SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION AFTER GLOBALISATION
Still commentary rather than critique?*

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Abstract: This paper starts from the argument that what counts as sociology of education has been predominantly shaped by its «project» – the political understandings and goals of its proponents, which, it is argued, are meliorative, even redemptive – and by its «location», predominantly in institutions devoted to teacher education. This has meant that its contributions have had as their main objective producing *commentary* on the reasons for success or failure of education policy, rather than a more rigorous *problematisation* and *critique* of those policies and practices. The paper develops the argument that the «globalisation» of education made it easier to distinguish between commentary and critique. There are three, linked, aspects to this argument. First, it problematizes the continuing value of each of the terms in the standard «commentary» assumptions of «national, «education», «systems», arguing that in an era of globalisation, the assumptions on which they rest, particularly those relating to the governance of education, are no longer valid. They result in a set of what are referred to as «isms»; that is, rather than being problematized, they become «fixed, abstract and absolute» (Fine, 2003: 465). A further aspect is the need to problematise the «composition» of education systems. Here, it is argued that this arises from the combinations of four key elements; modernity, capitalism, the «grammar" of schooling, and the relationships of education with national societies. The final means of problematisation is a set of «education questions». Here, rather than accepting that we all «know» what education «is», it should be approached by a set of questions that relate to all education systems and thus enable us to discover and explain their differences. These questions are raised in respect of four levels of «Education»: practice, policy, politics, and outcomes.

Keywords: critique, problematisation, education questions, architecture of education, governance of education

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SOCIOLOGIA DA EDUCAÇÃO NA GLOBALIZAÇÃO: AINDA A COMENTAR EM VEZ DE CRITICAR?

Resumo: Este trabalho parte do argumento de que o que conta como sociologia da educação tem sido predominantemente modelado pelo seu «projeto» – as interpretações e objetivos políticos dos seus proponentes, o que, como se argumenta, tem intenções de melhoria, mesmo de redenção – e pela sua «localização», predominantemente em instituições dedicadas à formação de professores. Isto quer dizer que as suas contribuições têm tido como principal objetivo produzir *comentários* sobre as razões para o sucesso ou o fracasso da política educativa, em vez de uma *problematização* mais rigorosa e *crítica* dessas políticas e práticas. O artigo desenvolve o argumento de que a «globalização» da educação tornou mais fácil a distinção entre comentário e crítica. Há três aspetos interligados neste argumento. Primeiro, problematiza-se o valor contínuo de cada um dos termos nas premissas padrão do «comentário», acerca de «nacional», «educação», «sistemas», argumentando que, numa era de globalização, os pressupostos em que estes assentam, em especial os relativos à governação da educação, já não são válidos. Resultam num conjunto do que é referido como «ismos»; isto é, em vez de serem problematizados, tornam-se «fixos, abstratos e absolutos» (Fine, 2003: 465). Um outro aspeto é a necessidade de problematizar a «composição» dos sistemas educativos. Aqui, argumenta-se que estes surgem a partir de combinações de quatro elementos-chave; modernidade, capitalismo, a «gramática» da escolaridade e as relações da educação com as sociedades nacionais. Os meios finais da problematização são um conjunto de «perguntas sobre educação». Aqui, em vez de aceitar que todos «sabemos» o que «é» a educação, esta deve ser abordada por um conjunto de questões que dizem respeito a todos os sistemas educativos e que, assim, nos permitem descobrir e explicar as suas diferenças. Estas questões são levantadas em relação a quatro níveis de «Educação»: prática, política, políticas e resultados.

Palavras-chave: crítica, problematização, questões educativas, arquitetura da educação, governação da educação

SOCIOLOGIE DE L'ÉDUCATION DANS LA GLOBALISATION: CONTINUER À COMMENTER AU LIEU DE CRITIQUER?

Résumé: Ce travail part du principe que la seule sociologie de l'éducation qui vaille a été modelée en grande partie par son propre «projet» d'une part – c'est-à-dire par les interprétations et objectifs politiques de ses composants, ce qui, comme on l'a souvent argumenté, vise l'amélioration, voire la rédemption – et d'autre part par sa «localisation» qui situe majoritairement la sociologie de l'éducation dans des institutions dédiées à la formation de professeurs. Ce qui veut dire qu'au lieu de proposer une *problématisation* plus rigoureuse et *critique* de ces politiques et de ces pratiques, ses contributions ont eu pour principal objectif de produire des *commentaires* sur les raisons du succès ou de l'échec de la politique éducative. L'article défend l'idée que la «globalisation» de l'éducation a rendu la distinction entre commentaire et critique plus facile. Trois aspects interconnectés structurent cet argument. D'abord, nous problématisons la valeur continue de chacun de ces termes dans les prémisses de référence du «commentaire», en ce qui concerne le «national», l'«éducation», et les «systèmes» en avançant l'argument que, dans une époque de globalisation, les présupposés sur lesquels ces derniers reposent, en particulier ceux qui ont traits à la gouvernance de l'éducation, ne sont plus valides. Il en résulte un ensemble de ce que l'on nomme les «ismes», c'est-à-dire qu'au lieu d'être problématisées,

ces notions sont devenues «fixes, abstraites et absolues» (Fine, 2003: 465). Un autre aspect renvoie à la nécessité de problématiser la «composition» des systèmes éducatifs. L'idée est que ceux-ci procèdent de la combinaison de quatre éléments clés: modernité, capitalisme, «grammaire» de la scolarité et relations de l'éducation avec les sociétés nationales. Les derniers dispositifs de la problématisation consistent en un ensemble de «questions sur l'éducation». Au lieu d'accepter le fait que nous «savons» tous ce qu'«est» l'éducation, celle-ci doit être abordée comme un ensemble de questions liées à tous les systèmes éducatifs nous permettant de découvrir et d'expliquer leurs différences. Ces questions sont posées par rapport à quatre niveaux de l'«Éducation»: pratique; politique; politiques, et résultats.

