SHIFTING PARADIGMS IN THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION – NEW SOLUTIONS TO OLD PROBLEMS?[1]

PARADIGMAS CAMBIANTES EN LA GOBERNANZA DE LA EDUCACIÓN: ¿NUEVAS SOLUCIONES PARA VIEJOS PROBLEMAS?

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Abstract

This article draws on the networking activities of a team of scholars. A key aspect of the theoretical framework is the assumption that there are changing paradigms of public sector management, and that education has been and is a site where these paradigms succeed and/or overlap with one another. As identified in research literature, these paradigms are so far: "traditional public administration", "new public management NPM" and "public value management". Central to the article, and the networking it refers to, is the assumption that education is as a prime arena in which the public sector of the future is being developed, and where emerging trends across the whole public sector can be detected. The article revises main paradigms that currently underpin the governance of education. Exploratory in character as it is intended to be the article argues that educational challenges demands innovative arrangements which could potentially go beyond the centrally-controlled, target-driven and accountability-heavy approaches characteristic of "New Public Management" (NPM). Drawing from the networking the article expects to raise questions and a discussion that might help developing an understanding of the tensions and trends that are currently shaping governance of education. It intends to draw attention to the ways in

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which these approaches face the challenge of promoting social cohesion and equity in the context of new economic and social realities.

Keywords: Governance of education, social disadvantage, social cohesion, equity.

Resumen

Un aspecto esencial del planteamiento teórico del proyecto es la presunción de que hay paradigmas cambiantes en la administración del sector público y que la educación ha sido y continúa siendo un sitio en el que estos paradigmas se sobreponen unos a otros. La literatura científica designa a estos paradigmas como: gobernanza pública tradicional, nueva gobernanza pública, y gobernanza de valor público. Un supuesto central del trabajo es que la educación es una arena privilegiada en la que se desarrolla el sector público del futuro y en el cual las nuevas tendencias a través de todo el sector público pueden ser detectadas. El artículo revisa los principales paradigmas que actualmente sustentan la gobernanza de la educación. El artículo, de carácter exploratorio, sostiene que los desafíos educativos exigen acuerdos innovadores que podrían ir más allá del control centralizado, impulsado por objetivos y la rendición de cuentas basadas en enfoques característicos de la "Nueva Gobernanza Pública" (NGP). A partir del trabajo de investigación que se propone se intenta cuestionar y servir de base para una discusión que podría ayudar a desarrollar un entendimiento de las tensiones y tendencias que actualmente conforman la gobernanza de la educación. Se llama la atención sobre las formas en que estos enfoques de gobernanza de la educación se enfrentan al reto de promover la cohesión social y la equidad en el contexto de las nuevas realidades económicas y sociales.

Palabras clave: Gobernanza de la educación, desventaja social, cohesión social, equidad.

Introduction

THE BACKGROUND TO THIS article and the networking around the highlighted topic is the earlier work of its authors within the European Commission funded project EUROPEP (Comparaison des politiques d´Éducation Prioritaire en Europe. Evaluation, conditions de réussite) (cf. Demeuse, Frandji, Greger, & Rochex, eds., 2008). This cross national project focused on the policies developed in a range

of European countries to tackle the educational difficulties of 'priority' groups of learners – that is, those who were likely to do badly under the 'standard' forms of provision made for most learners, and who were therefore regarded as needing some additional or different forms of support. The outcomes from this project indicated the importance of studying further how the allocation of resources to support such priorities in education relates to patterns and paradigms of governance of education in different national contexts. Particularly inspiring in this further questioning were outcomes of national studies conducted in Sweden and England (cf. Francia & Moreno Herrera, 2008; Antoniou, Dyson & Raffo, 2008).

Accordingly, a team of European scholars coordinated by Associate Professor Lázaro Moreno Herrera is beginning to explore issues in educational governance. This article reports the scoping work that has been undertaken by that group. It particularly portrays key theoretical and methodological assumptions shared during the planning phase. The case study that is presented bellow intends to further exemplify the presented assumptions.

