

**Science, Analysis or Rhetoric?
Teaching Public Policy in the Post-Positivist Era**

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I. Introduction

Scholars committed to the project of teaching public policy are faced with a significant challenge: what do they teach and how do they teach it? Since public problems rarely fit neatly into the self-contained spheres of academic disciplines, the study of public policy cannot be confined to any disciplinary boundary. But can a scholar switch hats from political scientist to biologist to economist without causing confusion about the area of study and without damaging the credibility of their imparted knowledge? As several authors contend, indeed one can, and one must, in order for the field of public policy to be of any use to both practitioners and academics alike (Brunner 1997, Lasswell 1971; deLeon 1986; Mead 1985). Proficiency in *politics* (the domain of political scientists) and *policy* (the field of scholars in economics, management, and public administration) are essential to a society-relevant, theoretically-sound, government-practical public policy scholarship.

While efforts have been made over the past forty years to develop the multidisciplinary, normative, problem-oriented policy sciences desired by its founder, Harold Lasswell (1971), they have largely failed due to resistances from within the academic disciplines (Brunner 1992; Tribe 1972; Garson 1986; Dunn and Kelly 1992). However, if the policy sciences are to develop, the present climate is a promising one. Over the last two decades, scholars have taken interest in reconciling individual behaviouralism with more contextual, post-positivist theories of public policy (Dryzek 1992, Hall and Taylor 1996; Danziger 1995; Howlet 1998). Kelly (1992) emphasizes that a movement is taking place away from the technocratic “handmaiden” approach to policy analysis that dominated the 1970s-80s in government. There is greater recognition of the existence of a “multiplicity of perceived realities” rather than a single empirical one (Dunn and Kelly 1992: 13). The increasing complexity of the governance environment – policymaking through networks – further demands a shift in policy skills and in approaches to public policy that suit decentralized decision-making and are informed by interpretivist frameworks (Lindquist 1992; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003).

Despite societal hospitality for a post-positivist public policy however, evidence of such an academic shift has been found wanting. In neither journal articles nor methods texts has there been an indication that post-positivism is becoming incorporated into the institutional architecture of policy-related academic programs and professional schools (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2002; Palumbo 1992). The endurance of the positivist myth in the social sciences (“institutional inertia”) partially accounts for this non-development (Durning 1999) alongside the historical bifurcation of policy-related study into separate schools of politics (political science) and policy (public management, public policy, public administration) (Mead 2005). Taken together, political scientists have sought to understand the policy process without improving it, while policy experts have sought to improve policy content without understanding the political process. The unfortunate consequence for governance has been marked: a lacuna of policy studies linking government to the ‘good life’ has persisted. No one develops public policy alternatives with the dual concern for the good societal effects that work for government whilst also improving democracy (Mead 1985; 2005).

Since recent societal developments necessitate a policy analysis practice more consistent with post-positivism (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003), it is worth revisiting previous works and prognoses to consider the extent to which post-positivism is being

incorporated into universities *through other avenues* than just published research – within post-secondary *teaching* as an example. If indeed institutional inertia explains the lack of post-positivist ‘up take’ in universities, a study of policy course content – a site where institutionally embedded practices collide with young scholars potentially exposed to new pedagogies – will give scholars an idea of the myths that future methods texts and future journal articles will contain if policy-oriented programs continue to endorse current pedagogy ‘business-as-usual’, whatever that might be.

Thus, the conclusions of Palumbo (1992), Mead (1985), and Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2002) will be revisited here with a view to understanding the role of teaching in both perpetuating *and* permeating positivist myths in the policy-oriented disciplines. This paper will discuss the emergence of post-positivist thought in the social sciences, explore its influence on the policy disciplines, and assess the extent to which positivist myths continue to influence public policy through pedagogy in related post-secondary departments and schools across British Columbia. This initial investigation suggests that coursework on the policy process continues to dominate political science pedagogy to the neglect of policy performance, a finding that is consistent with Palumbo’s work which attributes political scientists’ neglect of policy content to its positivist upbringing. That is, political scientists avoid the study of policy content because of the value considerations that such an activity would demand, the result of which has been a political science that is less relevant to the intellectual needs of policy makers. While this paper takes the position alongside Mead (2005) that policy entrepreneurs (those who link politics with policy) may therefore be a luxury in Canada, it also contends that this may be changing given the emphasis on politics in course curriculum within professional schools of policy and administration in British Columbia. While policy scientists’ knack for i) policy content and ii) skill in political analysis were long ago siphoned into separate schools of public policy and political science respectively, the shape of public policy pedagogy in Canada can play – and may be playing – a vital role in changing this. If indeed policy-oriented scholars would like to see a convergence between politics and policy, attention to the field of study as it is taught is just as important – if not more so – than developments within its academic theory and professional practice.