Mots-clés: critique, problématisation, questions éducatives, architecture de l'éducation, gouvernance de l'éducation

Introduction

The point is often made that education is not a discipline, but a field of study. As such it can be seen as an area of activity in which exponents of various disciplines roam, guided by their own perspectives and approaches. In particular, education is a field where subdisciplines (sociology of education, philosophy of education, educational psychology, history of education, etc.) have flourished. What is distinctive about the education subdisciplines, however, is their desire to «improve», to demonstrate the capacities and value of education, rather than merely treat it as an academic exercise. Sociology of education is at least as much driven by its «project» – which I referred to as a redemptive project – and its location, at the heart of the institution and practice of education, in organisations devoted to teacher education, as it is by any intellectual project (see Dale, 2001). The elements of its theoretical infrastructure, the assumptions and conceptions of reality it is based on and the purposes towards which it is bent, have tended to be shared with the practitioners and policy makers they are studying. What this means is that contributions to the sociology of education tend essentially (1) take the nature of the field of education for granted, and (2) regard it unproblematically as a «good thing» (see Meyer, 1999) and consequently focus on enabling improvements in its practices, organisation and administration, its understanding of childhood, its values and their attainment, and so on. It has focused particularly on the basis of the identification and removal of barriers, be they pedagogical, organisational, conceptual, logistical, ideological, etc. to the full realisation of the field's promise and potential, which are themselves rarely, if ever, questioned. Their contributions, then, have as their objective *the immediate improvement* of practice or policy rather than, or even at the expense of, a *more rigorous problematisation and critique* (in the sense of not taking for granted, rather than disapproval) of the field, its assumptions, structures, processes and range of outcomes. In a short article written in 1970

entitled «Education cannot compensate for society», which seems rather to fly in the face of the redemptive project, but which still, sadly, describes a very recognisable picture of schooling, Basil Bernstein (1970: 108), the greatest English sociologist of education, wrote

> the very form our research takes tends to confirm the beliefs underlying the organisation, transmission and evaluation of knowledge by the school... (while it) very rarely challenges or exposes the social assumptions underlying what counts as knowledge, or what counts as a valid realisation of that knowledge.

And this is what I mean by the title of this lecture; it is what I mean by suggesting that sociologists of education have been involved in commentary rather than critique.

There are, though, at least two ways in which we can understand the notion of critique, both of which I think are necessary. One is, as I have just suggested, to define it in terms of its opposite; the opposite of critique is «taking for granted», not «approval», which is the opposite of criticism. The other is related to the idea of the public role of the intellectual, the idea of the university as critic and conscience of society, of the need to «speak truth to power». Sociology of education has historically sought to be critical in both these ways. However, my contention is that its adherence to «commentary» means that in terms of the first sense of critique, it has indeed interpreted it in terms of disapproval, of criticism. Referring to this as «commentary» is not intended to suggest that it has been craven, bland, or fawning. Far from it. Sociologists of education are frequently in the vanguard of the critics of education systems, policies and practices. However, criticism in the absence of sound critique tends to become, sometimes quite rapidly, political advocacy, that takes the same things for granted as its opponents, but values them differently. And this, of course, also limits the possibilities of the second sense of critique, in so far as sociologists of education as public intellectuals operate within the same assumptions as what they are seeking to critique.

Globalisation and the sociology of education

Interestingly enough, in terms of this lecture, globalisation has both made it easier to recognise the nature and consequences of the commentary-critique distinction, and much more important to do so. In a sense, it appears, plausibly, but ultimately misleadingly, to make the fundamental question about education: «how does globalisation affect education?». In order to understand this question, we have to be clear about what we mean by globalisation, education and the relationships between them. My main focus will be on what is meant by education, but I will briefly consider the other two elements first.

You will doubtless be relieved to know that I do not intend to take you through an exhaustive discussion of what is meant by globalisation. Rather, I will just mention four differ-

ent uses of the term, which are all valid, and whose collective coverage and scope offer a valuable sense of what is to be understood by globalisation. I should perhaps make clear here that I regard globalisation as signalling a qualitative, rather than a quantitative, shift in the world as we experience and know it. It is a paradigm shift, an epochal shift. If we want to date it, the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall represents an iconic moment. It represents the triumph of capitalism, of a particular kind, over the only possible competing system, the end of a major political rather than economic split in the world, indeed, the emergence for the first time of a single world market in which everyone is involved, albeit in very different ways. At its most abstract, but possibly most significant level, it may represent on the one hand a tendential separation of the trajectories of capitalism and western modernity, whose symbiosis in various forms has characterised the last 500 years or so, in different ways, and on the other, a fusing of the twin pillars of the modern state, regulation and emancipation, as a result of the «reduction of modern emancipation to the cognitive-instrumental rationality of science and the reduction of modern regulation to the principle of the market» (Santos, 2002: 9). I'm sure you will not be surprised that I have found it rather easier to persuade people of this over the last year than I did before the Crunch.

Indeed, I find a useful way of appreciating the nature of the changes we are currently experiencing, is to see them as what Antonio Gramsci called the «morbid symptoms» that appear «when the old is dying and the new cannot yet be born».

The representations of globalisation are: as a state of affairs; as a discourse; as a process; and as a political project (see Mittelman). As a state of affairs, or a condition, it describes how the world now is. It is «globalised», in multiple areas, through multiple technologies, products and experiences. As a discourse, it has become an increasingly common and commonly understood way of describing what is happening – «it's all globalisation, innit?». There are two dangers in this usage. One is that if everything is due to globalisation, then the term adds little to our understanding. The other is that it conceals in unknown ways important differences in processes, conditions and projects. As a process, it seems to be happening, irresistibly and ineluctably, all around us, all the time. It sometimes appears unstoppable and inevitable. However, this is a potentially seriously misleading use of the term, because it easily transforms into a process without an agent, or a driver, somehow, self-propelling as well as irresistible. This is where the final use of the term, as a political project, is especially useful. Globalisation happens because of the intentional actions of people, seeking actively to transform the world in particular directions and in favour of particular interests. Though this can too easily be reduced to conspiracy theories, it seems the single most useful way of defining it.

