

GLOBAL EDUCATION POLICY AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NEW AGENDAS, ISSUES AND POLICIES

Review by Patsy Toland

Verger, Antoni, Novelli, Mario and Altinyelken, Hula K (eds.) (2018) *Global Education Policy and International Development: New Agendas, Issues and Policies* (Second Edition), London: Bloomsbury

This is a collection of academic essays that examines the state of education policy and developments in education in our rapidly changing world. This is not a book about ‘Global Education’ as understood by those in the Development Education (DE) sector, although there are references to related topics in a number of the essays and some perceptive insight into the role of education as a development tool, in particular as an element of Overseas Development Aid (ODA) programmes. This is an excellent read for those concerned with the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), those involved with education support in the developing world and for anyone concerned with the impact of our globalised world.

Each chapter in the book begins with an introduction to the subject matter, followed by the case- study or research content and a conclusion, which summarises the essay. There are useful ‘Questions for discussion’ throughout and each chapter has a comprehensive reference section for further reading. Although the book follows a loose logic in introducing theory, case- studies and future trends in the chapter layout, I would recommend reading chapter one to introduce the breadth of Global Education Policy and international development and then follow your particular interest through chapters titles (2-12). Chapters 13 and 14 form a commentary and conclusion to the book.

The knowledge ‘economy’

Chapter one is written by the editors and attempts to make the case for the importance of Global Education Policies, both within education but more importantly within a spectrum of development approaches. The chapter suggests the worrying infiltration of education policy by a range of ‘policy entrepreneurs’. As governments seek to impress the world of their nation building in economic and political terms, education becomes an area of validation and measurement. For those who see education with a skills and knowledge economy focus, economic development and global markets become the measure of success and the measurement tool ranks countries according to their success in international evaluations such as PISA (Chapter five has a more in-depth look at international large scale assessments including PISA). In the context of such measurement tools, education can be reduced to literacy and numeracy test results. Non-state actors, such as Microsoft and Pearson, are prime movers of education programmes, but their focus is on opening up new global markets for their products. This is of concern as the education policy field becomes dominated by a ‘western’ economic and cultural model and often causes tensions between local needs, cultures and development progress and the more global economic development model.

Chapter three documents a useful and insightful research method - ‘Network Ethnography’ - and also outlines how it followed the education policy initiatives of Brazil, showing how developments were manipulated by neoliberal agendas. The selection of international ‘experts’ advising on education were closely analysed by the researchers and ‘although the international speakers are presented as representatives of “international best cases”, they are also products of previously networked relations that depend on different kinds of capitals, including financial and network capital’ (70). Seminars like this are a deliberate strategy for commercial investment in education, for example The Lemann Foundation and Google who launched a \$6.4 million digital lessons project in Brazil. ‘Seminars are planned to gather the chosen people, the selected “specialists”, who will rehearse and reinforce the funder’s beliefs’ (69).

‘What is not measured does not get done’

Chapter four examines the progress of education in Kenya and South Africa under the influence and pressure of measuring up to the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) agenda. The chapter clearly outlines a communications and implementation gap between government policy makers, development workers and their global agendas under the MDGs. Regional and local education staff and school-teachers are under pressure to enhance school enrolment to meet MDG targets while the wider aims of poverty eradication and gender equality are lost. The role of local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) in the mix seems not to provide any support to solve the problem and they do not ‘bring the procedural reflection down from ideal theory to real-life implementation’ (92). The authors hope that these MDG lessons will inform the progress of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015-2030).

Chapter nine investigates Global Education agendas and the SDGs in more detail. The key message is that the consultation process for the formulation of the goals ‘is largely driven by powerful Northern actors and represents the Northern voice’ (190). The suggestion is that ‘the primary interest group may be stake-holders connected to overseas aid’ (190). Again, lessons learned from the failure of the MDG to deliver are scrutinised under the SDG progress. The education agenda is unpacked in detail and analysed with a vision for its success. The role of NGOs in teacher training gets a critical focus and is worth consideration by many Irish NGOs. But key questions of the SDG agenda are highlighted: the non-binding nature of the targets; the commitment to funding; global rather than ‘Northern’ ownership; local political will to adopt the agendas; and lastly the ‘What is not measured does not get done’ caution from Chapter four.

Chapter six looks at decentralisation and community-based management in education policies. In particular, the focus is on El Salvador and the development of community-based education as part of the decentralisation of government functions supported by the World Bank to improve efficiency, accountability and effectiveness. This reform has

become a global model, the Education with Community Participation (EDUCO). The chapter suggests the success of this model in El Salvador was due to the convergence of three elements: national political-economic structures; national actors' constraints and interests; and international actors' preferences for reform. The adoption of the EDUCO model cannot simply be adopted in other regions and is often adapted to suit local needs before success.

