A critical discourse problematization framework for (disability) policy analysis
“good cop/bad cop” strategy

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to present a composite framework for critical policy analysis drawing from discourse analysis and post-structuralist analysis. Drawing on an interpretive paradigm (Yanow, 2014), this paper provides a thick description (Geertz, 1973) of the processes involved in the application of these tools in a critical policy analysis project, focusing on disability policy within the Irish context. Methodologically, this is a resourceful cross-fertilization of analytical tools to interrogate policy, highlighting its potential within critical disability policy analysis and beyond.

Design/methodology/approach – Merging a critical discourse analysis framework and a policy problematization approach, the combination of tools presented here, along with their associated processes, is referred to as the critical discourse problematization framework.

Findings – Potentially, the framework can also be employed across a number of cognate social policy fields including education, welfare and social justice.

Practical implications – The value of this paper lies in its potential to be used within analytical practice in the field of critical (disability) policy work by offering an evaluation of the analytical tools and theoretical framework deployed and modeled across an entire research process.

Social implications – The framework has the potential and has been used successfully as a tool for disability activism to influence policy development.

Originality/value – The analytical framework presented here is a methodically innovative approach to the study of policy analysis, marrying two distinct analytical tools to form a composite framework for the study of policy text.

Keywords Qualitative research methods, Critical discourse analysis, Social policy, Critical policy analysis, Disability policy, Policy problematizations

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

This paper proposes an innovative method for policy analysis, the critical discourse problematization framework (CDPF), adding to the growing contribution of discursive and problematization approaches to the critical study of policy. Our interest in this area of study has been sparked by recent calls for innovation in qualitative research methodologies (Taylor and Coffey, 2009) and Hyatt’s (2013a) concern at the dearth of practical approaches to assist those engaged in policy analysis.

Innovation in qualitative research

Innovation in qualitative research has increasingly been regarded as a valuable and necessary aspect of maintaining the sustainability of social science within global knowledge economies. Moreover, it is regarded as a matter of survival in terms of the capacity of future academic endeavors to (re)produce this knowledge (Taylor and Coffey, 2008). As we inhabit a world characterized by new textual formations and technologies, emerging discourses and
new forms of identity, contemporary policy researchers must look to “new, hybrid blends of analytic techniques and social theories” (Luke, 2002, p. 98).

However, innovation in this sense is not necessarily limited to the creation of new methods, but can equally be applied to the adaption and hybridization of established research methods in the construction of new designs, concepts and approaches (Taylor and Coffey, 2008); in other words, “selecting good ideas and exploiting their potential” (Taylor and Coffey, 2009, p. 526). Following Taylor and Coffey’s proposal, the proposed heuristic toolkit in this paper is constructed through a combination of Hyatt’s (2013b) critical higher education policy discourse analysis (CHEPDA) framework and Bacchi’s (2009) what’s the problem represented to be (WPR) approach.

Hyatt (2013a) identifies policy analysis as a key element of doctoral programs and thus proposes a framework for CDA in response to concerns regarding a dearth of practical approaches to do so. Extending the CHEPDA framework (Hyatt, 2013b), this study has the potential to illuminate the policy analysis process through the practical application of an innovative approach to the study of policy text; the aim being to showcase CDPF at work in the interests of enhancing research capacity (Taylor and Coffey, 2009).

The marriage of CDA and policy problematization approaches is a particularly beneficial hybrid, bringing together complimentary approaches to policy analysis to achieve the dual objectives of policy analysis and critique. “Critique” from this perspective is understood from a Foucauldian perspective – not concerned with whether a policy is good or bad – but the type of assumptions, accepted norms and frameworks of thinking upon which the accepted policy practices are based (Bacchi, 2009, p. xv). While a policy problematization approach allows the analyst to identify and problematize policy constructions, discourse analysis adds other social, cultural and cognitive dimensions. Likewise, CDA on its own does not address policy problematization. But together, the combined approach offers a comprehensive, symbiotic framework to undertake the critical analysis of policy.

