

## Book Review/Recension d'ouvrage

---

### **International Handbook of Educational Policy**

by Nina Bascia, Alister Cumming, Amanda Datnow, Kenneth Leithwood, & David Livingstone

Published by Springer Netherlands, 2005, 1114 pages

ISBN: 978-1-4020-3201-1/ 978-1-4020-3189-2 (eBook/hardcover)

### **Reviewed by/ Revu par**

Kashif Raza

Qatar University

Research on educational policy has been through several phases and stages of development where the role of policy itself and of different stakeholders involved in its enactment, implementation and improvement has been perceived differently. In order to understand these trends and their contribution to the current growth of research on contemporary policy, a handbook was needed that would provide comprehensive accounts of how educational policy was understood, is being employed and should be perceived to advance the field. This timely handbook, comprising two main parts that are divided into five theme-based sections and are each edited by one of the book editors individually, fulfills this gap quite successfully.

The introductory chapter, authored jointly by the book editors, provides a historical overview of the stages policy development and policy research has been through as well as discusses the eminent trends it has observed as a field. The discussion starts with the earlier conceptions of 'policy' and its role in achieving the intended objectives followed by a shift in research focus from planning to implementation where the significance of policy implementers became the center of attention, specifically their capacity to work with educational policy that could influence the outcomes. Towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a major shift in the perceived role of educational policy took place when it was seen as a tool for aligning the eminent components of an education system – an attempt which the editors refer as a governmental effort to introduce 'systematic reforms' or 'standardization', and is discussed in the first three sections of the book. The introduction also summarizes the major themes discussed in the five sections of the book.

**Section 1**, edited by Amanda Datnow, has 10 chapters that focus on wide-range of educational reforms highlighting a shift in policy focus from small scale to large scale and discussing the factors that have been triggering these trends. Four recurring themes dominate this section of the book: First, a debate on centralization vs decentralization of educational policies with examples of policy reforms at national (Wells and Holmes, and Stoll and Stobbart) as well as local and district levels (Anderson and Togneri) is prevalent. Secondly, chapters by Datnow et al, and by Knapp and Meadows discuss how local teachers struggle to acclimatize themselves to large-scale educational reforms, especially when effective professional development opportunities are unavailable. Thirdly, four chapters by Munday, Joshee and Johnson, El-Khawas, and Howie and Plomp, respectively, discuss the flow of educational policy reforms across geographical borders and its influence on education. The last theme of this section highlights a shift towards evidence-based policy-making where Wells and Holmes, Wasik and Hindman, and Anderson and Togneri observe preference for data-driven decision-making in educational settings.

The central theme of **section 2** is *Leadership and Governance*. Edited by Kenneth Leithwood, it comprises 12 chapters and deals with three contemporary challenges in education at K-12 and post-secondary levels. The first issue, discussed in two chapters by Louis and Lasky, Datnow and Stringfield, is concerned with the ambiguous interconnect-edness between research, policy and practice, and the ways they inform each other. The second issue is related to the emerging challenges in educational governance and financial support of public education, which is discussed in six chapters by Land and Stringfield, Mulford, Corter and Pelletier, Karumanchery and Portelli, with two chapters by Lang. The last four chapters by Day, Riehl, Leithwood, and Jacobson discuss the relationship between leadership and educational policy development and implementation. The four leadership approaches (market, decentralization, professionalization and management) for the implementation of accountability policies presented by Leithwood are a significant component of this section.

**Section 3** focuses on policies about *Teacher Quality*, is edited by Nina Bascia, and comprises 8 chapters. The main areas of concern in this section are the types of teacher development policies in different countries and the assumptions about teaching and learning that influence these policies. While Bascia's chapter reports a policy shift towards classroom teaching and Quartz, Barraza-Lyons and Thomas discuss the factors that contribute to teacher attrition in different countries, Chin and Asera deal with teacher professional development and provide a critique of teacher certification and licensure policies, Slegers, Bolhuis and Geijsel suggest factors that can enhance productivity of teachers as well as administrators for school improvement, and Reynolds highlights the influence of politics in teacher quality policy development. Similarly, chapters by Osborn and McNess, and Smaller discuss curricular reforms as another focus of teacher quality policy. Finally, Sachs explores the development of standards and their political objectives.

**Section 4**, edited by Alister Cumming, comprises 12 chapters that deal with educational policy issues concerning *Literacies and Learning*. Communication between key

stakeholders is the first matter discussed in four chapters by Levin, Strickland, Luke, and Shultz and Fecho who emphasise the significance of effective dialogue between literacy researchers, policy developers, and implementers. A second concern, addressed by Pressley, Kelly, and Bereiter and Scardamalia, is the knowledge base that informs the development process of policies related to literacy curricula, is. A similar trend discussed by Triebel, King and Hornberger, and Shultz and Fecho is the shift from an ideological basis to a sociological basis of literacy policies where community interests dominate policy development. The last challenge discussed in this section by Gipps and Cumming, Olson, and Jackson, is about strategies to align literacy policies to social settings and objectives.

The last section is dedicated to policies about *Workplace Learning*. It comprises 13 chapters and is edited by David Livingstone. Providing an account of the transition from skills development and employment readiness at school to the enactment of policies that promoted vocational training and career guidance at paid workplaces, chapters in this section discuss the factors that led to this trend. For instance, Heinz and Taylor provide a case study of Germany and Canada, Belanger discusses the arguments in favor of workplace learning, Hager provides an account of relevant theories, and Berg proposes reforms in job description instead of educational settings. Another significant development identified in this section is the progress of research on empirically based policies in two dissimilar directions. Firstly, chapters by Rainbird, Munro and Senker, Rissanen and Kolehmainen, Sawchuk, Billett, and Forrester recommend changes in existing training policies at workplace by highlighting their deficiencies. Secondly, more emphasis is given to informal learning and volunteer work and their connection with school education and paid employment in chapters by Livingstone, Schugurensky and Mundel, Eichler, and Dehnbostel, Molzberger and Overwien.

With meaningful debates on multiple aspects of educational policy and their implementation in different contexts and settings, this book proves to be a comprehensive handbook and interests a wide range of audiences. There is something for everyone in this book. Educators can find policy discussions on teaching and learning and the eminent challenges in the field. Researchers can enjoy policy related debates and proposals for further investigation. Educational leaders and policy makers and analysts are exposed to different contexts and settings where policy related initiatives are being taken and improved.