

## Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard: Globalizing education policy

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Minori Nagahara

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In *Globalizing Education Policy*, authors Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard (2010) assert that neoliberal ideology—a driving force behind the processes of globalization—produces and reproduces social inequalities limiting the transformative potential of education. They argue against the historical inevitability of what they call the “neoliberal social imaginary” (p. 34) envisioning instead a new role for education in creating an “environmentally and economically secure, socially just and democratic global future” (p. 197). Rizvi and Lingard challenge readers to consider how the neoliberal social imaginary has shaped education policy around the world and what this means for policy analysis that crosses global, regional, national, and local boundaries.

Rizvi and Lingard examine “the ways in which global processes are transforming education policy around the world in a range of complicated, complex, commensurate, and contradictory ways” (p. 3). Their work provides an introduction to education policy studies that is informed by the authors’ experiences as policymakers and as scholars who have studied the processes of globalization. Rizvi and Lingard endeavor to shed light on “new policy content and process; the new rules for education policy associated with globalization; and the related need for new approaches to education policy analysis” (p. 4) believing that many of the older theoretical and methodological approaches to policy studies are insufficient and that new tools and ways of thinking must be employed in order to make sense of policy processes that are “shaped by a range of transnational forces and connections, demanding a new global imagination” (p. 3).

This review highlights Rizvi and Lingard’s timely contribution to the growing scholarly discourse around globalization and educational change (Darling-Hammond 2010; Hargreaves and Shirley 2009; Zhao 2009) raising questions and suggesting areas in need of further inquiry. It also explores the possibility that while

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M. Nagahara (✉)  
Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA, USA  
e-mail: nagahara@bc.edu

the neoliberal ideology is a powerful one that plays a central role in shaping current global educational practice and policy, overstating its dominance in all national contexts, without accounting for other influences and ideologies, may be limiting in designing and conducting research and policy analysis that challenges the status quo.

The first chapters of the book involve a discussion around key definitions and conceptualizations of policy drawing from the work of a wide range of scholars from different disciplines including education, anthropology, sociology, and political science. Rizvi and Lingard argue that public policies have to do with applying authorized norms across groups and communities serving to educate and to build consensus. For the purpose of their analysis throughout the book, the authors adopt the definition of policy as the “authoritative allocation of values” (p. 7). They emphasize the importance of examining the nature of authority as it relates to education policy suggesting that the Westphalian understanding of political authority—assuming that policies are contained within geographical territories, and that external institutions do not influence autonomous nation-states in the development of policy—has been challenged and destabilized by the processes of globalization. New approaches to the study of educational policies are necessary, Rizvi and Lingard contend, in order to examine policies that are both “an expression of the specific effects of globalization” as well as “the way the state and policymakers seek to manage and rearticulate global pressures, balanced against competing national and local pressures” (p. 21).

Rizvi and Lingard focus on current understandings of globalization, a term that they readily acknowledge is highly contested. Not only does globalization have to do with shifting patterns of transnational economic and political activity, as well as the reshaping of culture and communication through advances in information technologies, but it also has to do with how these changes are interpreted and enacted. The authors make the case that globalization “affects the ways in which we both interpret and imagine the possibilities of our lives” representing “both an ideological formation and a social imaginary that now shapes the discourses of education policy” (p. 23). They contend that globalization can be understood in at least three different ways: (1) as profound changes that are taking place throughout the world, (2) as an ideology representing different political interests and forms of power, and (3) as a social imaginary that shapes identities, aspirations, and expectations of the masses. Throughout the book, the authors emphasize that not all countries experience globalization in the same way. Their level of autonomy as well as their participation in the global economy is largely dependent on where they are located on the geopolitical terrain.

The notion of a social imaginary is central to understanding the thesis of this book. Rizvi and Lingard define social imaginary as

A way of thinking shared in a society by ordinary people, the common understandings that make everyday practices possible, giving them sense and legitimacy. It is largely implicit, embedded in ideas and practices, carrying within it deeper normative notions and images, constitutive of a society.

(p. 34)

Such social imaginaries, shaped by local, national, and global influences, play a significant role in framing the problems to which policies are the solution. In order to ensure consensus and to legitimize policies, governments employ strategies to match policy discourse to the dominant social imaginary. The ascendancy of the neoliberal social imaginary in global education policy—characterized by a belief in market fundamentalism and human capital theory—has been reinforced by the role of international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank, the EU, and UNESCO in shaping policy.