It is important to note that there is a substantial body of research on public sector governance in Europe, but that much of this has been conducted by researchers from economic sciences and other fields (e. g., Kickert, 2007; Pollitt, Van Thiel & Homburg, 2007). As a result, it tends to assume that all public services can be understood from the same theoretical perspective. Our position is, however, that it is only possible to understand what the governance and management of public services have in common if the distinctive aims, practices and contexts of the different services are also understood. In particular, the governance of education can only properly be understood if the various challenges that education systems, and specifically schools, are facing at present. Amongst these challenges, efforts to tackle the poor educational achievements of 'priority' groups of learners are particularly significant since they provide prima facie evidence of the ineffectiveness of established policies and governance practices, and creative an incentive for the development of innovative approaches.

Arguments for studying governance of education – The obvious that might not be!

The implication of these arguments is that there is much to be learned about governance in general by studying the innovative practices that are emerging in response to educational challenges. With this in mind, we have identified six key reasons why the study of innovative educational governance is important (cf. Moreno Herrera, 2010). They are:

–*Significance:* Education is the largest public sector service in our countries. Not only does education consume a significant percentage of GNP in our countries, but it also has direct impacts on all children, families, and society as a whole. Education services are, moreover, highly present and visible at local level and always have some element of local management raising important issues about central and local government relations in the new public sector.

–From a *methodological* point of view a focus on the education makes it possible to develop and use a standardised comparative methodology cross-nationally, in a way that would be difficult if the focus were wider.

–*Depth:* Whilst a study ranging across the public sector as a whole might have its attractions, we believe that an in-depth studies dealing with the specificities of the various public services is a more appropriate research strategy for creating robust and usable knowledge bases for a better organization of these services.

–*Relevance:* In recent years, education has been a 'trailblazer' in the introduction of NPM reforms in many European countries. It therefore offers an ideal case study for understanding the nature, impact, and limitations of these reforms. Because of this early entry into NPM approaches, and because of the sheer scale and complexity of the educational task, education is also beginning to emerge as the part of the public sector within which innovative approaches are most obviously beginning to emerge. Across the EU, for instance,

there are examples of services being reconfigured to bring education and other child, family and community services into closer alignment, often through the co-location of services in schools, or the development of local strategic approaches involving education. Education services – and, particularly, schools – are therefore prime sites for studying public sector innovation.

–*Interconnectedness:* Education, as a central public service, interacts with a wide array of other public services of essential value for the community. It depends for its effectiveness on being coordinated to some extent with other public services for children, families and communities, and therefore opens up a window on these services.

–*Impacts:* The notion that education is the key to individual development and to the social and economic development of society is well documented in research and in EU policy papers (e.g., Education and Training, 1995; Entrepreneurship in Europe, 2003). In addition, education is essential to building the future of Europe, and, in particular, to achieving goals of equity and social cohesion. It has implications for the life chances of learners from different social groups and, by equalizing those life chances, can contribute to social cohesion. The Council of Europe's Strategy for Social Cohesion and national strategies European countries stresses the central role of education in this respect (cf. Council of Europe – Social policy, 2009; Concerted development of social cohesion indicators, 2005).

Theoretical considerations and framework

A key assumption in our work is that understanding the relationship between governance of education and the impact or relation it might have a tackling the different problems we face at school and community level today is a complex task. It demands of a theoretical framework through which individual cases can be understood and international comparisons made meaningful.

One element of this framework is the assumption that there are

changing paradigms of public sector management, and that education has been and is a site where these paradigms succeed and/or overlap with one another. Kelly and Muers (2002) draw on what is now a widely-accepted characterization of three such paradigms (see also Aldridge & Stoker, 2002; Smith, 2003; Stoker, 2006):

–"traditional public administration", in which a public sector held to have a distinctive ethos is dominated by politicians and experts who determine what lies in the public interest with minimal direct input from service users;
–"new public management", in which the public sector is viewed as akin to the private sector, so that service users are constructed as 'customers', market mechanisms are used to make services responsive to customer preferences, and providers are managed through contracts and targets; and
–"public value management", which pays attention to the complex aims and processes of public services, accepting the multiple roles of service-users and multiple models for service delivery, whilst defining the public interest through processes of deliberation and interaction

Whilst this typology is undoubtedly crude, our cross national networking suggests that it can be used as a powerful sensitizing framework for analyzing the governance of education. Moreover, Stoker (2006) suggests that public value management (PVM) constitutes an emerging paradigm particularly suited to contemporary conditions in and around the public sector. His characterization of PVM is therefore likely to be particularly useful in guiding a search for innovative approaches.