Critical qualitative inquiry community
Denzin (2009, p. 142) identifies at least four pedagogical stances within the critical qualitative inquiry community: discipline-based qualitative research focused on accumulating fundamental knowledge about social processes and institutions; qualitative policy research aimed at having an impact on current programs and practices; and public intellectuals, public social scientists and cultural critics who use qualitative inquiry and interpretive work to address current issues and crises in the public arena. The fourth stance, which is the focus of much post-structural analytical work, is that which this study is concerned with critical qualitative approaches, which have as their core aim the disruption and destabilization of public policy and social discourses. In essence, post-structural policy analysis involves a process of interrogating the embedded assumptions within policy with the objective of challenging the conceptual premises on which they are grounded. Documentary analysis has therefore come to play an important role in critical policy to analysis. Employed within qualitative research, this form of policy study requires that the policy to texts(s) be examined and interpreted in order to gain understanding and meaning, and develop empirical knowledge (Corbin and Strauss, 2008).

Central to the CDPF framework proposed here is Ball’s (1993) conceptualization of policy as discourse, diverging from traditional rational approaches of understanding policy to the one of criticality. From a critical perspective, policy is not a fixed rational entity but “a discursive process embedded within social, relational process And temporal contexts: It’s a process invested with power relations, it’s a political process” (Ball in Mainardes, 2015, p. 184). Government policy, Bacchi (2009) argues, “enjoys a privileged position, given that its understandings ‘stick’ – that is, its version of problems (and solutions) are published and implemented, taking on ‘lives of their own […] they exist in the real” (p. 33). Policy subjects,
from this perspective are not considered individuals with fixed identities formed through
self-directed agency; rather, they are understood as the effects of practices, which
themselves are influenced by the effects of power and discourse. Power here is understood
as “the ability of actors (whether individual or collective) to ‘have an effect’ upon the context,
which defines the range of possibilities of others” (Hay, 2002, p. 185). This is ultimately
significant where matters of disability are concerned. Hence, this study is particularly
concerned with the power of language to construct identities and the effects therein on
disabled people’s lives.

Critical discourse analysis (CDA)
CDA draws on systemic functional linguistics’ approach to language as social semiotic
and post-structural analyses of power to investigate the way language use affects social
and the cultural dimensions. For Wodak and Meyer (2001, p. 2), the aim of CDA is to
uncloak “opaque as well as transparent structural relationships of domination,
discrimination, power and control as manifested in language instead of”. Incorporating
a multiplicity of methods, CDA is a problem-oriented, interdisciplinary, social science
research approach, bringing together social theory and textual analysis (Hyatt, 2013b).
Focusing on discourse alone, however, is not enough for critically examining policy; it
must be accompanied by a consideration of how discourse functions socially, politically
and culturally within the policy context. The theoretical lens deployed in this study is a
critical disabilities studies perspective (see, e.g. Goodley, 2014). It is through this lens
that the discourse of Comprehensive Employment Strategy for People with Disabilities
2015–2024 [CES] (Government of Ireland, 2015) is processed and questioned.

CDA and policy analysis
CDA recognizes that the prioritization and presentation of policy issues are the result of
power relations, multiple contestations and conflicts – in other words, “what is real” depends
on what is “presented as real” by those in positions of power (Bacchi, 2009; Hyatt, 2013b).
At its core, CDA seeks to engage in ways of criticizing and destabilizing prevailing and
normative discourses as a means of questioning social, economic and political power. This,
by its nature, is a political endeavor, speaking to the “need to disrupt and denaturalize the
workings of power and knowledge, and to query existing distributions of material
and discourse resources among human communities” (Luke, 2004, p. 150). Thus, a CDA
approach allows the researcher to undertake a detailed systematic examination of the
relationship between language and other social processes and the role of language within
power relations “to go beyond speculation and demonstrate how policy texts work” (Taylor,
2004). As Gale and Molla (2015) observe, in the policy-making process, policy makers use
specific discursive constructions to portray their agendas, the seriousness of the problem
and the urgency of the solutions proposed.