Two main accounts of the relationship between globalisation and education have been advanced (see Dale, 2000). One, advanced by world polity theorists at Stanford University,

sees the globalisation of the curriculum occurring as a result of the diffusion of a set of common scripts about education, that are fundamentally based on the values and norms of western modernity – rationality, science, the individual, and above all, the possibility of progress. Education is implicated in the achievement of all these goals. It is the organisational means through which they can be realised, worldwide. One consequence of this is the remarkable isomorphism of the curriculum around the world, over the course of the 20th century.

The other view of the relationship between globalisation and education sees education systems responding to globalisation, through the medium of a «globally structured agenda for education». This argues that as globalisation spreads it generates common expectations of education systems to provide it with infrastructural underpinning. This agenda is broadly shared by the leading international organisations, such as the World Bank and OECD, and it is through their efforts that this agenda – which we may expect to be differently interpreted and implemented in different countries – links the global and the national levels.

When we come to «Education», the effects of globalisation emerge in a number of direct and indirect ways. I use the term «emerge» deliberately, rather in the Critical Realist sense of an «emergent property», rather than describing the process in the more conventional terms of «seeing» or «identifying» the effects of globalisation. Emergent properties arise from the combination of other properties; the usual example is of hydrogen and oxygen combing to produce water. In this case, we see the combination of a «new» property – globalisation – with an existing property – call it «20th Century Education», to form a new property, which might be called «education post globalisation», but which, unfortunately, we still tend to refer to as «Education». This is necessary primarily because we very often don't see the differences globalisation is making. The reason we still refer to it as education is in considerable part because, as the anthropologist Gavin Smith notes, «a whole series of key concepts for the understanding of society derive their power from appearing to be just what they always were and derive their instrumentality from taking on quite different forms» (Smith, 2006: 628).

This is a quite crucial idea. It means that what we refer to as «curriculum», or «the state», for instance, may bear little resemblance to what we meant when we used those words 20 years ago. This has major consequences for the sociology of education after globalisation. Essentially, it allows it to continue with «business as usual», turning its attention to the ways that globalisation operates as another, albeit powerful and complicated, effect on existing education systems, policies and practices.

What this crucially involves is close to what Santos refers to as the ineffectiveness of the tools of modernity in addressing the problems of postmodernity. Most significantly, globalisation has undermined the core assumption that «education» takes place in *national education systems*, with major consequences for the area of study, both methodological and «political».

Those three central elements are in danger of becoming somewhat *ossified* and of thereby restricting, or even obstructing, rather than expanding, our opportunities to come to terms with globalisation and the ways in which institutional and everyday life has been transformed.

Globalisation has transformed the idea that education takes place only in national systems set up for the purpose. The place and strength of national states has been hugely altered, with very significant consequences for a sociology of education that has taken for granted the national basis of the «education» it studies. I have described the form these consequences take as methodological «isms», respectively methodological nationalism, methodological statism and methodological educationism. In each case the «ism» is used to suggest an approach to the objects that takes them as unproblematic and assumes a constant and shared meaning; they become «fixed, abstract and absolute» (Fine, 2003: 465), and the source of the danger lies in the nominal continuity provided by the ostensibly «same» concepts, as Smith (2006) warns. The assumption/acceptance of the «isms» means that the understanding of changes brought about by globalisation may be refracted through the lenses of unproblematic conceptions of nationalism, statism and educationism, even as these changes themselves bring about changes in the meaning of, or the work done by, nation states and education systems, and thereby undermine their validity.

Briefly, methodological nationalism sees the nation state as the container of «society», so that comparing societies entails comparing nation states (Beck, 2002; Beck & Sznaider, 2006). It operates both about and for the nation state to the point where the only reality we are able to comprehensively describe statistically is a national, or at best an international, one (Dale, 2005: 126). The third element of the problem arises from the tendency to juxtapose an unreconstructed methodological nationalism to underspecified conceptions of «globalisation» in a zero-sum relationship. This typically takes the form of the global «affecting» the national, or the national «mediating» the global. This is not to say that such relationships are not present, but that they are not to be taken as the norm.

If methodological nationalism refers to the tendency to take the nation state as the container of societies, the related but considerably less recognised term methodological *statism* refers to the tendency to assume that there is a particular *form* intrinsic to all states. That is, all polities are ruled, organised and administered in essentially the same way, with the same set of problems and responsibilities, and through the same set of institutions. The assumed set of institutions that has become taken for granted as *the* pattern for the rule of societies is that found in the West in the twentieth century, and in particular the social-democratic welfare state that pervaded Western Europe in the second half of that century (Zurn & Leibfried, 2005: 11).

«Education» would appear on the surface to be the most constant of the three components we are currently examining. After all, everyone in the world has either been to school, or is to have the opportunity to go to school – which, interestingly, is how education is defined in the

Millennium Development Goals. However, we also know both that what is understood by education differs widely and along multiple dimensions, and that the experience of schooling varies enormously. More precisely, what we are calling «educationism» refers to the tendency to regard «education» as a single category for purposes of analysis, with an assumed common scope, and a set of implicitly shared knowledges, practices and assumptions. It occurs when education is treated as abstract, fixed, absolute, ahistorical and universal, when no distinctions are made between its use to describe purpose, process, practice and outcomes. Particular representations of education are treated in isolation from each other, and addressed discretely rather than as part of a wider assemblage of representations – for there is no suggestion that the different representations of education have nothing in common with each other, or that the label is randomly attached. Far from it, it is the recognition that there are crucial relationships between different representations of education that are being occluded or disguised by the failure to distinguish between them that makes it so important to identify and seek to go beyond educationism. Educationism does not discriminate between uses of the term or make them problematic, and this makes it almost impossible for «education» to be the object of comparison.

