

Theorising the State and Globalisation in Education Politics and Policy

Teorizando o Estado e a Globalização na política e políticas educacionais

Teorizando el Estado y la Globalización en la política y políticas educativas

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Abstract: The essay aims to overturn much conventional (and generally critical) thinking which emphasises neoliberal prominence in policy and policy making. Two main policy making processes are noted: (1) a rational, systematic process or (2) an incoherent, incremental version. The latter account is perceived as more realistic model and accounted for by making use of particular perspectives regarding the nature and role of the state in today's globalised world. Using Dunleavy and O'Leary's *Theories of the State* (1987) and its update, *Theories of the Liberal Democratic State* (2009) by Dryzek and Dunleavy, four main theories are identified: the pluralist/neopluralist, Marxist, elitist and New Right/market liberal. Three perspectives on globalisation – the neoliberal, radical and transformationalist – are analysed with the latter providing insights into the varied impact of globalisation on the policy making process and its outcome. The essay concludes with an appeal for future research to acknowledge the complex nature of policy making, thereby using more nuanced analysis.

Keywords: Theories of the state. Globalisation. Policy making models.

Resumo: Este artigo visa reverter o pensamento muito convencional (e geralmente crítico) que enfatiza a proeminência neoliberal na política e na formulação de políticas. Dois principais processos de formulação de políticas são observados: (1) um processo sistemático e racional ou (2) uma versão cumulativa (gradual/incremental). Este último é percebido como um modelo mais realista e representativo por fazer uso de perspectivas específicas relacionadas à natureza e ao papel do Estado no atual mundo globalizado. Com base nos livros *Theories of the State* (Dunleavy e O' Leary, 1987) e *Theories of the Democratic State* (Dryzek e Dunleavy, 2009), quatro teorias principais são identificadas: a pluralista/neopluralista, a Marxista, a elitista e a Nova Direita/mercado liberal. Três perspectivas de globalização são analisadas: a neoliberal, a radical e transformacionalista. Essa última oferece *insights* sobre o impacto variado da globalização no processo de

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formulação de políticas e seus resultados. O ensaio termina com um apelo para futuras pesquisas reconhecerem a natureza complexa da formulação de políticas, utilizando, dessa forma, uma análise mais diversificada.

Palavras-chave: Teorias do Estado. Globalização. Modelos de criação de políticas.

Resumen: Este artículo busca revertir el pensamiento muy convencional (y generalmente crítico) que enfatiza la prominencia neoliberal en la política y en la formulación de políticas. Dos procesos principales de formulación de políticas son observados: (1) un proceso sistemático y racional o (2) una versión acumulativa o (gradual/incremental). Este último es percibido como un modelo más realista y representativo por hacer uso de perspectivas específicas relacionadas a la naturaleza y al papel del Estado en el actual mundo globalizado. Tomando como base los libros *Theories of the State* (Dunleavy y O'Leary, 1987) y *Theories of the Democratic State* (Dryzek y Dunleavy, 2009), se identifican cuatro teorías principales: la pluralista/neopluralista, marxista, elitista y la nueva derecha/mercado liberal. Se analizan tres perspectiva de globalización: neoliberal, radical y transformacionista. Esta última ofrece *insights* sobre el impacto variado de la globalización en el proceso de formulación de políticas y sus resultados. El ensayo termina con una apelación para que las futuras investigaciones reconozcan la naturaleza compleja de la formulación de políticas, empleando, de esa forma, un análisis más diversificado.

Palabras clave: Teorías de Estado. Globalización. Modelos de formulación de políticas

What is the relationship between the role of the (liberal democratic) state and policy making in education today? The question is relevant since much of the literature in education politics has focused on the 'neoliberal' turn (see, for example, APPLE, 2001, 2003; BALL, 1990, 2006; CROUCH, 2003; MARGINSON, 2006). Specifically, this has meant developments in several ways: a shift from an expansive state as provider of public services to a minimalist one; the contracting out of educational services and instruction to private market- and community-based providers, which themselves are subject to less regulation and oversight; and the imposition of targets, performance measures and indicators to raise educational 'standards'.

