

## Education Policy Network Analysis: the state of the art

Editorial

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This collection of papers offers a state of the art overview of education policy network analysis (EPNA). Many of the leading exponents of such work are included in the Special Issue. The papers explore aspects of the theories and methods that underpin and inform EPNA and offer exemplars in the use of these in relation to specific cases. The cases have a broad spread of coverage, both geographical (USA, England, Brasil, China, Australia, Lebanon, Bangladesh) and in relation to topic (vocational Education, climate change, evidence based policy, International schools, philosophy for children, *platformisation* etc.). Across the papers we see a new form of global governance in practice, populated by new kinds of policy actors, animated by new kinds of political relations, and informed by new (and old) policy discourses. New frameworks of sense and obviousness are in play within which policy is thought, talked and written and these have a global reach. While much education research continues to frame analysis work within the spatial limits of nation states, now many policies have their origins and influences elsewhere and are mediated by international organisations, mobile consultants, global philanthropy, multi-national companies, and so on, as the papers demonstrate. There is an emergence of new transnational spaces of policy and new intra-national spaces of policy, with new relationships between them.

The papers also suggest that new research strategies, methods and perspectives are needed to account for the participation of new actors and entities in the policymaking arena, the concomitant globalisation of policy and the enactment of heterarchical governance. EPNA is a methodological response to this new art of governance. Policy researchers are refocusing their attention on mobile people, policies and places - the “whos” and “whats” and “wheres” of policy. Research practice is homologous to/with the networks researched. This I have

called network ethnography (NE)(Ball 2016). NE is a research toolbox that education policy scholars have been employing to tackle the proliferation of policymaking sites and activities around the world and the increasing mobility and flow of education policy. It is used to investigate the interactions among public and private actors in education governance and global policy. It is a responsive and adaptive assemblage of research tactics. The NE method enables researchers to capture the details and meanings of policy relations, as well as the interactions, practices and sensitivities policy actors share. The NE approach requires an awareness of contexts and it involves the identification and analysis of both the creation and operation of global education policy networks and the connections that constitute them. This produces a map of the history of network 'effort'.

The papers in this issue take up the NE approach in a number of different ways. Gericke offers a critical look at network analysis research and outlines a narratological approach focusing on connective processes of sense making, and the ways that these processes transgress and re-figure existing field boundaries. Koon argues for a critical education policy network approach to support counter-hegemonic resistance to dominant policy narratives. In relation to this Jones and Bradbury consider the limits and possibilities of a grassroots network working within a neoliberal policy regime in England – *Philosophy for Children*.

The paper by Gillborn, McGimpsey and Warmington focuses on 'chumocracy' and the role of friends and allies of government within a network of right-wing actors and organisation in England and their espousal of hereditarian views about intelligence and criminality in relation to Black and working-class populations. Avelar considers the role of new philanthropy in Brazilian education policy and specifically the discourses and relational and institutional activities of the *Centre for Innovation in Brazilian Education*. Similarly, Liu and Hardy look at the *National Credit Bank of Vocational Education* in China and its role in joining-up policy actors around the automotive industry in Guangdong province. Again in a broadly similar way Rowe explores

the impact of an Australian evidence institute – the Australian Education Research Organisation through its relations with government and wealthy individuals and how it has been redefining useful research knowledge and what counts as evidence. Thus reshaping the policy ecosystem. Viseu also looks at the way expert knowledge is produced and disseminated by the OECD's *Network of Foundations working for Development*, an intermediary organisation bringing together philanthropists, policymakers and consultants. McKenzie explores the network activity of two United Nations intergovernmental organisations and how they facilitate policy mobility. Zakharia, Menashy and Shields use mixed-methods to look at the complex partnerships that are engaged in the work of refugee education in Lebanon. In a vertical case study focused on local and global actors they trace the participation of 440 different entities. Adhikary identifies three policy networks related to primary education in Bangladesh and explores the imagined governable worlds they deploy through actions, practices, logics and relations, and how reforms are moved, enacted and institutionalised through these imagined worlds. Han also addresses educational reform and specifically the use of experimental reform in China a form of contextual innovation that closes the gap between policy and implementation. The case analysed is that of the *National College Entrance Examination*. Also in China Jin looks at International Schools and the networking of local and international actors and on particular four boundary spanners who shape, promote and implement policy related to such schools. Finally, two papers address the *platformisation* of education. Lewis examines the growing influence of *Apple Teacher* in Australian schools and the concomitant privatisation of policymaking. While Peruzzo, Ball and Grimaldi attend to the founding of the *Oak National Academy* by non-state actors during the COVID crisis and more generally the ways in which the government in England has encouraged and created new profit opportunities for business in the field of state education.

Taken together the papers sketch through cases and examples, the outlines of a set of new technologies of policy and modalities of the state.

## References

Ball, S. J. (2016) Following policy: networks, network ethnography and education policy mobilities, *Journal of Education Policy*, 31 (5): 549-566.