

Preface

Educational policy has personal, educational, cultural and relational relevance to those involved in schooling (whether you are attending, delivering or researching education). This book is not about sexuality. But in order to explain my passion for the *seemingly* ‘dry’ topic of education policy that is at the heart of this book, it is worth noting that it originally stemmed from my individual engagement with education policy as an Australian high school student concerned with issues of homophobic bullying at my school. As a young person experiencing the shoving and slurs that went with the social approbation of my same sex attraction, I struggled to understand how certain kinds of bullying appeared utterly unacceptable in school rules and regulations, while other cruel acts and insults not only went unchallenged by certain staff members but were even perpetuated by a few of them. Even in this context, I could see that the anti-bullying policies at my all-girls Catholic school were not clear-cut. Some of the rules were spoken, some of them were written as procedures in manuals that would be referred to only in the most extreme of cases. Some of the rules seemed to intersect with the Catholic tenants of the school in confusing ways whereby the ‘higher power’ (whether anti-discrimination laws or the directives of religious leaders such as pope and bishops) could be uncertain. What one teacher or student saw as bullying others saw as an appropriate admonishment. These complications impacted me greatly, sparking a life-long concern for understanding education policy.

Later as a teacher and education lecturer, I became more aware of the collective efforts to understand education policy trends and changes in different aspects of education employment, and the broader social responses to the shifts in how education was to be ‘done’. Learning about different policy processes alongside different supervisors, co-researchers, faculties and centres and my engagement with policy took a more analytical bent, and I became interested in policy’s potential to impact upon educational problems more broadly. The difference in policy across government and independent schooling was always a fascination. Through various literature reviews and policy studies, the ways in which policies appeared to be conceiving and approaching educational problems in particular ways emerged in my work and the work of other policy researchers, as did the different lenses commonly used in its analysis.

Teaching education policy analysis to undergraduate and postgraduate students, it was often a useful starting point to be able to discuss these different lenses. Having a conceptual framework for our debates allowed the many different perspectives we held on the ‘point’ of policy or ideals for education to be made explicit. Research students particularly can benefit from having a broader overview of the field of policy when engaging with study on a particular policy area, to be able to better understand the impulses behind and around such texts. It was also useful to refer to this framework when engaging with educators and education administrators in their work, their responses to policy and their frustrations with different educational trends. I have also found it useful in my liaison work with policy-making bodies such as UNESCO, various levels of government and policy committees. Words such as ‘neo-liberal’ and ‘critical’ can be thrown about in policy discussions in the assumption that their meanings are obvious, which is not at all the case, and sharing a common vocabulary can allow much greater understanding of the issues and pressures educators face with different policy terrains. Researchers following the multifarious paths of education policies over the years may also take an interest in the framework presented in this book for reflecting on their own specialist areas.

In recommending books as an introduction to education policy, as a guide to frames of reference for policy debates, or for their analytical frameworks, I have often struggled to find one that was succinct in its framing but that took a suitably broad view of the field. I have also struggled to find a useful book for education policy courses or to direct education policy research students for their private study. There are wonderful policy books, but most have too strong a bias to one view of policy or another to allow multiple views of policy to be explored. There is a recent trend in policy textbooks to focus on the neo-liberal movement across education in Western countries for example, with a strong focus on critiquing this trend from a social-justice perspective. Focussing on only two views, such books can overlook even more dominant trends in education, and some other exciting alternatives to them. In writing this book, I found it important to spend time on several policy perspectives—not to solve educational problems with a simplistic ‘solution’ of a singular cure-all stance, but to stimulate dialogue and juicy debates about the fundamental ways we view education and the policies attempting to shape it. I hope to show that education policy is, indeed, anything but ‘dry’ or clear-cut.

Understanding Education Policy
The 'Four Education Orientations' Framework
Jones, T.
2013, IX, 71 p. 2 illus., Softcover
ISBN: 978-94-007-6264-0