Although the observation captures developments in education politics and policy in a succinct fashion, it has become loaded. Many observers of the scene, among them activists and advocates of greater state intervention, have perceived these changes negatively; as a result, many – for example, teachers and student groups – use the term 'neoliberal' in a pejorative fashion. At times this has limited ability to analyse developments in education, since both the analytical

and normative become almost interchangeable. Beyond this, the blanket use of the 'neoliberal' term has meant limits to the degree of analysis possible. This is evident at both the macro- and micro-levels. First, with regard to the former, while it may have been relevant to discuss a shift to neoliberalism in education after the 1970s and during the 1980s, how does this help analysis today? Is it still the case that the neoliberal model introduced then is still relevant? Is it really that static? If not then in what ways has it developed? More generally, by using 'neoliberal' as a catch-all term, are we denying the possibility that some of the conceptual features associated with it may have risen or fallen in both influence and relevance? Second, at the micro-level, a similar case can be made about the particular groups associated with education policy and politics. When neoliberalism emerged in the education field, this meant greater weight among business and market-oriented groups. Yet does this mean that some of the more traditional groups, like teachers, students and administrators have become irrelevant?

While a review of the literature shows that while the politics and policy has indeed become more 'neoliberal'; that this has not meant a complete reduction in the role and size of the state and of other groups in policy design and formation. This article therefore offers an alternative perspective in analysing developments in the ideology, role of the liberal democratic state and policy making in education over the past three decades. First it analyses the two ways in which policy making may be understood: as a rational, systematic process or as a more incoherent one. While the former may be portrayed as an ideal type, reality is closer to the latter. But in order to explain why this is, analysis of the contemporary liberal democratic state and its relationship to the present effects of globalisation are necessary. Therefore, the essay draws on the works of two important political science texts (*Theories of the State* and *Theories of the Democratic State*) to present the four main theories of the nature and role of the state on one side – i.e. pluralist/neopluralist, Marxist, elitist and New Right/market liberal – and the three ways in which globalisations can be understood – as benign, negative or somewhere in between – in order to make sense of this process. By emphasising a more neopluralist theory of the state and a mixed perspective of globalisation, an arguably more nuanced account of (education) policy making may be offered. Specifically, this means recognition of diverse groups and interests in policy making, including within and beyond the state and many of which may be as opposed to the interests of business and the market as in favour of it. The effect of these challenging (and sometimes contradictory) elements is to present a more complex and uncertain policy making environment than is more often assumed.

Developments in education politics and policy making

What is policy and policymaking in the education sector? To address these questions, the section considers the extent to which education politics constitutes a sub-branch and divergence of the study of politics. The section defines what is meant by 'policy' and the way policy processes may be understood.

Today the study of education politics is distinct from the more general field of political science. However, prior to the 1970s this was not the case. In his review of the politics of education, Wong (1995) notes that both the general study of politics and in education specifically was primarily based on the existence of institutions and their functionalism, whether those consciously formed (e.g. formal structures such as executives, parliaments, bureaucracy) or those that were rooted in society (e.g. behaviouralism, political culture). These approaches, along with the concept and analysis of power contributed towards greater understanding of why particular policies were pursued over others in the field of education, as well as how their subsequent success or failure could be accounted for.

This joint approach to political science and the politics of education began to change during the 1970s. This owed much to a growing scepticism with previous modes of analysis in (predominantly American) political science had provided the space for economic ideas and models to gain influence within the discipline. The shift from formal institutions and behaviouralism gave rise to more rational choice and individual-oriented explanations of the world. At this point though, the relationship between the politics of education and wider political science began to diverge. Researchers working in the politics of education maintained an arguably broader perspective, including perspectives from sociology, anthropology, public administration, human and curriculum development (WONG, 1995; SUTTON; LEVINSON, 2001). The more multidisciplinary approach underpinned recognition of the increasingly complex nature of the politics of education (LEVIN, 2001, p. 190). Such awareness has been important for developing understanding of how policy is formed and conducted in the field.