II. The Problem of Positivist Policy Analysis

Can there be an objective social science? This question has riddled policy-oriented scholars since growth in the fields of public policy took off in the 1960s. Traditional policy analysis, founded on empiricism and logical positivism, has fallen under attack both for failing to resolve complex social problems with its highly technical and quantitative toolkit, and for confiscating ‘knowledge’ away from the ordinary citizen and from scholars employing qualitative approaches to studying social problems (Durning 1999; Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). The terms “agent of domination” (Dryzek 1990:113) and “tyranny of expertise” for undemocratic ends (Fischer 1992) have been used to describe traditional policy analysis. As Fischer (1992: 354) charges, positivism-driven policy analysis has resulted in academic allegiance to “prediction and control of behaviour” over “values of human dignity and democratic participation”. Danziger (1995), Kelly (1992) and Fischer (1992) alike point to a positivist-driven policy analysis as a major impediment to a healthy functioning democracy.

Post-positivists, like positivists, do believe that reality exists; where they diverge from their colleagues is in what they affirm can be known or understood about that reality. As Fischer (2003: 211) insists, since theories themselves are socially constructed and since humans are reflexive beings “objectivity can serve as an ideal, but requires a critical community of interpreters”. For many post-positivists, policy analysis is not the inherent culprit but rather, the supposedly objectivist epistemology – positivism – with which policy analysis has become institutionally intertwined (see Torgerson 1986). What is wrong with policy analysis is what is wrong with positivism: its assumptions that only the empirically observable can contribute to knowledge, only a limited number of discrete factors matter and that these factors can operate independent of context, subjectivity and value considerations are inappropriate, fact and value can indeed be separated, and only adherence to all of the above contributes to science (Brunner 1991).

As Hawkesworth (1992) and Tribe (1972) contend however, positivism is no different than any another ideology except that it alone masquerades around as an objective science. While the positivist social science might assess the worth of two great works of art according to quantifiable categories such as greatest-use-of-pigment! and longest-median-brush-stroke!, for Tribe (1972) comparing a Rembrandt to a Picasso by reducing each into quantifiable parts using a common denominator is insufficient and distorting, at best (socially irrelevant, at worst). Despite its claim to neutrality and objectivity, Tribe asserts that the scientific method underlying positivism further deviates from these very goals through its “anesthetizing of moral feeling”: by replacing emotional events – “gruesomely burned human beings” and “the anguish of joblessness” – with new labels that lack emotive feeling such as “body count” and “Philips curve”, positivism engages in the very policy rhetoric and subjectivity that it claims to have been marshaled in to overcome (Tribe 1972: 97).

For post-positivists, policy rhetoric and subjectivity are inescapable. Policy analysts are not scientists or technicians, but phenomenologists. They occupy that messy space in society where opinions, beliefs, positions, convictions, rules, and claims are thrown together; with them, what policy analysts produce are arguments, interpretations, stories, and recommendations that assist in deliberation and decision-making (Kingdon 1995; Majone 1989; Hoppe 1993; see also Yanow 1996 on *meaning-making*). For post-positivists, the reason policy analysts cannot be scientists or technicians is because factual knowledge about reality can not be attained. Drawing from Popper, Hawkesworth argues that the human mind does not experience reality unmediated by presupposition theories. We impose our models onto the real world, therefore transforming it with our own theories. Neutral observation is impossible. For this reason facts and values can not be treated as separate or distinct.

The response to the post-positivist challenge has been relatively encouraging across the social sciences, although far from homogeneous. Rational choice theorist Jon Elster (1986) is quick to admit some of the failures and flaws of his own intellectual investment in rational choice theory. While Elster believes that the rational choice framework is helpful in understanding individual decision making, he also cautions that rational choice theory cannot help an analyst or decision-maker make a “rational choice” in the face of uncertainty. He concedes that the staying power of rational choice may be more due to the lack of a viable alternative than to rational choice’s sustained predictive or explanatory success. If either bounded rationality or sociological institutionalism

develop into more succinct, internally consistent theories of decision-making, indeed “neoclassical economics will be dethroned” (Elster 1986: 26).

Within public policy, scholars are also increasingly pointing to the complexity of human life and the decreasing relevance of rational choice theory, or hierarchical top-down linear frameworks to understanding it (on implementation studies, see Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Hjern and Porter 1981; Sabatier 1993; on decision-making, see Lindblom 1959; Kahnmann and Tversky 1974; Simon 1991; Mintz and Geva 1997). Several alternative frameworks have developed to build upon the insights of the linear policy process model and to overcome its shortcomings (for an overview, see Sabatier 1999; Teisman 2000; Peters 1992). Their major contribution however has not been towards a general theory of policymaking but rather, a realization of the complexity of its composite activities. For political scientists studying power in interest group intermediation (i.e. Schattschneider 1960; Cobb and Elder 1972), policy-oriented scholars have highlighted the absence of a central decision maker (Teisman 2000), the value of subjective rules and cognitive scripts to preference formation and decision making (Marsh and Olson 1986; Ostrom 1999), the importance of institutions to both the process of policy change *and* durability (Pierson 1993, 2000; Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Hall 1993; Clemens and Cook 1999), the relevance of ambiguity, uncertainty, timing and serendipity to policy making (Lynn 1981; Kingdon 1995; Teisman 2000; Marsh and Olson 1986), the role of ideas, beliefs and learning in policy conflicts (Sabatier 1991, Weiss 1980), and the limitations in information processing that humans face and its constraint on rationality (Kahnmann and Tversky 1974; Mintz and Geva 1997; Weiss 1980; Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Peters 1992; Lindblom 1971).