The appropriateness and potential of CDA for the critical study of policy text have
been previously highlighted (Fairclough, 2013; Grue, 2011; Liasidou, 2011). Motivated by
Foucault’s (1972) approach toward power, language and society, these scholars attempt to
expose power relations, ideology and social injustice in a variety of discourses of powerful
political, economic and social institutions, while illuminating the normative bases of their
arguments. In this regard, it is an explicitly critical approach, its central tenet being to
reveal the normative discursive construction of power relations embedded within policy
discourses and in its commitment to progressive social change (Taylor, 2004); as Luke
(2004, p. 150) puts it, “it is this will towards the normative that puts the ‘critical’ in critical
discourse analysis”.

Liasidou (2008, 2011) in particular, has demonstrated the potential of this approach to the
critique of disability policy focusing on document analysis. Due to a climate of deepening
neoliberal and economic imperatives, which has seen the most vulnerable within Irish society bearing the burden of austerity cuts, coupled with Ireland’s delay in ratifying the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities (UNCPRPD), the rationale for undertaking a critical analysis of Ireland’s disability policy becomes increasingly urgent. Inspired by Liasidou’s contribution to the literature, this study’s focus is on the recently published CES (Government of Ireland, 2015).

**Policy problematization**

Policy problematization offers a critical approach to the study of policy. Problematization is based upon the premise that rather than policies reacting to “problems” to be solved, they in fact play a significant role in shaping or framing the problem to be addressed. While not suggesting misrepresentation or malign intent, this approach recognizes that all policies by their nature carry implicit representations of problems that bring with them implications for how people are treated within society and how we are conditioned to understand the social world and ourselves as citizens. The main goal of studying problematizations, therefore, “is to dismantle taken-for-granted fixed essences and show how they have come to be” (Bacchi, 2012, p. 2).

Drawing, as Bacchi (2012) does, on a Foucauldian understanding of this concept, problematization here is understood as a strategy for developing a critical consciousness, whereby taken for granted “truths” are questioned and challenged in order to unearth the thinking that constitutes policy problems. It involves critical inquiry into the way policy issues are cast and framed as problems to be solved. Bacchi (2009) distinguishes between a problematization as a noun and problematize as a verb: The former refers to the way in which an issue is represented or put forward by policy makers as the “problem” to be addressed; the latter refers to the process of interrogating the “problem representations” themselves.

**The CHEPDA framework**

Although developed for the purpose of critical analysis of higher education policy, the CHEPDA framework (Hyatt, 2013b) is transdisciplinary, offering a purposeful approach for engaging in critical policy study regardless of the policy domain, as this study elucidates. Theoretically, the framework aligns with Fairclough’s (1995) CDA approach, focusing on the relationship of language to power. Codd (1988, p. 243) notes:

> The power that is exercised through discourse is a form of power which permeates the deepest recesses of civil society and provides the material conditions in which individuals are produced both as subjects and as objects.

However, the CHEPDA framework does not purport to offer a prescriptive universal approach to policy analysis, nor is it, intended as a prescriptive tool. It invites researchers instead to take only those aspects of the frame which they find useful for their engagement with policy in accordance with their agenda and the context of the policy being examined. In this respect, the framework is particularly valuable to policy analysis that aims to bring about social transformation and change. This is essentially a discursive endeavor “where discourses are viewed as socially and culturally formed” (Hyatt, 2013a, p. 837). The framework’s utility is demonstrated by the fact that it has recently been deployed in a number of critical policy studies (Mooney Simmie, 2014; Lucas, 2014; Wiggan, 2018; Van Aswegen and Shevlin, 2019). The CHEPDA framework comprises two elements: contextualization and deconstruction.