But what is 'policy'? Policy is clearly distinct from the broader study of politics in which it exists; it is a more specific, limited element, entailing a 'plan of action' or 'statement of aims of ideals' (TAYLOR et al., 1997, p. 1). But rather than just being a general aspiration, it tends to be focused; it involves the search for and realisation of (supposedly) rational and efficient administration of a large public resource (SUTTON; LEVINSON, 2001, p. 4). While policy can be both public and private, in the field of education (and social policy more

generally), the public dimension has been more prominent. It is 'public' because it involves a set of actions carried out by the state and shaped by the politics of different and sometimes competing actors, both public and private.

In this rational guise, policy is therefore the culmination of a (policy making) process in which various options are proposed and assessed in the form of various measures which are designed and analysed logically before being implemented and evaluated systematically (RIZVI; LINGARD, 2010, p. 1-2, 5). This idealised version suggests a linear way of policy making which results in a succession of ongoing experiments, some which are successful and others less so. Indeed, some studies of (American) policymaking have portrayed it as a largely mechanistic process in which particular actors converge on a given problem and interact with each other to formulate a set of measures which are then implemented. The process relies heavily on the use of scientific and technical knowledge in a series of experiments, which are then evaluated for their effectiveness and revised accordingly (BIGGS; HELMS, 2006; BIRKLAND, 2011). Such a model was based on an assumption before the 1970s that there would be a supposed consensus within the state, between governments, teachers' organisations and administrator groups (LEVIN, 2001, p. 11).

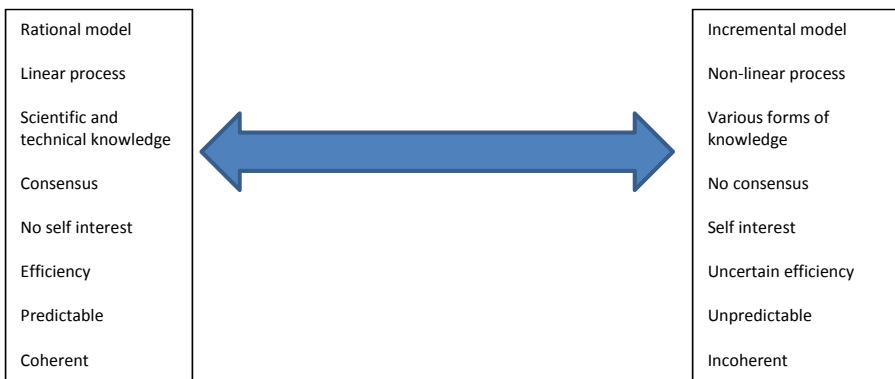
Such models of policy making have been theorised, resulting in an overly abstract and idealised form with arguably limited reflection of reality. The value of such analysis is that it enables an arguably more distinct contrast between the different features associated with particular models. Indeed, as Birkland (2011, p. 296-303) notes, several models that explain policymaking, from the stream metaphor (where problems, policy and politics stream into a window of opportunity ripe for change) and the advocacy coalition framework (where two or more groups come together to prompt change) to punctuated equilibrium (in which periods of stability are upset by short bursts of policy change) and institutional analysis and development (where group rationality and cooperation encourage the emergence of new policies). Implicit in these examples is arguably a strong sense of agency, which may appear to supercede structural actors; various actors come together at opportune moments to realise a 'policy' which represents the sum of their interests.

However, there are limitations with this approach. First, these models point to a policy making process and policy outcome that is highly rational. By rational here, we assume that those involved in proposing, negotiating and crafting a policy are able to do so while putting their own values and interests to one side. Yet because of these different groups and their interests, it is not clear why this should happen.

Second, policy can develop in other, less ‘rational’ ways, such as incrementally. In contrast to the rational approach which suggests a more linear and macro-level assessment of the different options, incremental change occurs through the building of policies on previous ones and through the use of smaller, more limited adjustments. Such developments may lead to potentially unforeseen outcomes. This messiness is exacerbated by the process of contestation, compromise and negotiation between different actors and their competing motivations (RIZVI; LINGARD, 2010, p. 12). Indeed, incrementalism may lead to potential policy incoherence and contradictory preferences of opposed groups. The result of this of these various and competing influences is their incorporation into policy design and implementation will invariably lead to a set of both intended and unintended outcomes. As a result, according to Ball in Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 5), policy encompasses a range of different elements, from text to action and what is produced, whether intended or otherwise. Policy may therefore include elements which are incoherent, even contradictory to each other. This therefore points to a process and output that is not reliable, generalizable or predictive (RIZVI; LINGARD, 2010, p. 2).