In chapter seven, another community-based development is examined. Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes (CCTP) aim to activate the poor to change their situation. CCTP is examined as a tool for education change 'to break the intergenerational reproduction of poverty through education' (143). The value and success of such programmes is examined through the case-study of the Bolsa Escola programme in Brazil. The chapter examines the successes and pitfalls of such programmes through a series of 'dilemmas' such as supply, target groups, transfer amounts, supports and monitoring. A key finding is that not all people experience poverty in the same way and this should be a major consideration in identifying beneficiaries and their 'educability'. Funding should be related to creating the best conditions for access to education.

Chapter 12 offers another view on finance and access to education. Private schooling is becoming more global as a solution to education access. Low Fee Private Schools (LFPS) increasingly represent private sector provision of schooling in developing countries. This growth is not because governments are promoting them as policy, but because financial constraints in education budgets prevent expansion of the education sector, thus leaving an economic opportunity for private education providers. Research shows a preference for private schooling because of the perceived better standards and management of such schools. Research results presented here show better performance by children in LFPS schools over public schools, but this preference is more often guided by perception rather than empirical research. Although the LFPS model has been very common at a local level and provided by local entrepreneurs, the backing of the World Bank and the

economic opportunities presented are leading to the internationalising of the model and the development of standardised school models by a variety of well-resourced national and global providers. The key questions asked are those concerning financial access by the poor and also the governance of such school chains.

Chapter eight looks at further educational reform in Mexico and examines the role of competency-based education (CBE) which focuses on ‘what learners can do with their knowledge rather than what they know’ (162). The chapter is also interested in how global policies are ‘re-contextualized’ when adopted in different national or regional locations – ‘as global policy ideas travel, they transform’ (164). The author shows how a holistic education ideal can be narrowed in focus when aligned with national and international evaluations, such as PISA, and ‘shifts the focus away from indigenous education’ (169). Competency becomes the needs of the workplace, factories, industry and the service sector. The chapter also looks at the lack of support for teachers and, in particular, the lack of resources to support local CBE.

Chapter 11 deals with the education of children in conflict zones - ‘a large proportion of the world’s out-of-school children are located in conflict and post-conflict countries’ (240). Along with food and shelter, education is seen as a key building block for human development. But the direct conflict of national and cultural forces in conflict zones, leads to the ‘politicization’ of education. The direct attacks on education in Nigeria, Afghanistan and Pakistan are integrated with the ‘war on terror’ and the links to ‘radicalization’ have put education in the blurred space with military aid and humanitarian aid. In response to this international agenda, the International Network of Education in Emergencies (INEE) has been established as an effective lobbying, advocacy and policy coordination body. But the authors caution this development because of its governance body which is directly linked to its funding base - ‘there is a somewhat heavier involvement of institutions based in or directed from the “western” part of the world, often related with ‘traditional’ donor countries, as well as considerable support

from the UN agencies' (245). Once again we have a chapter that questions the Overseas Development Aid model in education provision.

Child Centered Pedagogy (CCP) is the focus of Chapter 10. As case-studies, the authors draw on examples from Turkey and Uganda. There is an interesting reflection again on the how and why of western pedagogies imported into developing nations. Uganda, for example, relies on more than half of its education budget on outside donor countries. foreign money equals foreign ideas? The authors outline the question of education policies and how they are 're-contextualized' to respond to the practice and needs of different cultures A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to pedagogy fails to recognise that pedagogy is 'both the act of teaching and the discourse in which it is embedded' (227).

Chapter 13 reflects on the case-studies in previous chapters and is concerned with a theoretical approach to the discipline of Global Education Policy. The author is concerned with and offers commentary on measuring and interpreting the 're-contextualization' of global education policy which in practice is becoming the global education industry. The subject concern here is posed with the statement '... nobody in this book assumes that global education policy spreads because it represents a "best practice" or because it fits into a universally shared understanding of what constitutes "good education"' (280). The author suggests that the key focus of this book, as stated in chapter one, is 'Why do policy-makers buy global education policy?' (281) and the concern is that 'globalisation (...) is periodically mobilised for political and economic purposes' (286).

The final chapter reflects on the global nature of Education Policy and the web of issues surrounding the development, funding, adoption, contextualisation and manipulation of global education policy. The links between development issues and education policies are reflected on and cautions the reader to go beyond the accepted 'western colonialism' theory behind educational policy development. The role of local recipients as active rather than passive actors is highlighted but they are also often reactive to

new ideas and policies - 'they might be seen to adjust to the existence of GEP, rather than seeking to alter it more fundamentally' (297). The author emphasises the 'immensely complex ensembles of political, economic and cultural elements that underlie and compose any conception of a GEP' (ibid.).

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