The other major problem with the relative absence of work *problematising* «education» (now in quotes) – by which I mean asking how particular institutions, organisations, practices came to be as they are, and what might be learned from that – there is little incentive to interrogate what counts as education, what we mean when we use the term. In fact, if we were to go around this room now, I am sure we would harvest at least 50 definitions of education that were sufficiently different from each other to make comparing them, or even aggregating them meaningfully, extremely difficult. Some of them we may be able to discard, but we would still be left with deep and serious differences between them, for instance between education as a process or an outcome, as in «an» education, as a practice and as an institution, as something produced actively in dedicated institutions, and something «absorbed» as we go through life. Of course, we can rapidly overcome many of these problems with the exercise of a bit of common sense, but again, when we see education as a serious – often the most serious – matter, we can get involved in, real and demanding differences remain, especially, of course, when we don't recognise that we are not talking about the same thing.

Problematising «education» through the education questions

It seems clear, then, that, if we want sociology of education to retain a possibility of offering critique as well as commentary in an era of globalisation, we need to try to develop tools that will go beyond the methodological isms, and especially «Educationism», and to make dif-

ferent understandings of education commensurable and usefully comparable. This involves addressing the three main assumptions and bases on which the press towards «Commentary in the sociology of education» rests: the concern with immediate improvement of practice, within a taken for granted set of assumptions, about knowledge, learning, etc.; the (unconscious and unexamined) indiscriminate use of the term «Education»; the neglect of the need to problematise the assumptions of what education is, does, can be, which are made especially acute by globalisation; the need to ask how current definitions and assumptions arose.

The way I propose to approach this is not by attempting to refine and define education philosophically but by converting it into a set of variables, in the form of groups of questions, linked together within groups and across groups, to provide a zone of mutual intelligibility (Santos), through which we may be able to isolate issues of interest. The aim is to construct a simple heuristic device, with the intention of opening new ways of looking at old problems, and of generating new questions.

Education questions

FIGURE 1

Set of education questions

Level	Education questions
Level 1 Educational Practice	Who is taught, (or learns through processes explicitly designed to foster learning), what, how and why, when, where, by/from whom, under what immediate circumstances and broader conditions, and with what results? How, by whom and for what purposes is this evaluated?
Level 2 Education Politics	How, in pursuit of what manifest and latent social, economic, political and educational purposes; under what pattern of coordination of education governance; by whom; and following what (sectoral and cultural) path dependencies, are these things problematised decided, administered, managed?
Level 3 The Politics of Education	Issues of «social contract» (how does education contribute to it?) (values of modernity + core problems) Logic of intervention (how is education's contribution to be delivered?) (grammar of schooling + national focus) What forms are taken by the «architecture of education»? In what ways are the core problems of capitalism (accumulation, social order and legitimation) reflected in the mandate, capacity and governance of education? How and at what scales are contradictions between the solutions addressed? How are the boundaries of the «education sector» defined and how do they overlap with and relate to other sectors? How is the education sector related to the citizenship and gender regimes? How, at what scale and in what sectoral configurations does education contribute to the extra-economic embedding/stabilisation of accumulation? What is the nature of intra- and inter-scalar and intra- and inter-sectoral relations (contradiction, cooperation, mutual indifference?) What functional, scalar and sectoral divisions of labour of educational governance are in place?
Level 4 Outcomes	What are the individual, private, public, collective and community outcomes of «Education», at each scalar level? What are their consequences for equity, democracy and social justice?

We may begin by looking where most people might expect sociologists of education to look, that is at the level of school or classroom practice – always of course bearing in mind that the «school» or «classroom» in question may bear only a passing resemblance to what we have come to recognise as schools and classrooms –, though, having said that, one of the more compelling pieces of evidence that can be adduced for the idea of a «global script» of schooling is the sheer recognisability of schools; they really are frequently recognisable as such. And more than this, this instant recognisability is advanced as evidence for the conservatism, or backwardness of schools. The argument that anyone who went to school a century ago would recognise a school today – and it may even be the same building they attended, give or take a few coats of paint, boys and girls using the same entrance, and sundry lumps of IT equipment scattered around, while no one would from a hundred years ago would recognise a hospital (though that again may not be wholly true) – is used to imply the need for schools to modernise (I will not have time in this text to go into the «where» question, but if I had, I would be trying to elaborate the extent and implications of such similarities and differences).

So, let's start with what might be considered the most fundamental question, «who gets taught?», or, as it is more commonly and pithily expressed, «who goes to school?». This really is a critical question for millions of children around the world, since «access to primary schooling» is the form taken by the Millennium Development Goal for Education. So, attendance at school is, if you like, the official global definition of education, and changes in the number of children «in» education is measured by changes in the numbers attending school. Well, what's wrong with that, you may ask? Isn't it good if people all over the world bend their efforts to providing schools and teachers for children who would otherwise learn nothing? Again, OK, very reasonable, but such questions are typical of those that produce «commentary» responses. They take for granted the claims inherent in the question, and ask how far they are being fulfilled, rather than beginning by questioning those assumptions. At its simplest, they take it for granted that attendance at school means that children learn something useful to them, and that non-attendance at school means they learn nothing; this is of course a rather exaggerated way of putting it, but I hope you can see what I am getting at. At a more theoretical level, such doubts force us to recognise that the «practice level» questions – «who is taught what by whom», etc. do not stand alone, or in isolation from each other. Access to schools with classes of over 100, or where teachers sleep for most of the day, or that entail a 10 mile round trip walk, may be worth very little in terms of anything approaching formal learning. It may, though carry other incidental benefits, a question that has not been as widely investigated in developing countries as it might have been. The main exception is perhaps the very important case of girls' (or other previously excluded groups) attendance at school, which in itself highlights one of the absolutely central effects of schooling, that it is the first «public», as