**Contextualizing CES**

Linking the discourse of the broader social and political context provides an insight into the processes of social and cultural change taking place through a synchronic context...
(at a specific moment in time) and over the course of a diachronically relevant era (over time). Thus, the relationship between historical events and their social contexts can be seen as an “unpredictable and fluid tangle requiring a critical analysis that delves beneath the chronology of policy as event” (Peters, 2007, p. 100). Key to this stage of analysis is the concept of rhetorical structuring, which argumentation theory calls “the warrant.”

**Warrant.** In this context, the policy warrant is understood as “the justification, authority, or reasonable grounds […] established for some act, course of action, statement or belief” (Hyatt, 2013a, pp. 50-51). Drawing on Cochran-Smith and Fries (2001), the framework identifies three categories of warrant: evidentiary, accountability and political. The evidentiary warrant refers to a justification on the basis of the perceived credibility and trustworthiness of evidence provided, often presented as statistics, figures and forecasts, and constructed in such a way as to position evidence incontestable. The accountability warrant functions to influence the opinions of audience with regard to a sense of what is morally right or justifiable. Closely linked to this, the political warrant seeks justification by means of appeal on the basis of state or public interest. It can be observed through an expressed concern or pondered consideration for what “ought to be done,” sometimes alluding overtly or covertly, to potentially negative outcomes of an alternative approach, or indeed, lack thereof (Reyes, 2011). Paternalistic or charitable discourses frequently accompany warrants of this nature, particularly in relation to the issues of inclusion and social justice (Liasidou, 2016).

**Deconstruction**
This element of the CHEPDA framework engages directly with the policy text, aiming to identify discursive strategies through a number of analytical lenses and tools derived from CDA and critical literacy analysis. Of particular interest in this study is the concept of strategies of legitimation. Reyes (2011, p. 783) highlights how strategies of legitimation tend to be used by political leaders to “justify their political agenda or to maintain or alter the direction of a whole nation”. The CHEPDA framework, drawing on Van Leeuwen (2008), encompasses four modes of deconstruction through legitimation: authorization; rationalization; moral evaluation and mythopoesis, each of which can be seen at work throughout CES, as this study reveals.

**WPR approach**
The WPR approach (Bacchi, 2009) can be described as a questioning method for the critical study of policy. Two propositions underpin the approach. First, rather than evaluating policies for their ability to “solve” problems, WPR encourages the study of how policies construct problems (Bacchi 2009, pp. ix-xvii). On this premise, the WPR approach posits that by reading backward from any policy solution proposal, it is possible to capture what the “problem” is represented to be (x-xi). For Bacchi (2012, p. 4), every policy is a “prescriptive text,” setting out policy proposals that rely heavily on how a particular problem is constituted or framed. Examining policy proposals or solutions can reveal how the problem has been problematized and hence, the mental framework – the thinking that informs the problematization formation. To put it very simply, “policy meanings, values and assumptions are constituted in texts and discourses” (Gale and Molla, 2015, p. 811). Bacchi’s post-structuralist approach allows the policy analyst to examine how the use of language and the discourse surrounding a given problem representation affects the way in which the problem is understood and examines what possible presuppositions and assumptions lie therein. The second key proposition is that problematizations are central to the practice of government – to governing.
In contrast to traditional evaluative approaches, the goal of WPR is to probe the premises on which the problem representations are based, demanding the analyst to think deeply about the assumptions and presuppositions that lodge within and shape the policy, and to examine and critique the implications therein. As Stevens (2008, p. 71) argues: “to analyse how issues are framed then, provides a more engaged and critical reading of the word and the world, than in cataloguing which policies we like and which we don’t”. WPR, therefore, provides six guiding questions, which enable analysis at this level (Bacchi, 2009, p. 2):

1. What is the problem represented to be?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the problem?
3. How has this representation of the problem come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the problem be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?
6. Where or how has this representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How could it be questioned, disrupted and replaced?

Essentially, as used here, Questions 1–3 provide for a critical reading of the policy problematization, while Questions 4–6 allow the problematization to be problematized and critiqued.