While these works hardly – if at all – fall into the category of post-positivist studies, their findings nonetheless undermine the relevance of the lonely positivist search for general and elegant theories. Current models of policy making that have incorporated the above insights reject that policymaking must be understood through mutually exclusive frameworks; policy making is a multitude of processes, the interstices of collective action problems, social learning processes, and power struggles (see Baumgartner and Jones’ “punctuated equilibrium”, Kingdon’s “policy streams”, Teisman’s “policy rounds”). Given the complexity of information surrounding decisions, the prevalence of “irrationality” in decisions, and the instability and contestability of contemporary policy problems, academic public policy should therefore abandon its positivist search for a holy grail to decision making (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003).

This of course leaves aspiring policy scholars wondering if their work is good for anything. This is especially so if others are correct that the field’s most ambitious and sophisticated quantitative models have historically failed to resolve public problems either because of incorrect assumptions misguidedly based on a supposed objectivity (see deLeon 1988) or because technically-informed messages of policy analysts become filtered out of decision making anyway because in reality choices are driven more by political factors (see Pal 1997; Howlett and Ramesh 1995).

As this paper argues however, policy analysis informed by the academic disciplines *can* be useful to decisionmakers. The problem is not so much that political science and policy schools have nothing to contribute but rather that apart from each other and clinging to positivist notions, what they offer is rather inadequate and increasingly so given recent transformations to the governance environment that

governments are now confronted with (see Mead 2005). In fact, political scientists and other policy-oriented scholars may be demonstrating receptiveness towards the post-positivist approach not because post-positivists have been persuasive in their critique of positivism but rather, because the nature of public problems today necessitates a different kind of policy analyst.

III. The Real World of Policy: Post-Positivism in a Networked Society

The emerging context for governance in Canada is indeed a challenging one: new or emerging policy problems such as climate change and public health are highly technical crosscutting issues that have complex economic, social, and political causes, interactions and implications. They respect no national or departmental boundaries and governments are only one of many actors that can influence how they are considered and acted upon within the policy making process. Many of the resources and expertise needed to develop and implement public policy now exist outside of the formal boundaries of the state. Hajar and Wagenaar (2003) make the claim that the problems industrialized societies face today cannot be resolved using the framework for policy analysis developed using the traditional positivist method of inquiry.

The burgeoning field of governance through policy networks reflects an advance in political science towards recognition of a more discursive politics of policymaking. As Guy (2003: 650) writes: “we live in a social order based as much on mores, history, obligation, trust and learning as on rationality and utility maximization.”

This new governance context makes the ‘old policy analysis’ (where advice is given to central actors with rational decision making capacity) ill suited to modern public policy dilemmas. In a political world where no institutional actor, including government agent, has the information it needs to determine how it will best expend its resources towards its desired political outcome, interdependencies and interactions based on subjectively held beliefs and socially constructed perceptions become the currency of political power and ultimate shapers of public policy (Teisman 2003; Kingdon 1995; Koppenhan and Klijn 1999; Laumann and Knoke 1987). Policymaking based on a subjectively delineated policy domain of actors exchanging information and resources based on reputation, trust, interests, ideas, and beliefs, is simply not conducive to study based on the determinative approach adopted by traditional policy analysis (Howlett and Ramesh 1998). Simply put, in today’s policy networks, uncertainty abounds, risk prevails, opportunities fleet, interdependencies pervade, information sprawls, and irrationality breeds (Marsh and Olsen 1986). These things together complicate the task of providing the best policy advice based on objective, at-a-distance, technocratic methodologies.

This is not to say that analysis is out the window and that policy models are obsolete; only that a large part of the policy process itself – i.e. how problems and solutions come to be identified as they do - involves a significant amount of social construction. Macroeconomic events simply do not exist objectively out there in the real world; they must be politically mobilized, socially constructed, and subjectively experienced before they can even enter the realm of public policy (Parsons 1995; Soroka 2002). The very language we use to identify macroeconomic events “constitutes and pervades [our] socially constructed world” (Dryzek 2004: 89). For these reasons then, if we desire to understand a specific policy area in a particular country, we must invoke

multiple methods and be sensitive to the subjective nature of the policy domain itself (what does “health care” mean to different policy participants, *including the analyst?*) and to the manner in which formal institutions and informal structures (i.e. language, social norms) themselves shape understanding of the problem, potential solutions, and interests of the individual (Marsh and Olsen 1986; Schattschneider 1960).