opposed to family, for instance, institution that most people in the world encounter; it is where we learn that other people may be different from us, may have more than us, know more than us, and so on. One very nice example of this comes from the work of the anthropologist Elsie Rockwell (1994). In analysing the attempts to extend access to schooling after the Mexican revolution, she points out that this meant, possibly quite unintentionally, that «Children were exposed to these new practices of civic life, and thereby carried their imprint into the following decades» (*ibidem*). New conceptions of time – and especially of punctuality – were introduced, so that «Time that children had spent elsewhere, learning other things, was soon devoted to their schooling» (*ibidem*). Finally, and in some ways most significantly, the introduction of coeducation also changed «the existing patterns of social relations, with girls' school enrolment approaching that of boys, and separation by gender giving way to separation by age and achievement». As Rockwell (1994: 204) concludes, «the daily encounter between boys and girls in schoolrooms must have redefined gender relations in ways… which certainly went far beyond the official discourse aimed at dignifying women».

Systematic and patterned barriers to access to school are taken as the most important barriers to increased social equality and social mobility. One huge claim, and hope, for increasing and extending access to schooling is that it and often it alone – has the capacity, and is the mechanism to redress differences of class, gender, «race», caste, colour. It cannot, of course, do this alone – a point on which all sociologists of education would concur –, but the aspiration itself does represent a substantive element of hope, and a demonstration, however remote it may seem, that there are alternatives, and routes towards them. However, to assume that access alone will make this happen, that going through the school door in itself makes these dreams possible, is clearly mistaken. But why is it mistaken?

To begin to answer this question we need to turn to the second of the level 1 questions, «What is taught?», which is equally important, and has been at least equally investigated and debated by sociologists of education, for whom it has come to constitute almost a sub-category in itself, as the sociology of the curriculum. There have been several major debates – whose knowledge is of most worth, whose knowledge is it that is taught in schools, how do we come to have a standardised world curriculum? Underlying these questions is a wider assumption, that accounts for the massive importance historically attached to the curriculum that it is pre-eminently through what schools formally teach that they have most influence on their students as individuals, and through which they can make their greatest contribution to changing the world. One intriguing recent example of how far and how deeply this assumption is embedded has been provided in Sam Kaplan's (2006) fascinating study of what he calls the «pedagogic state» in Turkey. He shows that there are in Turkish society what he refers to as three mutually hostile «associations» – religious nationalists, neoliberal industrialists and the

military –, each of whom «try to impose their specific interpretations on key social issues through the curriculum» (Kaplan, 2006: 225). The key point here is that despite their differences, «All shared fundamental assumptions about the role of education and associated school practices. They invariably linked pedagogy and school knowledge with the moral and social imaginary the believed best epitomized the national views of the citizenry» (*ibidem*), which indicates, Kaplan (2006: 226) argues,

> their faith in the national education system reinforced the epistemic superiority of the state vis-à-vis the citizen… (as). No association questioned the ability of schools to effect positive transformations on the essential character of children…. Thus, in jockeying for the authority to *determine the roles school children should inhabit in their lives*, the different associations affirmed the pedagogical role of the state in creating citizenship. (emphasis added)

This also underlines a further key point about what is taught and what is learned in school. As schooling as an institution has developed it has accreted a wide range of functions and responsibilities that are contingently rather than necessarily to do with education. We can see this clearly in a contemporary example from a secondary school in Bristol, which places a high emphasis on learning via ICT, and is very well equipped to deliver that. As an experiment, a few years ago the then headteacher decided that for one day all year 9 lessons would be taught at a distance, with children doing their lessons at home. This caused a number of very revealing problems. First, many parents had to make child minding arrangements, which they did not necessarily find easy or desirable. And what do you think the children and teachers thought of this «day off»? Both groups were far from happy with it, for different reasons; briefly, the teachers had to make explicit a lot of what they could normally convey implicitly, for instance through body language. The children disliked it because their main reason for going to school is to see their friends – something that is reflected in their behaviour in the experiment, one feature of which was to substitute nudging their classroom neighbour and whispering «what have you got for number 7» with texting them the same question. This very simple example reveals a lot of what we take for granted about schooling, but that is not necessarily intrinsic or essential to teaching and learning. And of course, we also know that schooling is frequently designated as a kind of prophylactic against all manner of social evils.

More broadly on the issue of what is taught, the American sociologist John Meyer and his colleagues (e.g. 1992) have persuasively argued and demonstrated that there is now effectively a «world curriculum»; effectively all the countries of the world now subscribe, at least formally, to the same set of curricular categories, such as literacy, maths and science, history, etc. The rapid spread of national educational systems and the striking but surprising degree of

curricular homogeneity that we observe across the societies of the world, irrespective of their location, level of development, or religious and other traditions, cannot be explained by the functional, national-cultural, or rational-instrumental theories that have dominated the study of educational systems or the curriculum hitherto. Functional theories, which would explain the existence of education systems through their relationship with industrial growth, collapse when we realize that some countries had education systems prior to industrializing and others only post industrialization. National cultural and rational instrumental theories cannot explain the fact of the degree of curricular homogeneity that Meyer and his colleagues are able to demonstrate; they show the existence of the same subjects on the curriculum of practically every country in the world. These are based, Meyer argues, on the values, discourses and practices of Western modernity, with education as the key institution in delivering those promises of progress. And while it rapidly becomes clear that «common curriculum categories» by no means translate into homogeneous educational provision and practices, they do nevertheless contribute to the assumption that such issues are settled, and that we can consequently focus on enabling improvements in the practices, organisation and administration, particularly on the basis of the identification and removal of barriers, be they pedagogical, organisational, conceptual, logistical, ideological, etc., to the full realisation of the field's promise and potential, which are themselves rarely, if ever, questioned.