While neoliberalism is undoubtedly an influential ideology shaping global and national social imaginaries, there is a need to probe further and to examine how other ideologies interact with neoliberalism to shape social imaginaries in particular contexts. In his critical examination of conservative modernization and its impact on the current US educational policy and practice, Michael Apple (2006) points out that its dominance is made possible by “a tense coalition of forces”—comprising ideologies including neoliberalism, neoconservatism, and authoritarian populism—that can “overcome its own internal contradictions and can succeed in radically transforming educational policy and practice” (p. 49). What other ideologies might be interacting with the neoliberalism in different national contexts to form unique social imaginaries? Would this line of inquiry help to explain variations in how different national contexts experience globalization?

Warning against the reification of globalization as a catchall explanation for trends in global education policy, Rizvi and Lingard suggest that analysts need to critically examine the actors in education policy discourses—individuals, institutions, and organizations as well as their historical, cultural, and political contexts. The authors also make explicit their own stance toward policy analysis which draws from post-colonial, post-structural, and critical theories.

Rizvi and Lingard point out that policy research is conducted for a range of purposes making a distinction between analysis *of* policy and analysis *for* policy. The former tends to be academic and exploratory in nature, and the latter is typically conducted for the development of policy. Both types of analyses have political influence, and the practical implication of this distinction is that they involve different theoretical and methodological boundaries and commitments. Policy analysis must, therefore, involve asking the following questions: Who is doing the policy research? What is the purpose? What is the context? In addition to having different purposes, policy research deals with a range of different foci from how policy problems are constructed and framed to how policies are implemented. The authors provide a helpful framework for critical inquiry in approaching policy analysis.

In taking a critical, reflexive stance toward policy analysis, Rizvi and Lingard contend that attending to the positionality of researchers is crucial. Positionality, according to the authors, takes multiple forms including actual location (e.g., the researcher’s position as bureaucrat, an academic, or a consultant), theoretical and political location (e.g., theoretical, methodological, and political commitments), and spatial location (e.g., national location). Beyond the researcher’s positionality, global education policy analysis requires an understanding of how different nations and intergovernmental organizations are positioned in relation to each other. While

the argument for the need to account for positionality at multiple levels is compelling, this is an idea that needs further clarification in order to be useful in practice. How is an understanding of positionality translated into action when conducting research or policy analysis?

Following their conceptualizations of policy and globalization and their ramifications for the work of policy analysis in the first three chapters, Rizvi and Lingard highlight key issues and dilemmas of global education policy that merit the attention of policy researchers and analysts in the remaining chapters of the book. These address the allocation of values in education policy; curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation; changing forms of governance; equity policies; and policy dilemmas resulting from increased mobility.

In their chapter on values allocation and education policy, Rizvi and Lingard note that philosophical articulations of educational goals (e.g., equality, freedom, and efficiency) seldom translate into particular policy prescriptions. Instead, policies are shaped as values are interpreted and reconciled with other, sometimes competing or contradictory, values. Policy analysis provides opportunities to show how policies privilege certain values over others revealing political and ideological interests. Rizvi and Lingard argue that the current global trends in education policy—heavily entrenched in the neoliberal social imaginary—privilege efficiency and liberty marginalizing other values such as equality and learning for the sake of learning. From this perspective, education is a private good, as opposed to a public good, and all learning is linked to “the instrumental purposes of human capital development and economic self-maximization” (p. 81).

Values allocation in education policy not only steers the goals of education, but also impacts curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation—the three “message systems” of Basil Bernstein (1971). Rizvi and Lingard note that traditionally, studies of education policy have focused more on issues such as funding and values while neglecting the three message systems. The separation of policy studies and curriculum studies, they suggest, have sidelined the discussion of curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation in policy discussions and policy studies. The centrality of the three message systems to the work of teachers may help to explain why teachers have had difficulty connecting education policy with practice.

The assumption that globalization demands new skill sets, knowledge, and dispositions and the pressure to create “more efficient and effective systems...through more robust and coordinated regimes of accountability” (p. 94), the authors contend, have created a fourth message system: high-stakes testing—a narrow version of the evaluation message system. Using case studies from England and Australia, Rizvi and Lingard illustrate how testing has redefined pedagogy as a set of technical skills and has narrowed the curriculum, a concern that is shared by many other scholars of education (Darling-Hammond 2010; Hargreaves and Shirley 2009; Ravitch 2010). The influence of global education policy on the message systems requires policy analysts to focus on these systems as being central to policy.