As Fischer (2002, 2003) has demonstrated, a critique of positivism need not unravel into the immobilizing ‘relativism’ of post-modernism, in which the idea of obtaining truth and doing science are entirely brought into question. On the contrary, postpositivism is the commitment to a better truth – the acknowledgement of the role of physical as well as social factors on reality. What we arrive at through empirical study is some concoction of technical and social knowledge, because our claims are influenced by more than the pursuit of truth; they are partly the product of us as social beings – our language, our presupposition theories, our social world. Fischer writes:

What is taken to be a fact is in effect the decision of a particular community of inquirers who work within a set of theoretical presuppositions to which they subscribe. ... Beyond seeking to explain a ‘given’ reality, social science must also attempt to explain how social groups construct their own understanding of that reality ... The failures of social science can in significant part be attributed to the neglect of these subjective processes (Fischer 2003: 216).

Thus, the objects of the real world and their properties exist. The goal is to understand how the socially constructed language and concepts that humans use mediate our understanding of that reality. To the extent that postpositivists are interested in understanding how the social world mediates the technical world, to the extent that postpositivists pursue this through quantitative and qualitative empirical research followed by discursive synthesis according to competing views and bound by context, postpositivist public policy is committed to a better truth. That is all to say that while empiricists insist that we can definitively access the real world and postmodernists insist that the possible interpretations are endless, postpositivists take the pragmatic middle ground: while our access to knowledge of the real world is mediated by our social world, by our competing meanings and understandings, our possible interpretations are nonetheless bounded by our practical reason and sensory experiences. As Fischer (2003: 221) contends: “critical interpretations are ‘world-guided’ and can never be altogether detached from concrete experience ... An interpretation that bears no plausible relationship to the object-world has to be rejected”.

Social sciences’ recognition of new forms of policy making and proliferation of policy actors is good news to those scholars who wish to advance a post-positivist policy studies. Decades earlier, Lasswell’s (1971) call for a new multi-disciplinary, problem oriented academic program, *the policy sciences*, was also hospitable to the post-positivist approach to social sciences (see Torgerson 1985; 1990). Lasswell optimistically felt that modern skills (i.e. economic analysis) coupled with enlightened concern with improving democratic processes and expanding prosperity to everyone was all that was needed to overcome the greatest problems of mankind. One of his most innovative and important

intellectual contribution to this end was his emphasis on the “contextual orientation” designed to prevent policy scientists from succumbing to the power and prestige of politics. Policy scientists were to continually engage in self-reflective practice, to abandon the project of objective neutrality and enter the realm of the subjective. Policy scientists were to have ‘knowledge in and of the policy process’ (Lasswell 1971). However, Lasswell also promoted the rigorous, empirically-driven, methodologies of the hard sciences to resolve the complex social, political, and economic problems caused by industrialization. Because attention was paid more to Lasswell’s scientific methodologies than the ‘contextual orientation’ he equally stressed, a post-positivist policy analysis was never realized (Garson 1986; Torgerson 1985). Conditions are ripe again for its development; if industrialization presented Lasswell with the opportunity to develop the policy sciences, modern governance structures further compel its establishment (Guy 2003).

Whether these considerations are now being incorporated into the real work of professional policy analysts is not yet certain. Pal (1997) argues that policy analysts operating in the real world *are* sufficiently aware of these limitations of traditional rational empirical policy analysis. He submits further that analysts have incorporated some of the post-positivist critique into their work, realizing the simplicity of rational modeling and the hazard of an expert-driven policy process to the neglect of democratic participation. Other scholars are less optimistic however. While several proponents of post-positivist policy analysis (Forester 1989; Fischer 2002, 2003; Dryzek 2002) argue that the tenants of positivism can no longer be – and increasingly are not – adamantly defended by even the staunchest of empiricists, the myth of positivism lives on in the rhetoric of policy analysis while the practice of post-positivism lurches forward covertly, underlying what “social scientists already do” (Fischer 2003: 211). In response to Lynn’s (1999) attack on post-positivism for exaggerating the prevalence of positivist policy analysis, Dryzek (2002: 33) replies that “the technocratic image of analysis remains powerful, even if it is only window dressing” and thereby works to disempower those that do not speak in technocratic tongues or fit the conventional definition of decision-maker. Durning and Osuna (1994) find that practicing policy professionals predominantly *regard* themselves as professionals in the business of providing objective advice on proposed policy implications and prefer not to get involved with agency conflicts, internal matters, or the politics of the policy process. Durning and Osuna (1994) conclude that the “positivist myths” of objectivity and neutrality persist for professional policy analysts and continue to guide their work, a finding supported by Morçöl (2001) in a replication of their study. Morçöl further finds that while policy analysts are more positivist in their assumptions than academics, they also hold to abstract positivist beliefs (objectivity and separate of facts and values are essential) while engaging in a less positivist practice (analysis is political and quantification not paramount), demonstrating contrary to Lynn (1999) and Weimer (1999) the staying power of positivist rhetoric. Morçöl’s (2001) work supports what Dryzek and Torgerson (1993) lament as increasing theoretical receptiveness to post-positivism to which the real work of policy analysis has changed minimally to reflect.