Applying CDPF

The CES (Government of Ireland, 2015) was launched into the Irish disability policy landscape in October 2015. CES represents a significant policy event in Irish disability policy making, “affording the first opportunity in over a decade since the publication of the National Disability Strategy (NDS) (Government of Ireland, 2004), within which to examine the State’s conceptualisation of disability inclusion” (Van Aswegen, 2016, p. 9).

The relationship between disability and the state is complex and contentious (see, for example, De Wispelaere and Walsh, 2007; Scanlon et al., 2014). NDS was designed as a whole of government approach to the planning and implementation of disability policy to achieve its vision, bringing a fundamental shift in how we plan for and provide for disability through the concept of mainstreaming. However, following Bacchi (2009), the aim here is not to assume that just because a policy has been published that this is to be lauded as achievement and adopted without critique. Consequently, this study proposes to conduct an interview of sorts with this policy as it makes its journey into implementation.

While a full analysis and critique of CES is beyond the scope and aim of this paper, the study aims to present a snapshot of how the CDPF operates as an interrogatory device for examining this policy. Bacchi’s WPR Questions 1–3 are deployed to undertake a critical reading of the policy, while the CHEPDA framework works in the background, locating and presenting evidence in the form of a series of snapshots taken from the policy text itself. The metaphor of snapshot provides a useful conceptualisation with which to present the evidence supporting the critical reading, allowing the researcher to capture moments of the policy event in the form of excerpts taken from the policy text, affording the opportunity to pause and reflect on the discourses and assumptions therein. While WPR provides the questions with which to interrogate the policy, the CHEPDA framework affords the means with which to support a critical reading of the policy with documentary evidence. In a sense, the CHEPDA framework takes the role of the silent partner, responding with evidence to the questions posed by WPR. Working as a team of interrogators to achieve the task of the analytical process, CDPF employs a “good cop/bad cop” strategy of investigation: Bacchi asking the tough questions; Hyatt doing the forensic work behind the scenes. Table I provides an illustration of how both tools work together.
Locating the problematization

Bacchi’s WPR kick-starts the critical reading of this policy by posing the first question in the interview process: What is the problem represented in CES to be? Drawing on the CHEPDA framework with careful attention to the language of justification, it is possible to pinpoint CES’ problematization in the form of three categories of warrant.

All three warrants from the CHEPDA framework are clearly visible in this snapshot (Figure 1). The accountability warrant is upfront and cuts straight to the point: economic independence, social inclusion and personal fulfillment are the desired outcomes this policy wishes to achieve. The evidentiary warrant authoritatively establishes a single troubling fact relating to the participation rates of disabled persons in the workforce; the use of the modifier “only” here serves to heighten the impact of the statement. Complex “causes” of the problem are identified before the worthy political warrant is presented gallantly based on being the right thing to do: “people with disabilities will not be left behind, as the economy recovers.” Notice the discourse of “recovery” here as it serves to frame the warrant in paternalistic tones of assurance and comfort, activating CES rhetorically, as a heroic and honorable rescuer of pitiful but deserving disabled people. Discursively, this is a clearly articulated problematization, framing the problem effectively with all three warrants in a neat package of problem, evidence and moral obligation, each in turn justifying the proposals set out in the policy. Taken together, the three warrants represent the “articulated warrant” of CES.

Question 2: framing the assumptions

WPR Question 2 requires consideration of the presuppositions or assumptions that underlie the problem representation, drawing on a form of Foucauldian archeology. This aspect of the analysis looks for what is included, foregrounded, backgrounded and excluded with the aim of unearthing the conceptual logic operating behind the text; in other words, the “meanings that must be in place in order for a particular problem representation to make sense” (Bacchi, 2009, p. 5). In the context of CES, Question 2 seeks to interrogate the policy’s
linguistic paraphernalia” (Liasidou, 2008, p. 484) for cues as to how disability is understood. The strategies of legitimation direct the study in locating the evidence required to address this question, by examining the ways in which the policy ideas are advanced and justified.