However, we must come back, too, to the argument that it is impossible to take the «what is taught» question in isolation from two others – the «who is taught» question, and the second level question of «how and by whom is this decided». The effects and value of asking «who is taught what» are many times that of taking the two questions in isolation. It should immediately be clear that combining these questions sheds a different light on the possibility of access to schooling as a source of hope to millions, because it is the source of the differentiation of the benefits of access. Barriers to access to education do not end when new schools are built, or fees are abolished; they include, equally importantly, access to particular kinds of school, or knowledge. Asking who is taught what takes us to the heart of the distribution of knowledge and the allocation of opportunities through education. We know – and this has been the central theme and perhaps the greatest and most important contribution of the sociology of education over the last six decades – that access to particular forms of valued and valuable knowledge is very heavily influenced by both background characteristics such as class, gender and ethnicity, and by the very different experiences of schooling experienced on the basis of those characteristics, a point I will develop shortly.

Unfortunately, I have no time to go further into the practice level questions, but I trust that the point of combining them in much more complex ways will be apparent. Before moving on, though, I suspect that one element that some of you may think is missing from

the list of «practice» questions concerns the issue of «quality»; there is no question about «how well» this «education» is done. This is because «quality» is essentially a political and not an «educational» decision. Of all the terms in education that needs to be problematised, I would personally focus on quality. I have elsewhere referred to it as a tofu concept – not just because I dislike tofu, though that could have something to do with it, but because, like tofu, «quality» has no taste of its own; it absorbs its meaning from the context, though with the added assistance of the fact that no one can be against quality.

The power to designate what counts as «quality» is a major weapon in the governance of education, but it is useful to reflect that the basis of this power is that while there is wide agreement that something called education exists, and that it is a good thing, there is no known or acknowledged «best way» of doing it – and it is this that opens the field up to the development of «proxies» of education. With «education» as a whole, just as with «quality», when we do not know what it is, or whether it is happening, or whether someone has received it, we are reduced to recognising it through proxies. The past two decades and more have seen a major shift in the nature of proxies for education, from those that were established *ex ante*, such as curriculum prescriptions, to those that are established *ex post*, such as indicators and benchmarks. The audit culture with which education at all levels is currently embroiled is not so much *measuring* education, but *defining* it, telling us what it is, and what it is important for it to do. And this is happening on an increasingly global scale – just consider the OECD's PISA project, which has the potential to produce a global educational passport, valid and similarly valued, anywhere. Indicators and benchmarks are especially significant in the redefinition of the field, since they act as «silencing» mechanisms (i.e., they divert attention to levels of performance rather than content, outcomes, or purposes of performance), which increasingly *proscribe* rather than *prescribe* particular kinds of activities.

But the main issue for the policy questions, which I will briefly turn now, is how they relate and shape the practice questions.

How, in pursuit of what manifest and latent social, economic, political and educational purposes, under what pattern of coordination of education governance, by whom, and following what (sectoral and cultural) path dependencies are these things problematised decided, administered, managed?

Put simply, it means «who makes policy?» For a long time, we – and certainly I –, thought we had the answer to that question; it was «the state», and I argued that understanding the state was crucial to understanding education policy. I still believe that, but what is to be understood by «the state» has changed enormously. What still tends to resonate with the term the state is, I think, the post war social democratic state that introduced a range of «progressive social changes, very notably in the area of education, from which I and my generation

were the first and arguably the most generously treated beneficiaries. That was a state of tax, spend, policy – but it disappeared in the era of Mrs Thatcher and has never returned. In the running of education, it now takes the form of «governance, with the state as the coordinator and regulator of last resort – or not, as we are now finding out more cruelly every day. However, though that social democratic state has been clearly superseded, much commentary on the sociology of education tends to assume it as the preferred alternative, that is neglected through political weakness.

Central – and, we might argue, unique – to the social democratic conception was that all four dimensions of the state distinguished by Zurn and Leibfried (2005) (resources, law, legitimacy and welfare) converged in national constellations, and national institutions. What Zurn and Leibfried (2005: 1) make clear, however, is that «the changes over the past 40 years are not merely creases in the fabric of the nation state, but rather an unravelling of the finely woven national constellation of its Golden Age». As Edgar Grande (2006: 92) puts it,

> with the new forms of complex governance, the state *form*… loses its monopoly position in the production of collective solutions to collective problems. Collectively binding decisions are no longer taken by the state alone, or among sovereign states, but rather with the involvement of various types of societal actors, sometimes even without governments. (emphasis in original)

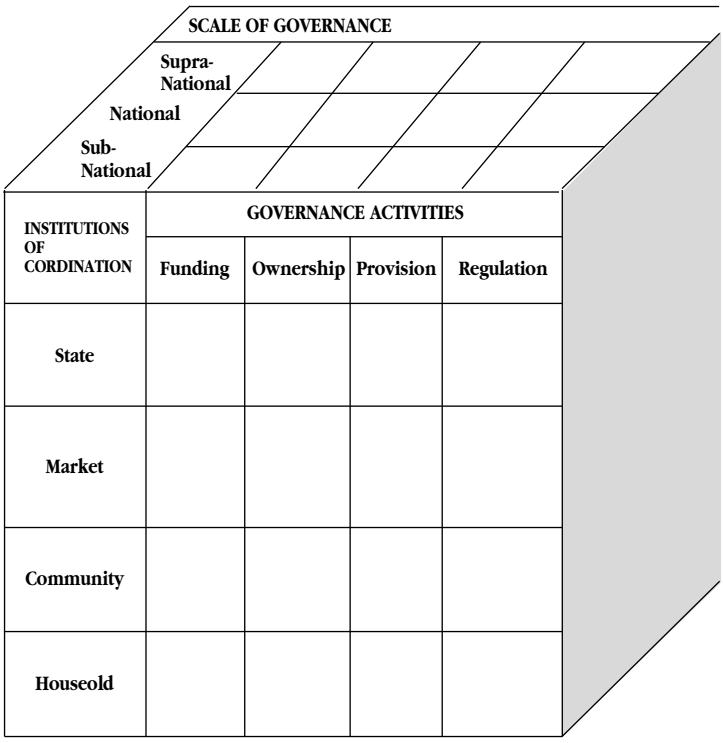
The state now governs through means other than «policy» and in concert with a range of other institutions rather than alone. This has given rise to the term «governance rather than government». And this leads to a need to make the state explanans rather than explanandum in our analyses.