Several reasons for the failure of post-positivist political theory to translate into post-positivist policy analysis have been proffered by scholars. Durning (1999) suggests that clients might prefer the quantitative, ‘objective’ approach. Other scholars admit

alongside Elster (1986) that postpositivist models and approaches are more difficult to work with and fail to compel scholars due to their lack of clarity, indeterminacy, and inadequate theory. A similar line of argument is that post-positivist approaches do not fit with the practical requirements of organizations (Howlett and Ramesh 1998). Finally, Durning (1999) claims that positivism enjoys an institutional heritage and continues to endure because of vested interests within academe that train, practice, teach and socialize others into its intellectual paradigm.

This final explanation for the staying power of positivism in the profession is particularly compelling because it suggests that for a fundamental shift towards post-positivist policy analysis to occur, public policy as it is taught rather than policy analysis as it has been practiced requires additional scrutiny, especially if the current practice of policy analysis is based on a previous positivist pedagogy. What types of articles are being published in policy-related scholarly journals? What methods of research are featuring most prominently in introductory textbooks on policy analysis? What types of coursework are being offered in political science, public administration, and schools of public policy? While previous scholars have answered the first two of these three questions, the last question of pedagogy remains. If institutional inertia in academia can explain the persistence of positivist myths in the practice policy analysis, this begs the questions *how persistent* and *how much inertia*?

IV. Positivism and its Institutional Inertia in Policy Studies in Political Science

We teach what we are taught; thus each generation of newly minted doctorates tends to teach looking backward for some years before developing their own perspectives. This creates a lag between the time when new ideas land on the printed page and when they are incorporated into the corpus of the discipline (Guy 2003: 644)

While few studies have been conducted on the training, practice, pedagogy, and socialization of the positivist intellectual paradigm, the existing research does not exude optimism about the establishment of a post-positivism orientation in the public policy profession. Palumbo's (1992) study of policy research published in policy-related journals reveals a hesitancy on the part of political scientists to engage in values-laden evaluative research and Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's (2002) study of fourteen research methods textbooks in political science uncover that positivism is treated as the *only* mode of scientific research in political science, interpretivist methods almost entirely absent from major political science research methods texts.

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2002: 458) asserted that research methods textbooks reflect and construct the state of political science, because their use by students, scholars and departments, and determination of the professional practice of the discipline itself "articulate and enact what it means to do political science, as well as what science itself means." Through its training of undergraduates and graduate students, methods texts shape the future of the discipline and in particular, perpetuate dominant points of view in the discipline. Thus, the intent of Schwartz-Shea and Yanow's study was to determine what viewpoints were shaping political science and towards what ends. Is there

disciplinary consensus, and if so, what is it? What are the implications for future research?

Schwartz-Shea and Yanow found that all research methods texts treat positivism as *the* mode of scientific research in political science. Positivist-qualitative approaches are ignored altogether in some texts and pursued with varying degrees of attention and treatment in others. However, the only message that was conveyed clearly and consistently across the texts was that empirical research *is* quantitative research, which *is* the best research. Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2002) pointed out that methods of study relevant and valuable to many fields of political science were absent from the texts: “historical and field methods in comparative politics, case study methods in international relations, agency studies in government, public policy and public administration, text-based methods of political theory, and in-depth interview techniques relevant to fields spanning the discipline” (Schwartz-Shea and Yanow 2002: 476). The irrelevance of the methods texts were usually in traditional spheres of political science, ones that Aucoin (1996) has reminisced as the more valuable, democratic governance-informing contributions to political science. Thus, the decline of democratic governance in political science which Aucoin (1996) laments, may be explained at least in part by a dominant language discourse promoting empirical research as only quantitative studies, and quantitative studies as the only acceptable manner of doing political science. The implication may be that a focus on quantitative methodologies in political science has dramatically affected scholars’ choice of subject matter and consequently, limited the potential value of the discipline’s work.