Authorization and rationalization. The legitimizing strategies of authorization are often closely associated to the evidentiary warrant (Hyatt, 2013b), both of which can be viewed contemporaneously in Figure 2; the authorization strategy building on the already established evidentiary warrants from the introduction chapter.

No definition of disability is offered in CES, instead an array of tables, charts and graphs sorting disabled people into categories of impairment and classification of capacity and functionings – the “clinical–medical discourses on which the mechanics of the welfare state depend” (Grue, 2011, p. 536).

The tables and categories in Figure 3 exemplify the hallmarks of rational legitimation – a deference to “precision and exactness” (Reyes, 2011, p. 787) and the “increased ordering of all realms” (Hook, 2010, p. 227), thus assigning to each, “his ‘true’ name, his ‘true’ place, his ‘true’ body, his ‘true’ disease” (Foucault, 1977, cited in Graham and Slee, 2008, p. 285). In addition, a quartet of heavyweight disability professionals and experts, including the World Health Organization (Government of Ireland, 2015, p. 35), trumpets an extensive evidence base emphasizing randomized control trials and chronic illness, declaring with certainty to “know what works for whom – and even when” (p. 66, emphasis added).

Moral evaluation. Moral evaluation, as a mode of legitimation, works by appealing to a value system on what is considered good or desirable (Hyatt, 2013b) and is closely linked to the political and accountability warrants. It can be seen to manifest itself in this policy by means of a charitable discourse heavily couched in soothing, paternalistic overtones. From the pitiful depiction of disabled people constructed in the warrant (Figure 1), CES (Government of Ireland, 2015) proceeds to congratulate itself on its “significant achievement”
requiring “concerted effort” “in bringing the strategy to fruition” (Government of Ireland, 2015, p. 3), despite challenging times and the “stubborn” nature of disability employment – “even at the height of the economic boom” (Government of Ireland, 2015, p. 5), The warrant is subsequently reinforced relentlessly throughout the narrative through a layer of “linguistic veneers that legitimise binary perspectives of normality and abnormality” (Liasidou, 2008, p. 484) as Figure 3 illustrates.

Silence. What is not accounted for in this narrative are the effects of seven years in which the burden of hardship, crisis and austerity policies were placed disproportionately on those least able to bear its impact. Silenced are the economic imperatives of disability retrenchment and benefit restructuring, which place the onus firmly on the individual to prove who is most disabled and therefore most deserving. Although CES legitimates its proposals drawing on an evidence base bearing a “what works” prescription, what is silent in this policy narrative are the forms of institutional power, inequalities and the normative ways in which people with disabilities are already disadvantaged in terms of their relative position in a privileged, ableist society. The state’s protracted delay in ratifying UNCRPD and the failure to fully implement the Education of Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (Oireachtas, 2004) is testimony to our reputation as a “Careless State” (Lynch, 2014) when it comes to matters of disability inequality. Instead, the policy rhetoric frames a portrait of disabilities as objects of charity in need of recovery. Notwithstanding that we would like to consider ourselves a state with a more sophisticated lexicon for describing and understanding disability, disabled people are still constituted as “of interventions rather than sources of socio-political change” (Grue, 2011, p. 535).

Question 3: how has this representation of the problem come about?
Key to addressing this question is a heightened awareness of how power differentials operate in the construction of a problem representation. What is being examined here is
not the concept of disability in itself, but rather, how it came to be and is actively constituted in this policy by a charitable discourse steeped in medicalized evidence and professional knowledge. Bacchi’s (2009, p. 64) conceptualization of policy as “travelling problem representations whose journey needs to be tracked” is a useful metaphor in reading this policy across time and space. While WPR does not offer a specific approach to undertaking this aspect of the analysis, the CHEPDA framework (Hyatt, 2013b) provides a structure with which to trace the genealogy of this policy, allowing for the mapping of CES to the immediate, medium and wider socio-political context into which it was born. The synchronic aspect of the temporal analysis allows for a consideration of the discursive context of CES against the diachronic relevance of emerging discourses of the time and across time (Hyatt, 2005). An intertextual and interdiscursive approach brings a layer of consciousness to the relationship between the policy and the wider discursive practices of the episteme that it sits within.