The difference between the rational and incremental approaches can arguably be portrayed visually (Figure 1). Specifically, the two models present polar opposites of each other in an abstract form. These abstractions serve a purpose, by enabling one to compare and contrast the differences of each. By contrast, empirical case studies of policy making processes will not be as clear cut in their features, since they will incorporate elements of both; consequently, distinctions will be a matter of degree rather than clear cut as presented in the binary rational/incremental model.

Figure 1 - Rational v incremental policy making



Third, awareness about the lack of coherence associated with policy making has coincided with a growing emphasis on market liberalism in the education politics and policy. This has been partly driven by financial pressures, with government retrenchment in response to growing political and public scepticism of the state's performance and delivery in social welfare. This ideological turn meant that after the 1970s the policy process was perceived to be more conflicted and policy design, implementation and evaluation more top-down, with the role of practitioners declining and that of business groups rising. At the same time the wider context emphasised education in broadly economic terms with educational institutions as failing and greater reliance on private funding and sensitivity towards incorporating greater diversity in the system (i.e. ethnic, linguistic, religious) (LEVIN, 2001, p. 12-14).

Fourth, by focusing only on 'visible' policy (whether in the form of the policy making process, its participants and the outcome), we may potentially overlook the extent to which policy options may be predetermined. Moreover, the emphasis on the visible masks other underlying and deeper interests which may be at work. While this may be understandable, owing to the focus on policy as a clear 'plan' or 'statement' for 'action', this only presents one side of the analysis. The other side would acknowledge the limitation of both the rational/linear and incremental models of policy making by going beyond the formal institutions, i.e. governments, legislatures, ministry officials, professionals in the education system (teachers and administrators), interest groups (students and parents), and also include actors who have been ignored or overlooked, such as the different interests within the state.

By state here we mean more than the formal institutions of government, legislature and bureaucracy. While it certainly includes them, it goes beyond such identifiable actors to include some of the more abstract features of the state, including its conventions and rules (DRYZEK; DUNLEAVY, 2009, p. 2). By including these elements it becomes evident that there may be more deeply rooted interests underpinning the state and its actions. An example of this may be in the logic of the World Bank: while claiming to work on behalf of the world's poor and in support of social and economic development, many of its policies are limited from realising these objectives. This is due to their neoliberal focus, including a limited state, privatisation, greater use of the market and deregulation, many of which have undermined the poor in terms of job creation or security. Yet for many in the World Bank, such objectives appear 'hidden' owing to the organisation's rhetoric in support of 'enabling' and 'facilitative' states which will act as the guarantor of development (by others) (PITMAN; MASEMANN; PEREYRA, 2012). In short then, concentrating on visible

policy change may mask the most influential sources of power. A focus on the policymaking process may highlight certain actors at the expense of other, more discreet ones. Therefore it is necessary to acknowledge the unspoken and overlooked elements which drive states. As the principal policy actor in the education sector over the last century has historically been the state, it therefore makes sense to examine its role and the different perspectives associated with it.

The traditional role of the state in policy making

Various underlying interests may be at work which has an impact on policy formation and development – and contribute to a model of policy making and output which is closer to the incremental model rather than the rational one. Moreover, those interests may be associated less with particular groups and organisations and more with the frameworks within which the policy process takes place. Principally the role of the state, whether as an agent itself which pursues a particular policy or in providing the framework for other groups to engage in policymaking.

