

International Conference on Education

Governing schools in the Global South: Policies, actors and practices

5, 6 and 7 February 2015, Bordeaux, France

Les Afriques dans le Monde (LAM), Institute of Political Sciences, Bordeaux

The final colloquium of the MOPRACS (“Models, practices and cultures of school institutions in West Africa” 2012-2015)¹ research programme due to take place in Bordeaux in 2015, will interrogate the profound changes which education sectors in the South have undergone during the last fifteen years. The adoption of an international agenda centred on universal access to quality basic education within the Millennium Development Goals framework has resulted in significant modification of the nature and forms of school governance.

The embedding of public education policies within international development programs has given rise to a new educational paradigm which needs to be questioned. Decennial sector development plans laying down guidelines and national priorities derive directly from the poverty reduction papers that condition the poorest countries’ access to international aid. The establishment of quantified targets, imposed as conditionalities, impacts on the priorities and orientations of educational agendas, the nature of relations between the different actors involved, and finally forms of regulation and control characterized by the hegemony of bureaucratic procedures and measurable standards. This has resulted in an apparent homogenization of educational facilities in the South as well as tendencies towards the educational field’s transnationalisation. The state and its administration are privileged players in education, but they now act alongside and interact with a variety of additional actors (international donors, NGOs, religious actors, local authorities, etc.) at the levels of design and implementation of public education policies.

Beyond injunctions defined by international aid priorities, or in more mundane terms, by procedural frameworks and blueprint approaches, what is actually happening at the level of the village school, or in the offices of municipal school administrations? And at the other end of the chain, how are decisions made which give education systems their reformist orientation (with respect to curricula, grade repetition, girls’ education, or teacher recruitment)? Finally, how are these two poles articulated at intermediate levels?

It is precisely the question of the governing of the school in a broad sense which this symposium raises. We need to ask how schools “work” in the Global South; in which, and under whose, direction? This question refers to both the orientation and goals of educational institutions, and we need to clarify how these vary according to the actors concerned. It also focuses on the interplay between actors who structure and organise educational spaces at local, national and international levels, and their respective positions of power. How are the impulses or actions of those who govern transmitted, with repercussions at all levels down to the classroom? How do they permeate through administrative channels? What are the pathways of translation? What processes, actors and mechanisms ultimately govern the school in countries of the South?

The comparative dimension of the symposium is to highlight the continuities and ruptures in educational dynamics across countries of the South; the factors of homogeneity and heterogeneity, as well as the room states have – or do not have - for manoeuvre. Are they all exposed in the same way to these reform dynamics? How are these logics translated across different regions, depending on the political and economic context, but also according to specific national educational trajectories? These issues can be addressed from various perspectives, around policy areas, actors and practices.

Educational policies implemented in the countries of the South allow us to observe original combinations articulating local, national and international dynamics. Different sites of production and negotiation of these policies (centralised or decentralised administration of services, sectorial reviews, international arenas) are all fruitful areas of analysis which can be explored in order to understand the phenomena of “transmission” of school policies, and the meaning of the school. Longitudinal analyses of these policies through the study of reform processes – from their formulation to implementation - are also useful to inform debates on the global or international nature of these reforms (teaching methods, the

¹ <http://www.lam.sciencespobordeaux.fr/mopracs/>

taking into account of gender, the training and recruitment of teachers, etc.). Finally we can ask how the extended range of educational provision - private, public, secular, religious, community or international - is perceived by the government and subject to reformist dynamics.

Actors within the education sector are also at the heart of our inquiry. Beyond “traditional” actors (teachers, students, parents, developers, administrators, unions, NGOs, etc.), contributors to the symposium might also be interested in other more contemporary figures (private entrepreneurs, communities, religious groups, think tanks, national and international experts, representatives of emergent donor countries, etc.). Participants are invited to highlight the positioning, trajectories and circulations of actors between different local, national and international spaces - and the types of actions and interactions which this movement generates. The diversification of actors has a direct influence on the means of financing education. The affirmation of new structures in this sector, such as private foundations and global funds, and their relationships with states and NGOs (public/private partnerships, etc.) define new power relations that must be questioned. The production of knowledge on education in the international context, which both reflects and inflects educational policies, can also be addressed in terms of the diversification of actors. The growing weight of expertise and consultancy in addition to academic research, including the role of public and private think tanks, and the affirmation of quantitative approaches and disciplines, contribute to the drawing of a new geography of global governance of education, closely related to its forms of financing.

From the diversity of actors follows the **diversity of practices**. Analysis of the “practices of everyday life” - whether at the level of the classroom through ethnographies of the daily life of the school, or in institutional settings (offices, national and international agencies) - would enable us to highlight the implantation of these practices in specific cultures but also the types of negotiation and bricolage at the heart of public action (de Certeau 1980, xl).² Such a process leads to an exploration of the margins, the shadows, the common practice rendered invisible by their banality, precisely in order to measure the gap between educational institutions as represented and imagined by national and international experts and technocrats based on indicators and statistics, and the reality of their daily functioning.

The symposium is resolutely interdisciplinary and proposals from different disciplines (anthropology, economics, history, education, political science, sociology, etc.) will be duly considered. The term "school" refers primarily to basic education (primary and secondary), as the targets of the MDGs, but is not limited to formal schools.

Schedule and procedures for submitting proposals

We invite submission of abstracts of 500 words in English or French, including a description of research methods and analysis. Priority will be given to proposals based on original sources and recent fieldwork. The deadline for submission is 20th June 2014. Final papers must reach the organisers of the conference by no later than the end of December 2014. The conference languages are English and French.

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² de Certeau Michel, 1980, *L'invention du quotidien 1, Arts de faire*, Paris Gallimard.