation through the effacement of agency, embedded in a style purporting objectivity and factuality, which has the effect of suggesting consensus, and therefore discouraging dissent’?

The blueprint on the whole seems to contain discourses that involve two parallel themes: state provision and school empowerment. The emphasis on the teacher’s role in interpreting and operationalizing the policy serves to locate the power and responsibility for the success or failure of implementing the Smart School reform mostly in the hands of teachers and principals. The policy agenda seems to be more concentrated on questions of implementation and management change in schools and classrooms and there is silence concerning the nature of the policy, which can be described as steering at a distance. The underlying logic is that deficiencies in learners’ knowledge, skills or attitudes are reflections of how schools and teachers carry out their practice and it is for them to remedy the situation. The overriding concern of the discourse in the policy seems to echo Mulderrig’s point of ‘legitimising and enacting the ongoing project of globalization and the concomitant changes in the relationship between the state and the economy’ (2003, p. 15).

The discourse constructed in the *Teaching and Learning Processes* section of the policy seems to emphasize the dominant discourse of what teachers ought to be. Although much of the ideology is taken from best practices (mostly adopted from Western contexts), questions need to be asked as to relative relevance and viability of these practices in the local Malaysian context, pedagogically, socially and culturally. Taking into consideration lessons from past reforms, how sure can one be that these seemingly newer and better practices are going to work? Theoretically speaking, the suggested practice is appealing but habits and attitudinal changes are notoriously difficult to change (Fullan, 2001). Teachers, especially those who have been in the profession for some time and who have personally witnessed and experienced various reforms before would no doubt be more sceptical and critical of the feasibility of the suggested guidelines for change. The ‘silencing’ or marginalisation of traditional practices and ‘tried and tested’ pedagogy has not helped either; in fact in our opinion it might even exacerbate resistance or non-adoption of the suggested guidelines.

Lastly, one also notices a move in the document that calls for stronger partnerships, collaboration and participation from various stakeholders and agencies in the educational system at district, state and national level. In our observation, such a practice is rather new and unfamiliar to most teachers, as they have always been expected to act as a mere conduit in a highly monolithic hierarchical set-up, much akin to what Edwards et al. (2002, p.129) suggest, ‘Here the knowledge; there the learner – you, the teacher, now deliver’. Even so, specifically how such endeavours could be done (what deliverance to deliver) is not further elaborated. As a result, one cannot help but feel apprehensive of the rhetoric used in the persuasive document. The outcome might be a facade of change, well-developed policy rhetoric but an enormous challenge to achieve a significant impact on schools.

Conclusion

The analysis showed that, the Malaysian Smart School Blueprint policy like many texts, particularly those from government services, can be considered a hybridised text containing competing discourses. In the case of the MSS policy, discourses for inclusion of best educational practices sit alongside the more traditional discourses of student (and teacher) deficit or need. This analysis has revealed that the discourses evident in the Blueprint can be seen as speculative, evolving and filled with discursive tension. In using CDA as a tool, it has been the intention of this article to help raise awareness of the various parties involved to be more critical of the ideologically invested discourses to which they are subjected and the nature of all texts as complex representations and constructions of social practices, their attendant ideological positions and power relations.

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