To assess the extent to which the state can play a significant role in the development of (education) policy we employ theory to provide a generalised account of what the state is and why it is fashioned in such a way. Especially relevant in this regard is the work of Dunleavy and O’Leary (1987) and the four main families or schools of thought which they identified regarding the nature of the (liberal democratic) state, outlined in *Theories of the State*. These include the pluralist, Marxist, elite and New Right perspectives. To these four could be added a modification of pluralism, i.e. contemporary or neo-pluralism.

Two decades later, Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009) revisited these classical schools of thought in *Theories of the Democratic State*, noting the emergence of other theories which have provided analysis of the state, including feminism, environmentalism and post-modernism and thereby providing a snapshot of the different explanations for the nature and capacity of the state at two moments in time. The two accounts presented by the two books occurred during a period in which the features of neoliberalism – i.e. a smaller and more limited role for the state and greater use of the market and the private sector in public services – were prevalent. While the various theories of the state offer analytical insights into the nature of the state, the other dimension associated with theory – i.e. the normative – was not far behind. But whereas different accounts offered different recommendations, whether explicit or implicit (indeed, ‘hidden’ on account of the values associated with the theories), the predominant one of the 1980s was the New Right version.

The pluralist theory of the state was articulated by a number of scholars, mainly of them operating in the liberal tradition (i.e. Locke, Hobbes, Montesquieu, Mill). These accounts suggested that power is shared across a wide range of groups and political actors in the state and society, from the government, political parties and interest groups to social movements and organisations (DRYZEK; DUNLEAVY, 2009; BEST, 2002).

In contrast to pluralism are more elitist theories of the state, including those from Machiavelli and Mosca to Pareto and Gramsci. For these theorists elitism was a consistent feature of human organisation and operated across both time and space; indeed they noted the prevalence of aristocratic rule throughout history, regardless of the social and economic composition of society. This perspective placed such theorists in contrast to Marxist accounts of the state, which emphasised the role of economic activity and the mode of production (and especially that associated with capitalism) in giving rise to social differentiation (i.e. class) and consequently political separation between elites and masses, the former which represented the interests of the leading class. Therefore, while both elite and Marxist theories of the state shared a common understanding that power was closely guarded by elites and kept out of the hands of the people, they differed in their explanation regarding how and where those elites had emerged.

The New Right theory of the state is drawn from ideas associated with public choice and methodological individualism. From the latter was drawn the idea that understanding how the state functioned it was necessary to study the role of individual rational actors and their behaviour. From public choice came the idea that these actors may be working in a manner beneficial to themselves, but with unintended wider consequences for the system; essentially that government had become inefficient, largely as a result of insufficient competition owing to the monopolistic nature of bureaucracy. Furthermore, the lack of competition and inefficiency was exacerbated by government agencies' susceptibility to 'capture' by special interest groups.

Two other aspects of the New Right are important to note. First, although the New Right emphasised the analytical dimensions of government failure, other, more normative voices proposed a series of measures to overcome this. Those recommendations went hand-in-hand with neoliberal advocates of state reform, including reducing the size and role of the state and introducing other private actors into the delivery of public services, in part to offset bureaucratic agencies' self-interest, into the delivery of public services. Second, the New Right constituted more than public choice analysts and neoliberal reformers; as Ball (2006) has noted, during the 1980s, the New Right came to acquire a broader definition, owing to the coalition between more market-oriented proponents on

one side and the growing group of social conservatives who stressed traditional and ‘natural’ bonds of family and community. This coalition was prominent in the Moral Majority and Thatcher government in the US and Britain respectively and also operated in a contrary way, propounding a larger role for the state in order to monitor society. Therefore, because of the blurred features of the New Right in this period, when Dryzek and Dunleavy updated their analysis of the four main schools of thought, they used the more narrow term ‘market liberal’ to distinguish it from the social conservative elements.

