

Changing Educational Policy: Developing a Bourdieuan approach to education policy analysis

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Background

Given current changes in education policy related to mediatization (Lingard and Rawolle, 2004), globalization (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), implementation (McLaughlin, 2006) and the continuous epidemic of educational reform (Levin, 1998), this paper presents an outline of some problems inherent in the application of what have been described as Bourdieu's 'thinking tools' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992, p. 160) to education policy analysis. Contemporary changes in education policy and policy processes are then one backdrop to this paper, which suggest the need for new approaches to policy analysis in education. The paper demonstrates the usefulness of an augmented Bourdieuan approach to policy analysis in the contemporary context because these contextual and policy changes also mean that Bourdieu's thinking tools need some development. The paper thus seeks to develop a Bourdieuan approach to education policy analysis based on an analysis of three empirical cases of contemporary education policy.

Research Questions

The paper provides an outline of three methodological challenges that globalization, mediatization and implementation issues hold for Bourdieuan studies of educational policy, and introduces some new concepts to address these problems. Specifically, the paper asks what are the effects of globalization and mediatization in relation to policy texts and processes and how implementation of policy has been affected by both and fast policy processes. The paper also asks what are the implications of these changes for the application of Bourdieu for policy analysis and how do his thinking tools need to be developed to offer a useful contemporary approach to education policy analysis.

Methods

The first methodological challenge relates to mediatization, and the effects resulting from the ongoing shaping of education policy and education policy processes through an engagement with the media. Specifically here, we are talking about the 'mediatization' of education policy. In order to describe and understand these sometimes intermittent engagements between the media and education policy, we introduce and develop the concepts of 'cross-field effects' and 'temporary social fields' to Bourdieu's approach and also consider their usefulness in other aspects of education policy analysis. The second challenge relates to globalization and the development of an emergent global education policy field, modeled on Bourdieu's (2003) account of the global economic field and framed by a neo-liberal social imaginary. The development of such a field challenges the assumption of many social science theories and methodologies of a necessary homology between society and nation-state and its related methodological nationalism. There is a need to deparochialise social science research (Appadurai, 2001). The methodological challenge for Bourdieuan studies related to the emergence of this as yet inchoate field is to develop ways to map the contours of this global education policy field and its overlaps with national policy fields - overlaps which might be understood as cross-field effects. This consideration will assist in understanding global/national imbrications in contemporary education policy and the strategic reworking of nation states. This is the rescaling of education policy and policy processes. The third methodological challenge relates to policy implementation in a time of fast, globalized policy discourses and to the dislocation between the universalized claims of the state and the contingent and specific logics of school and teacher practices. This disjunction between competing logics of practices offers another useful way to consider what some traditional policy literature has seen as policy implementation 'deficits' and 'failures'. As Bourdieu (1998) suggested, the state claims a monopoly on the expression of the universal as manifest in the voracious imperialism of policy, yet classroom practices remain contingent, specific and in a state of continual

flux. We argue that educational research requires methodological tools to understand and explain the incommensurate logics of practice in relation to the state policy field (itself affected by the global field) and field of the school, as an explanation of implementation 'deficits'.

Frame

The three methodological challenges will be illustrated through empirical cases, which hold implications for developing a Bourdieuan approach to education policy analysis. The mediatization of education policy will be demonstrated through an Australian policy case study in relation to the Batterham Review of Australia's science and technology capabilities (Rawolle, 2005, 2010). The emergent global field case will be articulated via a focus on global policy as numbers, governing through numbers and the creation of a global commensurate space of measurement, as with as OECD's PISA and IEA's TIMSS and PIRLS (Ozga and Lingard, 2007, Grek, 2009). The incommensurate logics of practice argument will be dealt with in relation to an Australian study of pedagogies (Lingard, 2007). These empirical cases support the development of an approach to education policy analysis using Bourdieu.

The paper provides a discussion of methodological issues across three different empirical policy cases outlined above, which utilized semi-structured interviews ('conversations with a purpose'), analysis of the symbiotic development of themes over time between policy documents and articles published in print media publications, as well as classroom observations and analysis of particular policy documents. The approach is critically reflexive, acknowledging the positionality of the researchers and a la Bourdieu, seeing epistemology as a practical matter, while seeking to avoid 'epistemological innocence' and recognizing critical social science research as 'fieldwork in philosophy'. The methodology also recognises the challenges to social science research practices flowing from globalization and thus the need to avoid 'methodological nationalism' and to 'deparochialise' educational policy analysis (Appadurai, 2001). The approach augments Bourdieu's thinking through analysis and explication of the cases. The methodological insights that are drawn across the three policy cases are intended to be of methodological and theoretical use for education policy research conducted both within and across national borders.

Research findings

The specific aim of the paper is to develop a Bourdieuan approach to education policy analysis and to discuss methodological issues related to the application of his thinking tools to such policy analysis. This purpose is linked to changes in both education policy content and production processes, which have resulted from rapid social changes linked to globalization, mediatization and new forms of educational testing and accountability, where high stakes national testing and global measures of comparative national educational performance increasingly steer schooling systems. The contribution to knowledge is twofold: firstly the production of a useful Bourdieuan approach to education policy analysis in the context of globalization and related post- and trans- nationalism; and secondly, an enhanced understanding of globalization, mediatization and implementation in relation to educational policy texts and processes.

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