The key change is that the state's role in the governance of education has changed, from a position where the state did it all to one where the state's role is as the coordinator of coordination. The second is that the national level is no longer taken as the exclusive scale at which the governance of education takes place. That is to say, the ways that education systems are coordinated in order to deliver, among other things, «solutions» have changed considerably, while at the same time those things take place in the context of a qualitatively changed relationship between nation-states and the global order. Today, no nation-states are isolated or insulated from the effects of economic, and indeed, political globalisation.

I have tried to represent this diagrammatically:

FIGURE 2

Pluri-scalar governance of education



The move from level 2 to level 3 questions is in many ways the most crucial one in this context, because it is one that especially marks the shift from commentary to critique. In essence, sociology of education as commentary tends to stop at the point where the second level questions have been posed, or possibly answered. However, for an adequate analysis it is necessary to investigate the contexts in which those decisions were made, how they were shaped, and so on. For instance, if the curriculum categories that Meyer et al. (1992) talks of are «global», how does this happen? Through what actors and organisations does this take place? Meyer and his colleagues suggest that the ideals are disseminated and diffused through groups of like-minded professionals, but it is much more plausible to see their prominence resulting from the work of international organizations working in education, such as the World Bank, the OECD and so on. These organizations have both the authority to endorse

particular moves in education policy around the world, especially in the developing world, and sufficient power in some cases to be able effectively to impose them.

But this also means, more fundamentally, going back to what we might see as the original «Education Questions», those implicit in the social contract – what is education's contribution to the social contract, and through what logic of intervention is that contribution to be delivered? We might see the social contract as the means through which the trajectories of capitalism and modernity have been held together, and thus as the origin of education's dual contribution – to creating modern people, and supporting capitalism in various ways. The current tensions in the social contract revolve around on the one hand the pressure to make sustainability rather than progress the dominant motif for global society, and the increasingly market-based organization of societies.

The logic of intervention – *how* education makes its contribution to the social contract, how we justify the forms of education we produce – might also be seen to be changing, putting it very simply, away from an emphasis on delivering the promises of modernity by educating individuals in its values and norms, and towards a more instrumental approach, that proposes an indirect contribution from education, through its contribution to economic development. This may be seen as the basic global agenda for education, and the label I like to attach to it is KnELL – Knowledge Economy and Lifelong Learning. It is important to note here that the lifelong learning component is another of those terms that has changed its meaning. It has little to do with the old tradition of adult education, or recurrent education, and much to do with taking responsibility for our own employability, through continuous upgrading of competences through life.

Some of this emerges through what I refer to – not very satisfactorily – as the architecture of education systems, which shapes and organizes at a very broad level the means of defining education and its purposes, and the means through which it will be delivered.

We might see four components, which are fundamentally grounded in education's links with modernity on the one hand and capitalism on the other, making up this architecture. They are: modernity; the core problems of capitalism; the grammar of schooling; and education's relationship with national societies. These four elements combine, in different and changing ways, to provide the architecture through which 'education' takes place in contemporary societies.

Again in view of the time I will concentrate on just two of these elements, the core problems and the grammar of schooling, merely noting that much of what might be said about the role of modernity has been touched on in the references to Meyer's work, and that national education systems are the major means by which societies seek; to define, replicate and ensure their national distinctiveness; to strengthen their national economies, to address their

social problems; to embed a sense of national identity; and to influence the distribution of individual life chances – each of which could easily make up a lecture series in itself. It is this image of «Education» that most people have in mind when they think about the issue. It provides the grist for national education politics.

I have argued for many years (see Dale, 1989) that the fundamental key to understanding education systems lies in recognising their relationship to the core problems of capitalism, that it cannot itself solve and that it needs an institution like the state to provide – but do bear in mind my comments on governance earlier. While their forms, too, may have changed (as we see all around us) three core problems remain: ensuring an infrastructure for continuing accumulation and economic development, such as the provision of a diversely skilled labour force; ensuring a level of social order and social cohesion; and legitimating the inherent inequalities of the system. I have always argued that the solutions to these problems were as likely to be mutually contradictory as mutually complementary (streaming is a good example here; it is claimed to enhance the identification and development of academic strength, thus serving the accumulation purpose, but at the same time it is widely regarded as unfair, thus threatening the legitimation purpose), and that attempts to resolve these contradictions lay at the heart of education policy. Essentially, these problems may be seen to set the limits of the possible for education systems, not in the sense that they require particular curricula, for instance – capitalism has shown itself capable of living quite comfortably with a range of different social preferences and movements, for example, feminism, and has successfully lived with a wide range of different education systems –, but in the sense that they lay down what is not in the interests of capital. Such limits are difficult to predict, and may only be recognized when they are breached, but their reality is reinforced by the increasing mobility of capital, which permits rapid shifts from educational regimes deemed to be insufficiently supportive.