Palumbo’s (1992) study of policy research published in policy-related journals sought to assess just this: whether and the extent to which policy-oriented political scientists conducted research that was useful to policy-makers. Palumbo found that most policy-oriented research in political science was concerned with understanding the policy-making process, rather than understanding the content of particular policy areas. This remains unfortunate because for political science to be of use to policy makers, it must focus on policy content (see also Mead 1985, 2005). Palumbo contended that political scientists were hesitant to conduct policy content (or evaluative) research because of the discipline’s traditional aversion to political judgment: in order to maintain its claims to being a science and to objectivity, the discipline chose to distance itself from normative values, from evaluative research, and from policy content studies. However, as Palumbo and others have argued, policy analysis is unavoidably political because all policy decisions distribute and redistribute power by making particular meanings out of social life (Franks 1987). For Palumbo, the contribution that political science can make to a post-positivist public policy is in institutional analysis: how do institutional arrangements allocate values and rewards in society? Since political science has traditionally focused on understanding the policy process – its institutions and actors and how they make policy – it is well positioned to contribute to a post-positivist policy studies, if only it would abandon the search for macro-theory, and its historical rejection of content studies as ‘un-scientific’.

What Palumbo (1992) and Schwartz-Shea and Yanow (2000) make clear is that the positivist myth is alive and well in the tools of its trade: methods texts and journal publications. Furthermore, the perpetuation of this myth in political science may have discouraged the study of topics that were once its *raison d’etre* and thereby severely

reduced the discipline's contribution to better governance – of both an improved policy process (Aucoin 1996) and informed policy content (Mead 2005).

The subsequent section of this paper will seek to explain why positivist assumptions have dominated the work of political scientists. Specifically, the survival of the positivist myths owes much to the fragmentation of the policy disciplines that occurred in the 1960s that was followed by a period of empirical fanaticism within all social science disciplines, which resulted in a policy-advice gap in political science that professional schools of policy analysis were eager to fill. As a result, political scientists have not examined public policies and policy analysts have not studied government. The final section of this paper will investigate this state of affairs through a pilot study of policy pedagogy within post-secondary public policy programs in British Columbia.

V. Academic Bifurcation and the Implications for Post-Positivist Public Policy

Since the 1950s, an unfortunate fragmentation and disaggregation of policy-related studies has occurred, public policies' various methods and tongues scattered into the traditional disciplines of the social sciences: public affairs into philosophy, policy analysis into economics, policy studies into political science, and socioeconomics into sociology (Brunner 1992). This is unfortunate because policy analysis needs policy studies (see Simeon 1972; Mead 1985, 2005). As Howlett and Ramesh (1995: 9) contended “we cannot understand what the government ought to be doing (or not doing) as emphasized by the [policy] analysis literature unless we know what it can or cannot do, the concern of the [policy] studies literature”. Policy analysis in public administration in particular needs policy studies in political science, if the former is to escape capture by business management schools where the predominance of economic values is incompatible with the traditional stuff of public administration and political science: “power, justice, equity, conflict, and policy” (Guy 2003: 650).

Several scholars blame the fissures in public policy on methods controversies that have persisted since development of a “science of politics” occurred in the mid 20th century. Garson (1986) and Guy (2003) have submitted that early calls for a scientific discipline attending to the greatest problems of mankind – democratic citizenship – became distorted through the Lasswellian grapevine. Methodological fanaticism occurred quickly within political science, and the baton of positivism was carried forward with little regard for the social problems it had originally been brought in to resolve (Fischer 2002). For Guy (2003), expanding the application of scientific methods to any and all social problems became the mantra of political science:

Hypotheses that could be tested by statistical analysis trumped those that required qualitative analysis. Students were trained that empiricism was science, that the “other” was not. Political science pulled farther away from the daily rigors of governing... the breathless chase to be “one of them” continued. (Guy 2003: 647)

The obsession with joining the scientific academe has had a particularly harmful impact on political science, as the pursuit of knowledge as a way of achieving greater prediction and control has robbed political science of its relevance to policy makers and to professional policy analysts (Mead 1985; Palumbo 1992; Aucoin 1996). For Dunn and Kelly (1992) it has contributed little to understanding real, pressing problems that

societies collectively face and that governments are perplexed to answer. Palumbo's (1992) explanation for this failure is rooted in the inadequacies of positivism, which have manifest within political science as a muzzle on passing judgment on policy outcomes. While political scientists prefer to keep quiet on issues of policy content and policy outcomes, Palumbo (1992: 71) has insisted that "facts don't speak for themselves". Policy analysis is a political exercise and judgments about outcomes are necessary and unavoidable.

The less policy studies and the broader political science have had to say about the things that matter to governments – policy outputs, policy outcomes and democratic governance – the more policy analysis did have to say on the former and did contribute through new practitioner programs of public administration and public affairs and policy management (Garson 1986; Guy 2003). Indeed, the growing irrelevance of policy studies and political science to policymakers coincides with an era of burgeoning independent professional schools of public policy analysis. The unhappy ending however is that while policy analysis rushed up to government to make up for political science's shortcomings, it also did so with the positivist toolkit, with an ambivalence to academic theory, and *without* the utopian concerns for democracy and justice upon which political science was originally founded (Garson 1986, 2005).

