

of ethnic and religious diversity in educational policy and practice, I would suggest this book to those investigating policy and curriculum development, as a good example of grounded theory research.

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Policy-making and policy learning in 14-19 education, edited by David Raffe and Ken Spours, London, Institute of Education, Bedford Way Papers, 2007, 234 pp., £18.99 (paperback), ISBN 0-85473-746-4

In the last decade there has been a considerable growth in the research literature on the educational policy process. This volume represents an interesting and valuable contribution to this branch of research, and one that lends itself to being used as the basis for teaching on the topic of policy formation.

The focus of the volume is that moment in the ongoing saga of English qualification reform when the Titanic of Tomlinson hit the Iceberg of Adonis and sank, leaving various pieces of debris, most notably the 14–19 Diplomas, bobbing forlornly on the surface. Its central thesis is that English policy-makers are not tremendously good at learning, from research or experience (either their own or that of policy-makers elsewhere), and that this tends to produce ‘reforms’ that do not work all that well.

The editors make clear from the outset that as both of them played a part in the work of the Tomlinson Group they may be open to accusations of sour grapes. This reviewer, who played no role whatsoever in the deliberations of the Tomlinson Group and who remains moderately unconvinced by some of its recommendations, is happy to clear them of this charge. One does not need to be a supporter of what Tomlinson recommended to recognise that recent attempts in policy formation on many aspects of 14–19 policy fall far short of what might reasonably be hoped for by any taxpayer or citizen – in terms of both process and outcomes.

The volume provides a range of perspectives on policy formation and learning, including learning from earlier experiences, learning from various forms of local innovation, and learning from other countries (including ‘home international’ comparisons across the UK). On this latter point, there are informative chapters on experience in Wales and Scotland, which offer the warning that although the grass may indeed be somewhat greener on the other side of the fence, all is not perfect in either country. A chapter by Cathleen Stasz and Susannah Wright provides

a very useful framework of analysis based on a policy instruments approach, and Ann Hodgson and Ken Spours offer an exploration of the notion of 'policy space' as a vehicle for encouraging and facilitating policy learning.

Particularly enjoyable is a contribution by Jeremy Higham and David Yeomans on policy amnesia and the failure to learn from past experience. They point out that Tomlinson is only the latest in a long line of problems with qualification reform, with National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) offering an example of a failure to learn that has persisted for two decades. Here there seem to be two causes. First, the difficulty for ministers or officials to admit that mistakes have been made within a highly politicised environment. Second, policy-makers often seem to respond to failure, if they are actually willing to acknowledge that failure has occurred, by trying more or less the same thing again, only harder. Their reaction is much the same as that of an army officer in post-WWI Germany, who when asked why the putsch led by General Kapp had failed to overthrow the elected government remarked, 'everything would have been all right if we had just shot more people'. All too often, policy-makers believe that it is not that the policy itself is flawed, but that implementation was too half-hearted. The Department for Education and Skills' current obsession with the extremely elaborate process for development and roll-out of the new Diplomas is a case in point. It matters little how well-executed is the delivery, if the underlying design of what is being introduced is confused and flawed.

One potential inherent problem with this volume is that the editors and contributors are educationalists and therefore implicitly assume that learning is both a necessary and desirable activity, since learning is what they study, research, encourage and engage in. For them, it is the natural state of being, however imperfectly realised. The same may not be true for policy-makers, whose chief function is to exercise power. In the final chapter the editors note that, in terms of the willingness of, and necessity for, policy-makers learning anything, 'in the end, it is a question of power' (227). Here they arrive at the central challenge.

Power in educational policy-making in England is now incredibly centralised and concentrated. The big decisions normally appear to be made by an inner group of ministers, advisors and senior civil servants numbering no more than 20–25 persons (sometimes fewer). If researchers cannot 'sell' their data, ideas and analysis to this charmed circle, then their influence is liable to be small, since policy power is not shared, even with the relevant government agencies, such as the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) and the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). Such bodies exist to roll out policies devised further up the chain of command. At the same time, there is no institutionalised form of social partnership, and Royal Commissions are dead. Their pale shadows, inquiries headed by a public figure, such as Tomlinson or Dearing, simply exist to provide government with a menu of policies from which to cherry pick. The fate that overtook Tomlinson is by no means unusual: witness the government's rejection of the main recommendations of Lord Dearing's inquiry into the future of higher education on the day its report was published. By international standards England possesses a highly centralised and closed system of governance and there are few signs of this changing.

Some contributors, most notably Jacky Lumby and Nick Foskett, argue that researchers, by confronting policy-makers with rational evidence in relation to the failure of policy, are in danger of thereby embedding defensive behaviours among the policy community and further increasing their inability to learn. They conclude that, 'researchers may, therefore, be unconsciously complicit in the maintenance of single-loop learning' (100). The reviewer recognises from his own experiences that there is an element of truth in this remark, since criticism of policies and their outcomes is implicitly criticism of the competence of those who designed the policies. The problem comes in knowing how else researchers might proceed, or what they would need to do to stimulate and support among policy-makers the 'double loop' learning that Lumby and Foskett yearn for – the more so in a world where the nature and depth of interaction between

researchers (outsiders) and policy-makers (insiders) is largely dictated by those within the policy process. At the end of the day, learning is hard work, often uncomfortable and disconcerting, and requires a degree of self-reflection and honesty – in other words, it is not always all that attractive, and for the powerful, anything but the natural thing to do.

As various contributors note, unless there are actors, incentives and structural mechanisms embedded in the policy machinery that help to enforce a more outward-looking, reflective approach to the process of devising and implementing reform, the likelihood is that such an approach will not materialise. In many other education and training systems, one stimulus for reflection is the countervailing power of other stakeholders, an influence more or less totally absent here.

Perhaps the most depressing aspect of this volume is that it covers a single instance of failure to learn. Others that might be adduced might include vocational qualifications more generally, the work-based route/apprenticeship, performance management systems in education and training, the use of targets, and the role of employers within publicly-funded training. It will be very interesting to reread this book in a decade's time and see if the Diplomas have been able to buck the trend that it so skilfully dissects.

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Citizenship under fire: democratic education in times of conflict, by Sigal R. Ben-Porath, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2006, 159 pp., £19.95, ISBN 978-0-691-12434-6

The focus of this book is on education for citizenship in the context of war – an important and timely subject that has not been substantively addressed to date. Ben-Porath's approach is largely theoretical, although drawing from the Israeli and US socio-political contexts. This book makes an important contribution on two levels – firstly, theoretically, but also in a pragmatic sense – opening up a new line of inquiry, which should attract the interest of those working in the field of citizenship across the interdisciplinary boundaries of politics, philosophy, sociology and education.

The basic structure of the book is as follows: chapter 1 examines how conceptions of citizenship change in the context of war, drawing predominantly from Israeli and American experiences, where the author argues that these changing conceptions affect participation, deliberation and social unity. Ben-Porath uses the term 'belligerent citizenship' to describe this narrowing conception of citizenship that emerges in such contexts. The following chapter explores how some educational practices might perpetuate such narrow conceptions, where the author looks in particular at the teaching of patriotism in schools. She argues instead for what she calls 'expansive education' in order to defend 'democratic values' not only in the face of moral conflict, but in the face of defensive unification and belligerent citizenship. Chapters 3, 4 and 5 examine theoretical contributions from peace education, feminist theories and multicultural education, where the author highlights potential aspects that could be brought together under the umbrella term of 'expansive education' for the purposes of addressing citizenship education in the context of war. The concluding chapter attempts to draw together these themes and spell out what is meant in theoretical terms by 'expansive education' and how this might be applied.