A second element of the theoretical framework is constituted by a conceptualization of 'social cohesion', understood as an important outcome of education and, therefore, of educational governance. In this sense our networking activities draw on the definition given in the Council of Europe's Strategy for Social Cohesion. Social cohesion is here defined as "the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of

all its members, minimizing disparities", namely access to rights for all, respect for dignity of others, the right for all individuals to have the opportunity for personal development, and participation in the democratic process to assess co-responsibility work at local, regional, national and European level" (Concerted development of social cohesion indicators, 2005: 9).

The third element of the framework draws on the long-standing EU commitment to the development of equity in and through education. We understand equity in this sense to refer to a range of characteristics of socially just education systems – in which all learners have access to high quality educational experiences, and educational outcomes are not determined by social background. We also understand equity to refer to the impacts of education in equalising life chances between learners from different backgrounds, and thus in contributing to a fairer – and more cohesive – society, at the same time as paying attention to the role of education in promoting economic development (cf. Ainscow *et al.*, 2010; Moreno Herrera, 2006).

With this in mind, our intentions are to seek to trace the links between different paradigms of public management as they have manifested themselves in education in different contexts, and outcomes from education in relation to social cohesion and equity. Within this framework it becomes relevant to pay particular attention to 'promising ways forward', understood as policies and practices which seem likely to contribute to social cohesion and equity. It is essential, however, to recognise that:

–paradigms are not always distinct, that they can overlay rather than succeed one another, and that whilst NPM dominates education in many European countries, it does not yet have a significant practice in others; and that

–innovation can take many forms, and that, while PVM is a useful sensitizing concept, it will be particularly important to look for innovations which do not fit neatly into any of the currently-recognised paradigms.

Stance towards research

Central to our understanding of the impacts of the shifting paradigms in the governance of education is the assumption that this is a critical juncture for education in Europe. In recent years, education systems in many countries have drawn on the approaches of NPM to marshal a vigorous attempt to 'improve' their quality and enhance standards of performance. However, this attempt has, for the most part, failed to disturb existing patterns of advantage and disadvantage. Educational achievement and to some extent access to educational resources remain structured by social class, ethnicity and gender (cf. Neckerman, 2004; Machin, 2006). Educational researchers have done much to expose and analyze this situation in individual countries (see, e.g., Gewirtz, 2002; Ball, 2003 in England. Rochex, 2008; Tissot, 2007 in France. Magalhaes & Stoer, 2006 in Portugal. Crisan, Iosifescu, Iucu & Nedelcu, 2006 in Rumania and Francia, 2005 in Sweden). However, there has, so far as we are aware, been no robust attempt to trace the impacts of different paradigms of public sector management on a trans-national basis. We therefore find it essential to combine a qualitative study of the impacts of NPM in different countries with a robust, quantitative analysis of its impacts on educational outcomes across a range of national contexts. We anticipate that this mixed methods approach will prove particularly useful in disentangling the complex costs and benefits of NPM in the governance of education, and will provide a more nuanced view than the critical 'policy scholarship' (Grace, 1984) analyses that are typical of much research in this area. Moreover, it is of chief importance to explore practical alternatives to NPM – both through qualitative case studies and, so far as possible, through quantitative analyses of outcomes. Our assumption is that this could, in the hands of policy makers, be a new set of tools they can use to tackle a problem that is endemic in many European education systems.

An important postulation in our networking, further verified by some national cases (see next section), is that innovations are likely to take the form of new ways of reconciling the apparently competing demands of standards, equity and cohesion, and of combining existing

with strategies for 'improving' schools and systems with new strategies for intervening in the social conditions which shape and limit learners' capacity to achieve. In systems that are currently dominated by NPM approaches, it seems likely that many such innovations will occur at sub-national level. This is particularly the case since innovations foregrounding equity and social cohesion are likely to involve some boundary-crossing between the traditional 'silos' of education and other public services. In order to explore these new approaches, therefore, we (the network) seek to identify a example of innovative public sector practice and study its processes, outcomes and potential for further development. The examples focus on education but might well involve other public sector services where these are related to education in some way – for instance through school linked services or local coordinated strategies for tackling disadvantage, or improving the life chances and social position of particular social groups.

