

Book Review

Mary Richardson, Associate Professor of Educational Assessment
UCL Institute of Education, London

Date: 09/05/2019

European educational research (Re)constructed: institutional change in Germany, the United Kingdom, Norway, and the European Union by Mike Zapp, Marcelo Marques, Justin J. W. Powell with contributions by Gert Biesta and Jo B. Helgetun, Oxford, Symposium Books, 2018, 254 pp.(paperback), ISBN 978-1-910744-02-4

This edited book provides a useful discussion of educational research across European contexts; indeed the particular examples from England, Germany and Norway echo much of the prevailing discourses that challenge educational researchers in many European states and characterise the Europeanization of educational research. It contains a very detailed and useful bibliography making it valuable to researchers, students and educators alike.

The central tenets of the book hang on three core foci: analysis of how educational research has developed in recent decades; the success and trajectories of policies in education and the challenges inherent in educational research. The authors successfully confront and interrogate famously slippery issues such as internationalisation, quality, excellence, relevance and impact bringing them to bear in examples relating to thorny topics like education policy making, accountability systems and the impact of International Tests.

The chapters build a 'story' that moves between EU states and range of examples, but some stand out in particular. In Chapter 1, the model of Institutional Change establishes a clear outline of the 'cornerstones' and unpacks the detail relating to internationalisation, quality and relevance arguing that they are "not novel phenomena" (p27) rather they appear to be both prominent and closely intertwined in much of the current relevant discourses. In Chapters 2-4, the country-focused case studies are presented: firstly, Germany's response to the so-called "PISA shock" in 2001 is re-examined and here the authors reveal what might be a further shock, that of the reorientation of educational research into a more utilitarian framework that is guided by the results of testing and more educationally barren measurement systems. The spectre of International Tests and their impact loom large both implicitly and explicitly throughout the book.

Marques' chapter focused on the UK is a detailed examination of just how the grip of accountability and close measurement is taking hold on the Higher Education sector. His findings suggest a system that is mirroring the schools in England with educators and their managers being forced to act strategically revealing the prevalence of "normative isomorphic pressures" (p67). Essentially, evidence of gaming the system is now part of the way in which HEIs have to conduct their 'business'. The story of Norway's evolution in terms of educational research makes for fascinating reading: it's case is not a reflection of the usual narratives that surround the myth of Scandinavian success, rather Helgetun et al present a historical picture that is punctuated with challenge and tensions due to their being "a late comer to modern mass education" (p96). As such, the way that state education is positioned within a culture and context where social goods are carefully considered, we have the chance to better understand what a well-funded approach to educational research could entail. Chapter 5 provides a broader picture across the EU and considers how

funding has enhanced the quality and quantity of educational research within and between member states. He reveals a very positive outcome in relation to how universities (both large and small) are developing links, sharing work and evolving research cultures together. Examining this from the perspective of a Brexit-facing UK, we might well be concerned about how UK institutions can successfully renegotiate their working relationships and funding. The final chapters review the cases in light of their theoretical framework and demonstrate its success by demonstrating how the three core ideas can frame our understanding of the broad comparisons made using the discrete cases. The focused comparison of approaches to educational research, Chapter 7, suggest that whilst there is still space to consider fundamental questions relating to the aims of education there is a stronger emphasis on the evidence that is empirically based and might provide a more easily digested and understood about the success (or otherwise) of educational policies and systems.

This book provides the reader with substantial food for thought; we can examine country-focused cases at a very detailed level and then sit back and consider the broader contexts and ever-growing influence of supranational entities, big data and a continually evolving idea of what constitutes educational research, particularly at a time when the very idea of Europeanisation might be challenged.