EDUCATION: PAST, PRESENT, FUTURE

What is Policy?

Analysing policy

Learning outcomes

- To consider a range of strategies relevant to the analysis of policy.
- To appreciate the work of key writers in relation to policy analysis

Some initial points

- Policy can be difficult to define
- '*a course or principle of action adopted or proposed by an organization or individual*'(Oxford English Dictionary)
- Traditional simplification of the policy process, generally perceived as linear and 'top-down' or cyclical (Hogwood & Gunn 1981)

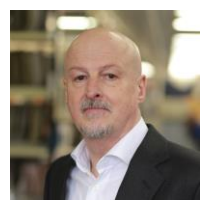
What is policy?

- What is policy?
- Discuss – to what extent is our education system based on reactive or proactive policies? Can you give some examples?
- Can you think if ways in which your educational journey has been influenced by policy? Try to think on a national as well as a local level along with formal and informal policies.

The work of Stephen Ball

- the context of influence
- the context of policy text production
- the context of practice
- the context of outcomes
- the context of policy strategies.

(Ball 1994)



The context of influence

- The source of the particular policy
- Causes and relevant background issues, factors etc that gave rise to the policy

TASK

In groups discuss the context of influence for the following policies.

1870 Education Act

1944 Education Act

1988 Education Act

The context of policy text production

- This element refers to the struggle over the actual text of a particular policy.
- Can often be seen as a struggle of interests.
- Different types of policy text

1. 'writerly texts' – generally more directive and fairly easy to read and uncontested
2. 'readerly texts' – more ambiguous in nature and often open to interpretation by the practitioner. This will then have consequences for the practice of policy.

The context of practice

- Not to be confused with policy implementation.
- Context of practice is a significant part of the policy process.
- Looks at the way in which practitioners interpret, reinvent and possibly resist the text of a policy.

TASK

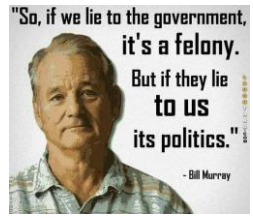
Consider the context of practice in relation to the implementation of the Foundation Phase in Wales. Can you identify any issues?

The context of outcomes

- This relates to issues of social justice, equity and individual freedom.
- This context is no longer seen as relevant by Ball.

The context of political strategies

- Refers to political and social inequalities that arise from policy consequences.
- Issues of power and social justice can arise because of the difficulties inherent in the policy process.
- This context was also revised by Ball



Usefulness of Ball's work

- the idea of a policy cycle and its inherent contexts
- the concept of a trajectory study, which advocates an analysis of the policy process across the three contexts;
- its flexibility in approaches to analysis, reflected in the idea of a 'toolbox' for analysis rather than a single theory.

Taylor's model

- Work of Taylor and colleagues largely similar to that of Ball but some important modifications.
- Emphasis on the role of the state and a greater reliance on critical theory.
- Identified 3 areas of policy analysis.

1. Context
2. Text
3. Consequences. (Taylor 1997)

- Context is viewed as slightly different to that of Ball in respect of his context of influence
- The significance of discourse theory

The model of Vidovich

- Worked to synthesise theories of Ball and Taylor
- Combined modernist approaches with post modernist approaches
- Retains the basic elements of Ball and his contexts as well as acknowledging the fluidity of policy analysis
- Some modifications made…

Vidovich's modifications

- Clear recognition of the impact of global influences partly assisted by changes in technology and communication.
- Greater recognition of state-centered constraint.
- Greater links between the three contexts and some development to the trajectory.

TASK

- Examine the following policy documents:

The Learning Country (2001)
The Learning Country: Vision into Action (2006)

- Using Ball's model of policy analysis consider and prepare feedback on the following:

1. Context of influence
2. Context of text production
3. Context of practice

References & Further Reading

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