To these four main schools of thought regarding the state and its relationship to society (and therefore policy making) may be added an updated and revised version of pluralism: neo-pluralism. Neo-pluralism emerged during the second half of the last century mainly as a response to previous developments. As well as taking account of the Marxist and elite theories of the state, it acknowledged the limitations of earlier pluralism by incorporating the role of other and newly apparent political, social and economic forces and groups. While it maintained the pluralist view that the state and policymaking was represented and conducted by a diverse range of actors, it acknowledged the extent to which this was limited. Not all actors were equal in their influence on the state. This included awareness of the more professional nature of the state and the greater role that technical specialists within government bureaucracy could play, alongside the increasingly visible power of business actors like transnational corporations could bring as a result of globalisation. These pressures represented a winnowing out of the conventional view of the state, with growing pressures from within and without, above, below and across state boundaries (BEST 2002; DUNLEAVY; O’LEARY, 1987; DRYZEK; DUNLEAVY, 2009, p. 17-8).

Globalisation, neopluralism and the state of education policy making

Dunleavy and O’Leary’s (1987) study of the primary theories the state – pluralist/neo-pluralist, Marxist, elite or New Right/market liberal – illustrated the different ways that the state and its policy making process could be analysed. But it was state-centric and therefore did not take sufficient account of one of the most significant phenomena which has had political, economic and social implications at a worldwide scale since the 1980s: globalisation.

That the earlier work paid limited regard to globalisation and considerable attention to the state was understandable; the authors’ consideration and production of the text had occurred during the early years of the New Right ascendancy in Europe and North America. By contrast, in *Theories of the*

Democratic State, Dryzek and Dunleavy (2009, p. 325-6) acknowledged the impact that economic globalisation and its other variants (e.g. political, cultural) had played in the intervening two decades. In particular, they noted its erosion of the relatively impermeable boundaries between states. As McGrew (2000) has pointed out, the effects of several political, economic, technological and cultural changes in recent decades gave rise to a process of globalisation which has involved the stretching of social, political and economic activities across borders and their related intensification, interconnectedness, speed and depth. At the same time, McGrew noted that these causes and effects were value-neutral; what gave them meaning was in the way that they were perceived. In particular three schools could be identified: the neoliberal school which perceived the effects of (economic) globalisation as benign, its connection to free trade raising the prospect of greater affluence and political liberalism; a more radical view which saw globalisation as a means for continued Western imperialism, with corporations and markets replacing the role of colonialism; and the middle ground of a more transformationalist view which assumed that the division between Northern dominance and Southern dependence was less clear cut and was instead being replaced by the emergence of different groups and actors globally, with some in both the North and South benefiting from globalisation and others suffering.

Arguably these different perspectives on globalisation may be mapped onto the four main theories of the state. Therefore, while the New Right/market liberal approach most closely identified with the neoliberal perspective on globalisation, the Marxist and elite theories of the state could most closely be seen in the features associated with the radical view of globalisation, especially in relation to the hierarchical relationship between elites/North and masses/South. Meanwhile, the neopluralist account of the state was closest to the transformationalist perspective in that it balanced both neoliberal and radical assumptions regarding globalisation

The Janus nature of this analysis suggested that the neopluralist theory of the state arguably offered a more robust account of the role of liberal democratic states and their approach to policy making. Specifically, it did so in several ways. First, Dryzek and Dunleavy noted the strength of the neopluralist perspective in acknowledging both the rise of New Right/market liberal analysis and the prominence of neoliberal proposals in public policy discourse since the 1980s on the one hand, while also observing the continuing relevance of the state and the presence of different actors beyond the market in policy making on the other. Indeed, a neopluralist and transformationalist observation of policy making offers insights into the challenges faced by the capacity of

contemporary welfare states and the growing role of international organisations (e.g. the World Bank, OECD and UNESCO) to promote policy, changes in states' legal frameworks (e.g. the WTO and its influence on trade in educational services) and a transnational private market of education providers (VERGER; ALTINYELKIN; NOVELLI, 2012). The current period has coincided with greater uncertainty and congestion in the education and social policy spheres, from the use of new managerialism, performance targets and indicators, more attention towards devolution/decentralisation in education, as well as greater access and equity for girls, curricular content, pedagogy and testing and the international trade and competition in education services (RIZVI; LINGARD, 2010, p. 16; BALL, 2006, p. 69-74).