In addition to driving educational practice, the politics of performance and rigid accountability regimes have influenced educational governance creating a “poly-centric state with private-sector involvements and principles, for example markets, operating inside the state structures and framing its policies and policy practices”

(p. 136). Shaped by national governments and reinforced by intergovernmental organizations, this type of governance has impacted the role of teachers and principals who are “expected to implement policies set elsewhere and have their schools achieve according to various league tables of performance indicators” (pp. 121–122). This has eroded professionalism and has limited the transformative potential of education.

There are also implications for educational equity, Rizvi and Lingard argue. While education systems around the world have sought to address issues of equity through education policies and programs (sometimes with the help of international development agencies), progress has been “uneven both within and across nations and across social groups, particularly in relation to indigenous populations and low socio-economic groups” (p. 140). Using three international policy initiatives—the Millennium Development Goals, policies addressing gender equity, and programs addressing the digital divide—as examples, the authors illustrate that within the neoliberal social imaginary, the values of equity and justice take on narrow definitions focusing on access to educational institutions and programs without adequately attending to quality and outcomes.

Along with concerns about ethics, equity, and justice in education, the unprecedented levels of population mobility raise the following policy questions: How should cultural diversity be addressed in educational settings? How can academic mobility be encouraged without being exploitative? What does it mean to internationalize curriculum? How can language policies in education respect and affirm all cultural and linguistic backgrounds? What can be done to encourage the mobility of skilled people while making sure that all countries have access to the talent and expertise required for ongoing development?

The authors do not endeavor to answer these questions but rather point out how crucial debates are about their argument in coming years. In their conclusion, Rizvi and Lingard reiterate their contention that neoliberalism has become the dominant social imaginary of globalization resulting in narrow conceptions of education that emphasize values of market efficiency, individual self-interest, and liberty. Pointing out the failures of neoliberalism, such as those manifested in the recent financial crisis around the world, the authors call for radical alternatives to the existing global imaginary which recognize

That human beings are social and cultural beings as well as economic ones, an imaginary that recognizes the need to think locally, nationally and globally. Such an imaginary suggests the need for the construction of cosmopolitan citizenship that emphasizes collective well being sutured across local, national and global dimensions. (p. 202)

Educational policies studies have a role to play in this transformation, and to that end, they need to be debated, globalized, and deparochialized.

The strength of Rizvi and Lingard’s book lies in their systematic and thoughtful approach to analysis that resists the reification of complex ideas and issues. Drawing from a wide range of multidisciplinary literature and using relevant case studies from around the world, they provide a thorough and compelling discussion of globalization and its impact on education policy. Each chapter builds on the ideas

from the previous chapter adding layers of nuance and complexity as the book progresses.

What may have pushed the analysis further is a discussion around the educational policies and practices of countries that have resisted the narrowing of curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation, and accountability that the authors attribute to the neoliberal social imaginary. In recent years, scholars of education have highlighted the reform efforts of education systems in Finland and Asia, not only for their high achievement on international assessments, but also for their emphasis on equity, high quality curriculum and pedagogy, as well as a more inclusive, expansive notion of evaluation, accountability, and responsibility (Darling-Hammond 2010; Zhao 2009).

The education system in Finland, Darling-Hammond (2010) points out, has rejected curriculum standardization reinforced by frequent external assessment, a narrow curriculum that is focused only on basic mathematics and reading skills, and is encouraging innovation and local capacity building. Zhao (2009) highlights recent education reform trends in Asian countries such as China, South Korea, Singapore, and Japan, with long histories of standardization, high-stakes testing, and a somewhat narrow curricular focus which are increasingly focused on broadening the curriculum to involve emphasis on creativity, emotional development, and critical thinking skills.

Rizvi and Lingard acknowledge that countries experience globalization in different ways depending on their global positionality. Beyond geopolitical positionality, what accounts for the variation in how countries—influenced by a dominant neoliberal social imaginary—develop, articulate, and enact educational policies and practices? What can be learned from examining these policies and practices that appear to resist convergence? Is it possible to overstate the dominance of a neoliberal social imaginary and its influences on global educational policy and practice? Is it possible that this focus obscures other powerful influences on how people across the globe envision the problems and possibilities of education?

This book is one that resonates with the recent work of other scholars who have also called for new approaches to understanding and promoting educational change. Rizvi and Lingard's work is both instructive and provocative bringing key issues to light, challenging assumptions, and pointing out that as the social, political, and economic contexts of education shift, so to must theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of educational policies.

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