The term the «Grammar of schooling» (see Tyack & Tobin, 1994) is used to refer to the set of organizational assumptions and practices that have grown up around the development of mass schooling and have come to be seen as defining it, to become, in effect, education as practised. The existence of these conventions and of the practices associated with them may become apparent only when breached or threatened. Thus, the spatial separation of «the school» becomes «strange» or problematic only when challenged, for instance by current calls for «any time, any place» learning to replace the current spatially and temporally restricted forms of education. The temporal basis of education – school year, school day, lesson length – is particularly deeply embedded into the fabric, rhythms and even the calendar of contemporary societies, through the conception of the «school (or academic) year», with its effects on such unconnected items as the cost of holidays, for instance. What is to be learned is broken down into disciplines, which themselves frame new knowledges. Schools are made up of structured

spaces for teaching, delivered through a classroom-based pedagogy by people whose job it is, professional experts, part of a dedicated teaching force – which in itself has major consequences for the provision and experiences of education (see Robertson, 2000).

Schooling is universalist in a number of ways. Universal Primary Education is considered a key step towards eliminating poverty through the Millennium Development Goals. Participation in education is the only compulsory requirement of citizens, and the expectation that all will be treated at least formally equally is deeply embedded in the institutional forms of schooling. Through the everyday processes of schooling, children take on identities based on friendship as well as kinship, achievement as well as ascription classified and sorted; crucially, they typically become *individuals.* They are included and welcomed into some categories, and excluded from or denied entry to others. The important point for an analytic sociology of education, however, is not so much to comment on, reflect developments in, and consider the changing effects of that grammar, but to challenge and expose its bases, and spell out their wider consequences for the outcomes of education.

One way that we might indicate that is by suggesting that the grammar of schooling has always assumed, and been constructed in order to accommodate, a white middle class male, academically proficient, student. This is visible in its architecture, and forms of grouping, which might be seen, for instance, to ascribe particular public spaces and presences to females. As with many other similar examples, this is perhaps so obvious that it's not noticed; as the Australian feminist writer Drusilla Modjeska (1994: 140-141) puts it, «because the masculine assumes the universal, men wear their certainties, their agency so lightly that very often no one notices; it is like the air we breathe». And equally importantly, we might argue that the same is true of the dominance of whiteness and middle class-ness.

It is very clear is that this architecture of education has signally failed to deliver the redemptive promise that has inspired generations of educators, or the promise central to modernity that a person's destination would not be determined by their origins. In their classic account entitled «Persistent Inequality», Blossfeld and Shavit (1993) demonstrated very clearly that there were no examples at all of education policies in the 13 advanced countries they looked at reducing the tie between family of origin and destination. They found that over the first two thirds of the 20th century there had been «little change in socioeconomic inequality of educational opportunity» (Blossfeld & Shavit, 1993: 21). By contrast, we should note that in all the countries for which relevant data was available, over the same period there was a substantial reduction in male/female differences in attainment.

Such findings have long been the staple of the sociology of education. There has perhaps been a greater emphasis on construing the problem as one of «limited social mobility», than as one of social class related educational inequity and this might be seen as taking a «commen-

tary» rather analytic approach. In the latter case, there has, though, been rather little move beyond the establishment of the correlation between social class defined by father's occupation, and educational achievement in formal tests. Explanations are rather rarer. It is though, clear that the importance of the issue has not been reflected in an acknowledgment of its relative significance compared to other goals of schooling, or in the level of resource commitment of all kinds that would be necessary to begin to rectify the situation, and, especially in this context, of the depth of the structures that maintain the class divide in educational opportunity.

Writing in 1970, Basil Bernstein argued in a distinctly critical tone, seeking to identify the sources rather than the appearance of the problem, that «the organisation of schools creates delicate overt and covert streaming arrangements which neatly lower the expectations and motivations of both teachers and taught. A vicious spiral is set up, with an all too determinate outcome». Updating that approach, and identifying the current manifestations of class assumptions in the grammar of schooling, such as the influence of school mix (the proportion of middle class and working class children in the school, a product of school choice strategies) will entail identifying and unravelling the ways that the education questions are currently being addressed, and the mechanisms through which inequalities are maintained and intensified through schooling.

Outcomes

This leads me finally, and extremely briefly, to the final set of questions, about the outcomes of education. Here I must admit to appropriating the language of the New Public Management (NPM), with which I became intimately familiar in New Zealand. Among other things, the NPM insists on the importance of the distinction between *outcomes* and *outputs*. Outputs refer to what is produced, in relation to specific objectives, and outcomes refer to the effects and consequences of the outputs.

The distinction was crucial to the New Public Management reforms of the public sector, designed to increase efficiency and to control bureaucracy, largely by specifying the nature of *accountability*, who was to be accountable *to whom*, *for what* and *how*. One aspect of this was the separation of «purchaser» and «provider»; it would be dangerous if the same agency was accountable for both. It was this that underlaid the distinction between output and outcome; the Purchaser – the Minis*ter* – was to be responsible for the outcome of a policy, and the Provider, the Minis*try*, was to deliver the outputs required to achieve the outcome. A relevant and interesting example is that of school inspection. The Minister specified the goals of school inspection, and the Head of the Education Review Office signed a contract to provide

outputs – in this case, school inspections, of a quantity and quality that would enable the outcome to be achieved.

This kind of process is much more familiar now in education in this country, through the endless proliferation and specification of outputs in the form of targets, indicators, league tables and so on. Such input-output models of education reflect deep-rooted, economistic conceptions of «quality» schooling, which are premised on and driven by the fact that not everyone can succeed in and through education (league tables; positional goods). It is not enough for a critical sociology of education to monitor and evaluate the success of schools in meeting their targets, and the «factors» affecting this. It must accept the challenge of determining the relationships between educational outputs and social consequences. For we must be alert to the fact that, when schooling becomes wholly instrumentalised, the distinction between outputs and outcomes disappears, along with the crucial distinction between the *accountability* for the production of an output (70% receiving A-C grades at GCSE) and *responsibility* for the personal, social and collective consequences of those results. And if sociology of education is to meet the challenge of progress towards the project of a democratic, equitable and socially just society in the current circumstances, it is our responsibility to take back that wider responsibility.

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