Second, other groups and interests, including those which are less inclined towards the neoliberal shift have continued to have a role in policy making in education. This includes both more 'traditional' groups such as teachers and students as well as the ongoing presence of the state through its officials and representatives. The effect of these groups and organisations' involvement is to make clear that the move towards greater market forces in education politics and policy has not been complete – although it has coincided with deepened understanding and complexity regarding the identity of such groups and the scope and capacity of effective policy making. In short, while much of the literature suggests that the involvement and influence of 'traditional' actors like teachers and students in the policy making process declined after the 1970s. In part, this reflected their relatively weaker demands for a bigger state, support for state socialism, commitment to comprehensive public primary and secondary school education, increased financial compensation and job security for education professionals against the stronger, cost-cutting proposals advanced by the New Right/market liberals. Yet taking this view has overlooked the extent to which these non-neoliberal groups have been able to continuing occupying an important space in policy making and state-society relations. Furthermore, their position is aided by globalisation as well, offering them opportunities for others within and beyond the state (OLSEN; O'NEILL; CODD, 2004; GAVENTA; MCGEE, 2010). For example, globalisation has provided the means for transnational social justice movements to emerge and articulate the interests with which they are associated, thereby providing a counterweight to market-oriented providers at the global level (BALL, 2006).

Third, that these groups are engaged in policy formation and development does not mean that they represent exactly the same interests as they previously did. Certainly at an organisational level, such groups have become fragmented as a result of greater job insecurity, diversity in occupational

status and identification. Indeed, teachers and students (if not parents) had been highly unitary actors, generally being organised and mobilised in unions. The organisational breakdown mirrors similar trends across society as a whole, where traditional forms of organisation have been in decline. Moreover, their self-perception and that of society's view of them has indeed been challenged. For example, at one level, such groups may be distinguished between teachers as producers of education and students as consumers (LE GRAND, 2003). But this distinction masks the way that they may be perceived in the policy process, as either a source for change or obstruction. For teachers, whether they constitute a traditional trade union (focused on the interests of labour) or as a distinct type of professional worker, or whether they may be understood as civil servants or social reformers remains a key consideration of the state (COOPER, 1992; COOK, 1996). Indeed, Le Grand (2003) distinguished between two main ways of seeing teachers: either as public spirited altruists during the period of state growth and expanded public education prior to the 1970s or as selfish budget-maximisers during the subsequent neoliberal ascendancy. Similarly, students also occupy an ambiguous position despite being a consumer group. For neoliberals they compromise the raw material of the educational process, to be trained and prepared for the labour market; for neoconservatives they are the vessels for the transmission of prevailing social and cultural mores; for some on the left they are perceived to be the agents for social change (TROWLER, 1998).

Fourth, just as traditional groups like teachers and students may still be involved in policy making, so has the state and its bureaucracy also continued to play an important role – even if globalisation has varied in its impact on the scope and capacity of different states (RIZVI; LINGARD, 2010, p. 13; OLSEN; O'NEILL; CODD, 2004). This trend reflected awareness – even by neoliberal advocates – of the need to build up state capacity to ensure effective public policies, which was illustrated in the World Bank's 1997 World Development Report, *The State in a Changing World*. As Boer (1997) noted, the state would not be the provider of public services as it had been in the past, but neither would it leave it completely to the market. Instead it would adopt the role of 'partner, catalyst and facilitator.' This model of social development would be taken up by (predominantly) social democratic governments across Europe and Latin America during the 2000s.

Final remarks

This article began by noting the broad trend towards neoliberalism in education politics and policy which began after the 1970s and which appears to have achieved monolithic status in much of the literature since. By emphasising

the role of the market and of private providers and action in the education field, the study of education policy has become somewhat limited by overlooking the role of other actors and the extent to which they can influence the process – or not.