An analysis of the immediate context reveals a hegemony of economic recovery in which the boundaries of the welfare system are being redrawn through tightened disability benefit eligibility and conditionality. Sustained political stability and recovery became the outgoing government’s election mantra to the tune of a “happy-clappy” poster campaign, urging voters to keep the recovery going. The supply-side measures articulated in the soft paternalistic discourse of “promoting positive expectations,” “planning young people’s transitions” and “fostering independence” are traded in exchange for a commitment from people with disabilities to “maximize their potential” and “make a contribution” (Government of Ireland, 2015, p. 6). The disability problem is, thus, packaged as one of
personal failings and inadequacies that can be summed up as “laziness and lack of drive, motivation and intelligence that consequently absolve the state from any responsibility” (Leyva, 2009, p. 369).

Discussion

Such discourses are of course not unique to Irish disability policy; globalized discourses invoked in the public domain are frequently “characterized by a language where growing inequality and injustice are a result of ‘global’ processes over which no one seems to have any control” as Marston (2008, p. 364) notes, globalized discourses. The charitable model has a particularly Irish dimension because of its long association with the development of disability services through religious organizations. A charitable model is dangerous on a number of levels as it is underpinned by the desire for moral recognition on behalf of a virtuous donor rather than the rights of those who receive, thus helping to offload the guilt of the better off (Surbaugh, 2012). A charity ideology positions those in positions of power in the caring and compassionate role of protector “and the Other as in need of protection” (Choules, 2007, p. 466). From an Irish perspective, McDonnell (2003, p. 266) puts it laconically: “the presumption of authority and care together with the practice of exclusion can best be described as institutionalised paternalism.”

Thus, we see Bacchi’s Questions 4–6 coming into their own here, allowing the researcher to stop and question this policy document before it sets off on its journey to implementation. Through problematization, the researcher not only gets to identify the problematization representation in the policy document, but also to problematize that same problematization through the lens of a theoretical framework of their choosing – in this case, through the lens of critical disability studies (Goodley, 2014).

Conclusion

This paper sets out to demonstrate that CDPF, as a qualitative approach to critical policy analysis, is valuable for researchers working not only in the field of disability policy but also across a range of social policy domains such as welfare, education, employment and their intersectionality. Simultaneously, it highlights the usefulness of CDPF in undertaking a document analysis of a chosen policy. Document analysis is particularly appropriate to qualitative policy case studies, producing rich descriptions (Stake, 1995) of the policy event, the interpretive lens and processes of interpretation undertaken; its usefulness as a standalone method for specialized forms of qualitative research has been documented by Bowen (2009). The application of the analytical framework and the thick description of the process offered here can equally be applied to any policy text through multiple theoretical lenses, and in a range of international contexts, depending on the aims of the study. In addition, CDPF is particularly useful for doctoral students or other researchers wishing to engage with policy, who have little or no experience in the field of policy analysis (see, e.g. Van Aswegen, 2016). As such, it offers a systematic tool with which to navigate this process at a critical level.

The innovation of this approach lies in the blend of two qualitative approaches to critical policy analysis in a symbiotic relationship. While the CHEPDA framework (Hyatt, 2013b) offers a structural approach to addressing the WPR’s questions, Bacchi offers a focus to the framework by directing hard questions to the policy text. The CHEPDA framework offers contextualization and deconstruction tools with which to read a policy text through Bacchi’s Question 1–3. WPR Questions 4–6 offer a further layer to the CHEPDA framework by extending the analysis to interrogate and challenge the assumptions therein, as has been highlighted in this study. Both work here in harmony with each other, capturing and presenting a snapshot of policy in time, thus affording an opportunity to deconstruct, challenge and question this policy, as it moves from the policy-making space on its journey
into implementation. Working as a team, they execute a “good cop/bad cop” game plan: WPR upfront asking the tough questions, while CHEPDA works silently in the background framing the evidence.

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