However relevant the work of policy analysts had been, empiricism alone fails to address the most pressing problems facing governments, which invariable turn on values (Mead 1985; Franks 1987). *Whose* utility curve is to prevail and more or less government *for whom?* Whose story, argument, meaning, and definition are to be accepted is the stuff of politics and at the heart of post-positivism. There is simply no room for objectivity and generalization from context.

Taken together, the history of political science and of policy analysis paint a dreadful picture of *two* inadequate pedagogies: 1) an academic oriented political science that struggles to be relevant to the policy needs of government but is all the more attune to the political factors that shape government decisions and 2) a professionally oriented public policy analysis committed to resolving the direct conflicts over scarce resources that occupy the attention of political decision-makers but by emphasizing technical solutions that obscure politics and treat interests, power, and ideology like they do not matter and need not bear on the work of policy analysts.

VI. Public Policy Pedegogy in British Columbia: A Study of Course Content

Results from a pilot study of compulsory course content in policy-oriented academic and professional post-secondary programs in British Columbia, confirm the prevalence of the positivist myth in political science and policy analysis while highlighting some important nuances for future examination. The research strategy employed here consisted of two stages. First, information was gathered from websites about policy-related programs in British Columbia. Information from each program was compiled, including the program mission, concentrations and specializations, degree requirements and compulsory courses. An early decision was taken to restrict the study of course content to only those courses that were considered 'compulsory' for the degree. It was implied that compulsory courses signal those fields, topics or areas of study considered most important, or central to the discipline according to the program's designers, granting the researcher a sense of the importance of various courses vis-à-vis

one another. A framework from which to compare the programs was developed, and informed using information from the institutions' online program calendar. Coursework was coded based on the following categories: political system and environment, political theory, policy process, policy analysis, economics, qualitative research, quantitative research, policy evaluation, and policy content. Programs included in the study were as follows: Political Science at University of British Columbia (UBC), University of Victoria (UVic), and Simon Fraser University (SFU); Master of Public Policy and Master of Urban Studies at SFU; Master of Public Administration at UVic, and Public Administration certificates at Capilano College (in local government) and Nicola Valley Institute of Technology (in First Nation Public Administration). Because doctorate programs in their first two years tended to follow the coursework designed for master programs, the two were collapsed into one graduate category.

Table One
Compulsory Research Methods
by Graduate Program and Type

Program Name	QT	QL	Both
U Vic Political Science			
SFU Political Science	X		
UBC Political Science			
SFU Urban Studies	X		X
SFU Public Policy	X		X
U Vic Public Admin	X	X	

In general, political science programs in British Columbia tend to place a greater emphasis on theory and structure than stand-alone policy programs that stress methods and agency. As table one indicates, none of the graduate-level political science programs make research methods compulsory, although SFU does require its graduate students to complete either political theory *or* quantitative methods. All of the graduate non-political science degree programs make methods courses compulsory, although they vary in terms of their stress between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Overall however, quantitative approaches tend to dominate the curriculum.

Turning to the undergraduate and college level in table two, quantitative methods (UBC and SFU) and research methods (UVic) are mandatory subjects in political science. Within stand-alone policy programs, methods courses also enjoy a prominent position. No college level or undergraduate level requires coursework exclusively in qualitative research.

Table Two
Compulsory Research Methods
by College/Undergraduate Program and Type

Program Name	QT	QL	Both
U Vic Political Science			X
SFU Political Science	X		
UBC Political Science	X		
Capilano Public Admin			
Nicola Valley Public Admin	X		

Across all degree programs at both graduate and undergraduate levels, qualitative methods are thus significantly underemphasized, with only one school containing a mandatory course in the area (UVic graduate public administration), and only three other programs include qualitative methods within a broader compulsory research methods course (UVic graduate political science, SFU graduate public policy and SFU graduate urban studies).

On subject matter, there are also important differences between the political science departments and stand-alone policy programs in British Columbia. First, political science programs, especially at the graduate level, tend to be the most flexible, composed primarily of coursework in elective fields. Those courses that are required in political science tend to cluster around three major areas as shown in table three: the political system (and political environment), political theory, and the policy process. While the stand-alone policy programs share with political science programs interest in the policy process and political environment, they also emphasize economics, policy analysis, policy evaluation, and policy content in their curriculum to the complete neglect of political theory.

