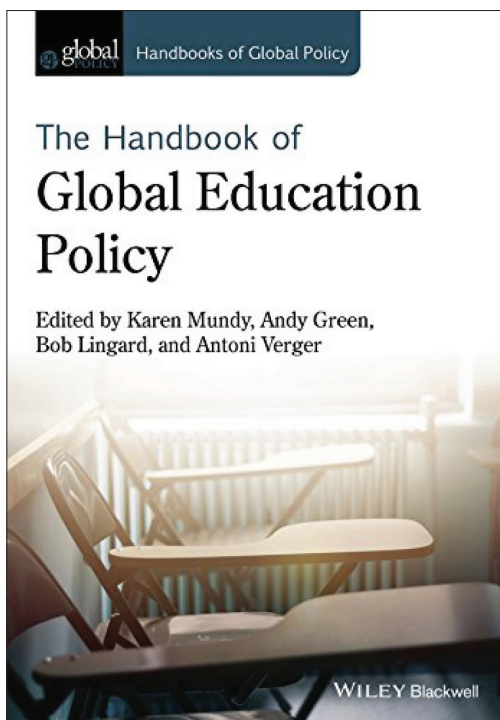


Book review

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The Handbook of Global Education Policy, edited by Karen Mundy, Andy Green, Bob Lingard and Antoni Verger

London: Wiley-Blackwell; 632pp; 2016, ISBN 978-1-118-46805-0 (hbk); ISBN 978-1-118-46804-3 (ebk)



The area of education policy has for years been of great concern to scholars working in the field of sociology of education and comparative and international education, among others. It is fair to say that it has evolved as an area of educational enquiry in its own right. It has given rise to a number of journals and also features prominently in the names of university departments. These bring together different areas of educational enquiry, each one of which was once considered broad enough to constitute a department on its own. Education policy has served as an umbrella term for the restructuring of graduate schools and faculties of education. It is, however, an important area of educational research in its own right, as the book under review clearly demonstrates.

Educational policies exist at different levels: local, national, regional, continental and global. The interaction between the global and the local in policymaking, interpretation and execution, or better still reinvention, has increasingly become of crucial interest over the years, given the way the policy discourse is driven by major organizations, ranging from the World Bank, the Organisation for Economic

Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) to transnational corporations, philanthropic organizations and civil society bodies, the last mentioned being prominent in advocacy work. The publication of such a compendium covering these aspects and much more is most welcome. As expected, this sizeable volume spans a broad range of issues, including globalization in education, privatization (even through low cost 'for profit' bodies in African countries) education for all (EFA) efforts, gender policies, human capital theory (HCT), the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA); this, as argued, involves contradictory ways of striving for equity and social cohesion when education is a positional good), education for reconstruction in post-conflict societies (this brings to my mind Karl Mannheim's famous work – *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*), the 'thickening' and 'thin' processes of global governance of teachers' work, methodological research issues such as ethnography and localization, higher education, language development (the hegemony of English and beyond), early childhood education and skills development. Chapter authors include some of the leading figures in the field of educational policy research: Stephen Ball, Aaron Benavot, Xavier Bonal, Martin Carnoy, Andy Green, Bob Lingard, Caroline Manion, Simon Marginson, Karen Mundy, Fazal Rizvi, Susan Robertson and Antoni Verger, to name just a selection, are household names in the area. There are also less known but equally important contributors, rendering this compendium a 'who's who' of educational policy and comparative education research.

It is very difficult in a short review to deal with each chapter adequately. My comments therefore will, for the most part, be general. I can say there is a strong comparative streak throughout most of the articles. This is hardly surprising given the presence of many authors in the comparative education field. We come across chapters comparing and analysing the trajectories of organizations with a specific educational mandate. These include the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), the latter dealing with children, which inevitably brings education and schooling into the equation and, it is argued, seems to be gaining more prominence than the former. These are contrasted with organizations that were not originally established with a specific educational focus. Among the latter, one finds the World Bank, arguably the most powerful institution with regard to education and development, the OECD, with its eagerly consulted PISA cross-country comparison mechanism, and, I would add, the EU. It is interesting to note how the EU, which uses its funding structures to influence the educational policies of its member states, despite claiming to have only a limited legal competency in this regard, exists alongside another important institution that for years played a very strong education policy advocacy role: the Council of Europe. This institution is rarely mentioned in current policy research, the book under review being no exception. This might reflect its dwindling role in global, or more appropriately European, policy discourse, at least in policy advocacy discourse. It has been promoting policies in a variety of educational fields such as adult education, language teaching and citizenship education, with implications for the teaching of history and other subjects. The editors would no doubt argue that, given the space constraints, their focus is bound to be on the major players, such as the World Bank. I would, however, find it interesting to read analyses of the roles that institutions such as the Council of Europe might have had in policy influence and advocacy. One other entity that could have been included is the Commonwealth, which comprises 53 member states. The chapter on transnational advocacy networks (Chapter 22) makes reference to the Commonwealth Education Fund 'to support 16 national education coalitions in Africa and Asia' (p.406). What other roles does it play

apart from the advocacy that is provided through fora such as the pre-Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting People's Forum? Perhaps this could be considered in a second edition of the volume.

Other chapters have a more regional or continental focus, such as those concerning China – Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) relations in higher education (Chapter 21) and the one on human rights in South Asia (Chapter 11). So too, is the chapter concerning Western perceptions and constructions/representations of the 'other' that is Asian higher education (Chapter 29), perceptions and constructions developed from a binary West–East viewpoint and in a totalizing manner. This chapter brings a postcolonial perspective to the discussions around education policymaking. The book provides theoretical paradigms or perspectives, against which one can view global policymaking, including postmodernism and world culture theory.

The best chapters for me are those that demonstrate the intricate interplay between the different levels of policymaking – between top-down and bottom-up flows spanning different levels of policy transition involving global, continental, national, regional and local bodies. The areas of educational provision covered are various, and one can say that the volume is quite comprehensive in this regard. It was interesting to see that, apart from schooling, skills training and higher education, which is to be expected, there was also a chapter on early childhood education (Chapter 12). One area which is treated sporadically (not entailing an entire chapter on its own) is adult education (there are references to adult literacy and adult skills), apparently still regarded as the 'Cinderella' sector of the education field, despite all the rhetoric surrounding its importance within the context of lifelong education or lifelong learning (LLL). And yet, LLL itself is also given short shrift in this volume, quite surprising in many ways, not only because one of the book editors holds a chair in the area, but mainly because of the importance accorded to it by UNESCO, with regard to the UN's Sustainable Development Goals and the EU. It is common knowledge that the EU has been encouraging and inducing its member states to develop national LLL strategies, providing funding incentives in the area and developing LLL quality indicators (paradoxically, they are mainly of a quantitative nature). In my view, LLL warrants a chapter on its own in an otherwise rich volume, with insightful chapters.