In order to maximize the practical utility of this study, we consider it relevant to involve in a meaningful way one or more partners from both professional and user communities. This is expected to help identify examples of innovative approaches and understand the policy and practice implications of those examples, which in turn will lead to the identification of cases from which we can learn across the European spectrum.

Case study

Up to this point, we have presented the key theoretical and methodological assumptions underpinning our work. We now move to presenting a case study illustrative of the new kinds of governance arrangements in which we are interested. The case is drawn from England. That country was an early and enthusiastic adopted of the NPM paradigm of public sector governance, and, as a result, has been one of the first to discover the limitations of that paradigm and begin to develop new approaches.

For the past two decades, the education system in England has been governed through a classic NPM combination of high levels

of central government control, exercised through target-setting and high-stakes accountability, and quasi autonomous schools competing with each other in an education market place to recruit students and so maximise their income (Dyson, 2007). The avowed purpose of this approach has been to improve system performance as measured by the attainments of learners against centrally-determined benchmarks. Whatever successes this approach may have had, however, it has failed to tackle the significant gaps in outcomes between the most disadvantaged groups of learners and their peers, and England therefore remains an educationally divided country (Schools Analysis and Research Division, 2009).

In classic NPM mode, the response of governments has been to intensify central intervention and the use of market forces. One strategy has been the development of academies. In their original form (the policy has evolved over time), these were schools that are state funded schools, but are established and managed by one or more private or public 'sponsors' and are thus more or less detached from the framework of local authority control within which most other schools operate. Many academies serve highly disadvantaged populations and replace schools that are judged to have failed to make a sufficient impact on the relationship between the social disadvantages experienced by children and young people and their educational outcomes. Removing local authority control increases the direct influence of central government, makes it possible to bring to bear the practices of the commercial sector, and (particularly since academies are often housed in new buildings) repositions the school more favourably in the local education market.

Whatever the original rationale for academies, their advent in practice has begun to break down traditional models of governance, principally by weakening local government control and by introducing 'third parties' into the governance model from beyond education and the public sector. 'Weston' Academy, for instance, is sponsored by the Weston Housing Trust, a major provider of social (i.e. subsidised) housing in the area that was spun off some years ago from the local authority's housing department. Although the Housing Trust operates in a quasi-commercial manner, its values are in fact based on a

notion of public interest. It therefore interprets its responsibilities as being not simply to provide affordable accommodation, but also to develop sustainable communities in terms of employment opportunities, community safety and cohesion, and the well-being of residents. It sees the Academy as central to this task, offering a means of working directly with children and their families.

This means that the role of the Academy is seen by its sponsors and by the senior leaders whom they have appointed as essentially being to contribute to an overarching strategy for the development of the area it serves. This strategy is based on an analysis of the area served by the Academy which suggests that it is disadvantaged by the social problems besetting many areas of social housing, compounded by the particular economic configuration of the town in which it is located. That town is part of a large conurbation where low- and semi-skilled employment in manufacturing industries has been replaced by more skills- and knowledge-intensive opportunities in service, media and arts-based businesses. The town itself has escaped the worst ravages of unemployment, but it offers for the most part only low skilled employment with limited prospects for advancement in small and medium enterprises. To this extent, it is disconnected from the developments taking place in the wider city region, and the people who live there are becoming increasingly isolated from the opportunities available elsewhere.

