
Pp. 240 ISBN 1441143904

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This collection of what could be called reports from the trenches of education policy is a welcome addition to the analytical and policy research work on education policy. It has, in my view, the rare quality of being both useful as a foundational theoretical analysis on the field of global education policy while at the same time providing clear insights into how the phenomena studied are having direct, real world consequences on education practice in general; from curricular practice to financing and the role of civil society and a variety of supranational stakeholders not previously characterized at this level of detail.

The introductory remarks by its editors provide a clear blueprint on how to read this book. In general, all of its constituent parts seem to follow the proposed outline and support the theoretical dialogue proposed. In other words, this book is not a series of individual statements on issues of policy. Rather, it presents a coherent viewpoint on what the editors see as qualitative changes in the relation between policy agendas and its, sometimes willing, sometimes not so willing, end users. While the overall discussion is clearly oriented towards developing, low-income countries, it would have been useful to have a discussion, as part of the introductory remarks, on the impacts of the brutal austerity policies pursued in Europe over the last five years.

In many ways, the prescriptive agendas espoused by the ‘policy entrepreneurs’ in some countries of the Eurozone are similar to those applied to developing countries although their impacts are, of course, of a different scale. Along the same venue, one could argue that the School Choice movement as well as the increasing class-cleansing and plutocratization of access to Higher Education in the United States have borrowed several of their conceptual premises from the work done overseas by some of its domestic practitioners.

Chapter twelve of this volume offers a robust analysis of the factors at play in Private Public Partnerships in Indian education which is a also prominent feature of the Charter Schools movement in the U.S. Furthermore, evidence points to an increasing exclusionary trend, in the developed world, where education systems are being turned into islands of privilege where exclusion reproduces itself and quality education becomes an additional commodity borne out of entitlement rather than a common societal good (Ruano, 2011, 2010). This trend is helping turn metropolitan areas into “Patrician Ghettoes” where “top level corporate and professional sectors in Sao Paulo, begin to have more in common with peers in Paris, London or Hong Kong than with their own societies” (FT Magazine, 2013). Several contributions to Global Education Policy and international development, document this flow of policy as a dissociative exchange of practice and worldview between national and regional needs and their proposed ‘fixes’. For instance, Edwards & Klees (chapter three) and Untenhalter (chapter four)
explain how models of consultative practices and education sector outcome indicators are imposed on contexts where they are unable to address most of the recipients' needs or increase local capacity in the policy implementation.

Applying the essential notion that policy is “both a medium as well as a message system. It is also a process.” (Robertson, p. 36), would be a first step towards engaging in a truly equal act of policy dialogue with the countries concerned. The same issue of programmatic adequacy and responsiveness is discussed in relation to Conditional Cash Transfers (Bonal et.al. chapter seven), a much touted, magic pill in poverty alleviation strategies. There is also a rich discussion on the impact of Conditional Cash Transfers (chapter seven).

A further point the authors make is that it is important to understand the policy cycle as a bidirectional space in which, under certain conditions, local actors become empowered to influence policy choices and their implementation via transparency and accountability provisions agreed to by all stakeholders. For example, this occurs by maximizing the possibilities of addressing national shortcomings on education policy by pointing to specific member States’ obligations under various United Nations instruments as a matter of State rather than Government commitment. In other words, by providing civil society organizations with monitoring and accountability tools rooted in internationally agreed commitments it is possible to mitigate the impact of local political dislocations in the policy process.

The analysis of Dos Santos and Soeterik provides a concrete example of this interplay between the global and national policy development space (chapter nine). I also found comparisons between countries useful, in particular in the area of teaching and curriculum development (Altinyelken, chapter ten). Hopefully, this type of comparison from the field will stimulate additional research on the possible emergence of alternative education paradigms in the post Washington Consensus era. And while a full critique of the institutional disfunctionalities that seem to plague some of the very institutions tasked with reducing poverty on a global scale awaits its writer, (Forbes Magazine, 2012), this volume
offers a good step in linking Global Education Policy with most of its players, sufferers and implementers.

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