In order to challenge this view, the article sought to suggest an alternative account. It observed the different accounts which explain the role of the state as set out in *Theories of the State/Theories of the Democratic State* and in the wider context of an increasingly globalised world. But whereas the New Right/market liberal analysis and neoliberal policy prescriptions became increasingly prominent from the 1980s, the last decade has not suggested its complete dominance. Instead, Dryzek and Dunleavy have argued that a more neopluralist explanation has accounted for the ongoing role of the state coupled with the involvement of non-market actors and non-market interests. The role of other ‘traditional’ groups (teachers, students and administrators) has changed. They no longer operate as the primary actors in the ‘plural’ domestic education sector; instead they operate alongside other social and economic influences (e.g. international financial institutions and parents’ groups) in a less delineated and hierarchical and more globalised ‘neoplural’ policy making system. Indeed, the perspective of neopluralism enables us to see that while all groups may have a voice, some may be more powerful and carry greater weight with decision makers than others.

As the same time, the shift from a New Right/market liberal explanation has coincided with changes in the way that globalisation and its effect on states has developed. Rather than being a linear process in which globalisation has benefited one set of interests and depriving those of another, diverse accounts of globalisation exist, from one offering a benign account (i.e. neoliberal) to a more critical one (i.e. radical) and between them a more middling explanation and analysis (i.e. transformationalist). Of the three perspectives, the transformationalist offers perhaps the fullest account, by noting that just as globalisation has provided the space for certain neoliberal concerns to gain traction, it has not excluded the opportunity for other, non-neoliberal groups and interests to act, both within established institutions like the state as well as beyond it, between nations and locally. At the same time, these developments have coincided with challenges towards our understanding of what these groups and their interests represent. As noted in the section above, teachers’ and students’ identities has not remained static, for example; changes, including in their aims, organisation and actions point to more diverse identities and interests.

The more nuanced approaches offered by the neopluralist and transformationalist accounts can perhaps help explain why (education) policy making is less rational and systematic than the ideal type and more incremental

and messier in reality. For example, Epstein, Cuban and Darting-Hammond (2004, p. 2-3) note that while there has been a trend towards centralisation in the US school system, there is no clear control of the overall education sector, with federal and state governments playing a role alongside courts and NGOs. Furthermore, there is a growing division between the proposals and demands of policymakers in government on one side and the pressure to implement them by practitioners, such as school principals and teachers on the other. Additionally, Dougherty (1988) has observed that ministers and bureaucrats were as much influenced in the design and implementation of policies by what they might gain from other actors involved in the process (e.g. access to business's resources and students' political support) as they were in the relative merits and relevance of a policy recommendation. For Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 14-19), the developments of recent decades points to a process in which an understanding of policy has meant the need to understand the wider features beyond the legislative document usually associated with it; that policies exist within particular social, economic and political contexts and are value-laden; and that while they remain predominantly the preserve of state activity, they do interact with policies in other sectors and (i.e. they have consequences on other areas), whether intended or not.

Such observations point to a set of processes in (education) policy making – policy formation, development, output, analysis, re-formulation – which are far more complex than are often portrayed. In this regard, policy making generally and in the education sector specifically would therefore appear to be more closely in line with the incremental model rather than the rational model as portrayed in Figure 1 in the first section. But what does this suggest for future research about education policy and politics? Perhaps relevant in this regard are the observations that Darling-Hammond (1998) drew attention to when searching to design and develop effective policy: just as it cannot be achieved by applying a top-down approach, neither can it be found through a redirection in favour of an alternative bottom-up one. Just as government and bureaucrats may be remote from the everyday realities within schools, so too can grassroots-initiated reform be too grounded in local context and therefore non-transferrable. In its place a rethinking of the different roles of government, subnational actors and other groups in the education sector should be developed in a more complementary way. This has been echoed by Levin (2001) who provides advice to both policymakers as well as recommendations for further research. In terms of policy he encourages a more modest set of goals which take into account the social context in which policy is being designed and enacted, while ensuring that they make a difference for its recipients (i.e. students). For researchers, he suggests that more emphasis needs to be given

to the conceptual frameworks associated with policy and the greater use of comparative analysis and original research. Ultimately then, at the core of these appeals is what Steiner-Khamsi (2012) pointed out: in order to make sense of education policy it is necessary to study the context in which they are shaped and disseminated. This therefore means taking into account not only the content of these policies – both intentional and unintentional – but also the different groups and their interests who are involved in the process, long with the pressures and opportunities offered by phenomena like globalisation.

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