In this context, the Trust and Academy leaders have pursued a twin-track approach. One track is to tackle the area's social problems head-on by supporting families, tackling criminality and vandalism, building community problem-solving capacity, and developing a sense of pride in the area. The other is to develop the skills and ambitions of local people – and, particularly of young people – so that they can take more advantage of the opportunities in the city region, and so that, in time, new employers are encouraged to locate in the town. With this in mind, the Academy offers an extensive array of support for individual students, but does this in close collaboration with the Trust's community officers, who are able to work with families and link the work done on problems in-school to their own work with young people on anti-social behaviour. At the same time, the Acad-

emy is developing an extensive community strategy, which involves it in offering adult learning opportunities to local residents, operating as a base for community services, becoming a hub for community activities, and involving its students in community service. In addition, it is developing a specialism in Business and Enterprise. This involves it in reviewing its pedagogy and curriculum to ensure they engage young people, but also that they equip them with the skills that are needed in the developing local economy, and a sense of entrepreneurship that will in time, they hope, drive the economy further forward. Since the Trust is a major local employer, moreover, it is able not only to offer advice on curriculum development, but also to offer opportunities for vocational learning pathways into employment as young people leave school.

Further comments about the case study

What is significant about this case from our point of view is that, despite its origins in NPM thinking, it in fact opens the way for a very different style of governance. Alongside the NPM disciplines of central control and the market, there is a third discipline of cross-sectoral collaboration in pursuit of a joint strategy. So, we see a housing provider involving itself in educational provision, and a school involving itself in community development and area regeneration there is a hierarchical relationship between school and Trust in that the latter is the sponsor of the former. However, there is also a powerful horizontal relationship in that both are service providers, and both have their areas of expertise on which the other cannot, in practice, impinge. This is even more evident in the relationships being developed between the Trust, the Academy, and a range of other service providers – such as the local authority social care teams, the police service and the fire brigade, where there is no element of control, and mutual collaboration forms the basis for a shared area strategy. For each of the partners in these relationship, questions of how to maximise organisational self-interest and to comply with externally-imposed imperatives are accompanied by equally powerful questions of how to work together

in a common public interest – to maximise, in Stoker's terms, a shared 'public value'.

The Weston case is very far from being problem free, and the evident tensions between NPM approaches and newer governance approaches are felt very keenly in practice (Rowley & Dyson, 2011). Indeed, it would have few implications if it were an isolated example. However, the last few years of new Labour government in England, between the middle of the decade and 2010, in fact saw a significant development of inter-organisational collaboration and cross-sectoral working in response to the challenges of social and educational disadvantage that appeared to be insurmountable using the approaches of 'classic' NPM (see, for instance, Cummings *et al.*, 2011). Whilst governments did not abandon their commitment to these approaches, they began to foster horizontal relationships amongst schools, and between schools and other services, which demanded local negotiation around broad and shared agendas, rather than either central 'command and control' or responsiveness to quasi-markets. These emerging forms of governance raise fundamental questions about the role of central government, the nature of accountability, the definition of the public interest, and the legitimate participants in collaboration and negotiation – not least, the part to be played by citizens and local communities. Such questions are far from being answered, and a change of government in 2010 makes the answer, if anything, more distant still. However, it is precisely because of these unanswered questions that cases of this kind deserve serious attention.

Concluding remarks

This work is, as we explained earlier, exploratory in character, and therefore no elaborated conclusions are presented here. Paradigms of governance are difficult to detect in single-country studies because the essential dimensions of the model tend to be lost in the complexities of specific policies and circumstances. Their impacts and outcomes are even more difficult to detect because of the problem of attribution – in other words, it is never clear whether impacts and outcomes

are attributable to the model itself, or to particular contextual factors in its implementation. A multi-country project of the sort we have proposed not only increases the range of innovations available for study, but makes it possible to explore the relationship between types of innovation and contextual features supporting or inhibiting those innovations.

The comparative perspective brought to bear on this project is a European one. This is for two reasons. First, European countries display a mixture of similarities and differences which maximises the productivity of comparative work. These countries are all relatively (in global terms) affluent and display a broad commitment to state-led services, particularly in education. On the other hand, they have very different social histories, and base their public sector on very different 'social models'. Second, the broad similarities amongst European countries mean that there is a realistic prospect that they can learn from each other and develop distinctively European approaches. This is particularly important in relation to the public sector where the dominant research and policy-development powerhouses outside the EU – notably the USA – have public sectors of very different kinds and based on very different assumptions about the role of the state.

Should the Nordic context with its specific history of politics and governance be considered in itself as relevant unit of analysis? The authors would argue in favour!

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