Table Three - Compulsory Courses by Subject Matters
(Excluding Methods)

	Degree	Political System	Political Theory	Policy Process	Policy Analysis	Economics	Policy Content	Policy Evaluation
<i>Political Science Departments</i>								
UVic	BA		X					
	MA	XXX	X	X				
SFU	BA	X	X					
	MA		X					
UBC	BA	X	XXX	X				
	MA							
<i>Public Policy and/or Administration Schools</i>								
Cap.	Cert.			XX			XX	
NV	Cert.	XX				X	X	
UVic	MPA	XXX		XX		X		X
SFU	MPP	X		XX	XX	XX	X	X
	M.URB							

These results somewhat support the findings of Palumbo's 1992 study of journal article content. Political science programs are weak on policy content and policy evaluation while public policy schools neglect concern for democratic governance. Public policy teaches students how to think about *what should be done* with cursory concern for *what process is best* while political science teaches students to think about *what can be done* stopping short of equipping them with the skills to determine *what is best*. That stated policy and administration schools in British Columbia do not entirely live up to the caricature painted by Mead (2005) and others. The programs' emphases on the political system in compulsory coursework suggest that the current pedagogy of policy analysis is sensitive to political power, interests, and institutions.

One important variation between the programs deserves further scrutiny. The public administration program at the University of Victoria stands alone amongst all programs as being very close to the ideals of the policy sciences (Brunner 1997). It is the only program that brings together the crucial elements of politics and policy in a single degree experience. The program stresses methods as an important degree component, places an equal emphasis on qualitative and quantitative research, and evenly balances subject matters important to political science (three courses on the political system and two on the policy process), with those central for public policy practitioners (the aforementioned policy process courses, as well as a course in economics, and in policy evaluation). Nonetheless, remaining within the field of public administration, this program lacks coursework in democratic governance or political theory oriented towards improvement of the policy process.

VII. A New Research Agenda for Reflexive Scholars: Do Policy Scholars Teach Post-Positivist Public Policy?

This paper has argued that a postpositive approach to doing public policy analysis is long overdue. While Merriam and Lasswell pushed for a multidisciplinary, normative, problem-oriented social sciences in the 1940s and 1950s, their visions have never been fully realized as policy-oriented programs have proceeded separately in each traditional discipline, often guided by the behaviouralist toolkit. However, this paper has also suggested that if the policy sciences were to develop, it is in the current governance context and academic climate that it may receive the greatest hospitality. The increasingly complexity of policy problems mean that the traditional policy analysis emphasizing positivist methods exclusively, no longer resonates as strongly with both government needs and intellectual trends. There is also greater awareness of the interdependencies between state and society in contemporary policy making, which more often is taking place through the rational, non-rational and extra-rational processes of policy networks (Howlett and Ramesh 1995).

That stated, this paper also identified two limitations to a post-positivist public policy. First, it is uncertain whether postpositivist considerations are being incorporated into the real work of professional policy analysts. While the postpositivist idea is certainly percolating in academe niches, a study of prominent methods texts in political science still reveals a bias towards positivist methodologies and other studies demonstrate that the attitudes of policy practitioners are imbued with positivist rhetoric. The second limitation to a post-positivist public policy is explained by the shortcomings of policy programs as they have developed distinctively within political science and public policy

and administration. On the one hand we have an academic oriented political science that struggles to be relevant to the policy needs of government but is all the more attune to the extra-rational processes and non-rational (political) factors that shape government decisions. On the other is a professionally oriented public policy analysis committed to resolving the direct conflicts over scarce resources that occupy the attention of political decision-makers but by emphasizing technical solutions. As Mead (2005: 537) so aptly puts it “while political scientists typically study government without telling it what to do, policy experts tell government what to do without studying it.”

This paper has also suggested that institutional inertia in academia partially explains the persistence of positivist myths meaning that the extent to which policy-related academic programs can overcome positivist handicaps in their pedagogy will indicate the prospect of post-positivism flourishing in the professional practice of policy analysis. In political science, positivism manifests as the belief that ‘because politics is more than rational decision-making, only areas lacking value-considerations can be studied for political science to remain scientific’, while in professional policy schools, it is embodied in the adage ‘because only scientific, objective methodologies are employed, studying value-laden areas is okay’. Overcoming institutional inertia requires both political science and professional programs to accept that politics *is more than* rational choice, value considerations are an *unavoidable* part of advice giving, and policy outputs and outcomes must *necessarily* be studied for a policy program to have usefulness to society. The public administration program at the University of Victoria deserves further scrutiny as a potential frontrunner in postpositivist pedagogy and the policy sciences in British Columbia.

Thus, this paper calls for a new research agenda that will assess the degree of institutional inertia in policy programs by conducting a multi-method study of policy pedagogy in policy-related post-secondary degree programs across Canada. Movement away from policy advice as objective and scientific towards policy advice as politics and rhetoric will represent an importance advance in the pedagogy of public policy. The extent to which policy programs include opportunities for professional reflective exercise and course-work in democracy, the political system, ethics of policy analysis, special topics in public policy content and evaluation (i.e. public health, natural resource management policy) will be a strong indication of how close academia is coming to achieving a post-positivist policy sciences that is society-relevant, theoretically-sound, and government-practical. Analysis of coursework, teaching styles, student experiences, and institutional cultures will go far in demonstrating a rigorous post-positivist scholarship while also revealing the scope of its current pedagogical practice.

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