ACADEMIA
ISSN, 2241-1402
http://hepnet.upatras.gr

Number 11, 2018

Academia A publication of the Higher Education Policy Network

Is educational policy a matter of doxa? Overcoming the fact/value distinction in educational policy research

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Abstract

My aim in this theoretical article is to present an argument on the epistemological grounds of policy sociology. In particular, I have structured my argument as follows: first, I present the three most used epistemological traditions within which educational policy is implemented and I highlight their basic deficiencies. The goal of this presentation is to show how the reasons why the aims of policy researchers working within these traditions have failed are related to their assumptions regarding the fact/value distinction. Secondly, I describe in detail the arguments of Hilary Putnam and Richard Bernstein and I identify how they overcome the impasse this distinction leads to. Finally, I sketch three regulative principles stemming from their arguments, which could provide a fruitful epistemological context for deliberating about policy values, theorizing about educational policy problems and implementing policy research.

Key words

Policy research, fact/value distinction, epistemology, phronetic rationality, realism.

Περίληψη

Σκοπός του θεωρητικού αυτού άρθρου είναι να παρουσιάσει τις λεπτομέρειες ενός επιστημολογικού επιχειρήματος για τους όρους άσκησης εκπαιδευτικής έρευνας για λόγους εκπαιδευτικής πολιτικής. Συγκεκριμένα, έχω δομήσει το σκεπτικό μου ως εξής: πρώτον, παρουσιάζω τις τρεις πιο γνωστές επιστημολογικές παραδόσεις εντός των οποίων ασκείται η εκπαιδευτική πολιτική και εντοπίζω τις αδυναμίες τους. Σκοπός αυτής της παρουσίασης είναι να δείξω ότι οι λόγοι για τους οποίους η άσκηση της

εκπαιδευτικής πολιτικής παρουσιάζει αδυναμίες συνδέονται με τον τρόπο με τον οποίο οι εν λόγω παραδόσεις απαντούν στο πρόβλημα της διάκρισης γνώσης και αξιών. Δεύτερον, αναλύω το σκεπτικό των Hilary Putnam και Richard Bernstein προκειμένου να επισημάνω το πώς θα μπορούσε η εκπαιδευτική πολιτική να ωφεληθεί από την φιλοσοφία τους. Τέλος, αναπτύσσω τρεις ρυθμιστικές αρχές που απορρέουν από το σκεπτικό τους και το οποίο θα μπορούσε να αποτελέσει το επιστημολογικό πλαίσιο α) ορθολογικής διαβούλευσης για σχετικές με την εκπαιδευτική πολιτική αξίες β) για την επεξεργασία μιας θεωρητικής βάσης προσέγγισης προβλημάτων σχετικών με την εκπαιδευτική πολιτική και γ) υλοποίησης έρευνας για λόγους άσκησης εκπαιδευτικής πολιτικής.

Λέξεις κλειδιά

Έρευνα εκπαιδευτικής πολιτικής, διάκριση γεγονότων/αξιών, επιστημολογία, φρονητική ορθολογικότητα, ρεαλισμός.

Introduction

The aim of the article is to present the details of an epistemological argument on how educational policy research could overcome the deficiencies the fact/value distinction has imposed on its implementation and on why values should not be seen as irrelevant to its raison d' etre. Needless to say it is not an argument on the value content educational policies should strive for but on the epistemological foundations of the policy research as a scientific endeavor. The question that drives this aim is the following: how can one claim that something has to be done in an educational area without having an idea regarding how he/she can obtain knowledge on the entities which make up this area? Or, how can one claim that the only solid foundation of knowledge are the observable regularities of the descriptive statistics and at the same time depends upon the non observable entities (for example, the "educational needs" of the students) for explaining them? The assumption of this line of reasoning stems from the fact that educational policy researchers have either left the epistemological reasoning which frames their (scientific and political) decisions unexamined or they consider the values their policies serve as self-evident. On the other hand there are those who believe that since observations are theory laden it follows that there are no universally shared values upon which one could base educational policy objectives.

It is this epistemological superficiality that creates the following theoretical impasse: to the extent that science is value neutral it follows that it is vulnerable to the possibility that its outcomes could be used for unethical purposes. On the other hand, if one accepts

that science is a theory laden practice then it is impossible for its findings to have any kind of validity for they are shaped by the values which determine it. How could one reconcile scientific objectivity with the practical aims educational policy aspires to serve? In the next sections we aim to do three things: firstly, I present three different epistemological frameworks through which educational policy is implemented and I identify their main deficiencies. Secondly I illuminate how the arguments of Hilary Putnam and Richard Bernstein could remedy these deficiencies by focusing on how they dispute the fact/value distinction. Thirdly, I present three regulative principles which stem from their arguments and which could make educational policy practice theoretically sustainable and practically acceptable.

A brief genealogy of the fact/value distinction

As is well known, Enlightenment bequeathed to the modern world a particular view on how social research has to be appropriated by social institutions and on how it has to be implemented by them, or in other words, on the relationship between facts and values (Heineman et al 2001: 9-13). According to this view it is only scientific knowledge which could be true knowledge and which could promote progress, social justice and political freedom. By its nature, scientific activity is a progressive operation and can emancipate humans. At the same time, knowledge produced by scientific research is partisan-like in the sense that it has to serve the common good. However attached the scientific practice has to be to this supreme goal, the way scientists find their theories ought to be value neutral. The gap between "is" and "ought" meant different things for different reasons and in different eras. The ideal of value neutrality has been defended for three reasons.

First, in the ancient times Plato promoted the idea that unless a philosopher breaks with what his/her senses drive him to believe, he/she could not obtain true knowledge of the things (values and ideas) themselves. In the Platonic line of reasoning, sense based knowledge is discarded not because it is irrelevant to the goal of obtaining valuable knowledge but because it is not the proper means for attaining the kind of knowledge that deserves to be yearned for should one wish to become a virtuous person. Secondly,

in Bacon's time, theoretical knowledge came to be seen as the only true way for fighting the prejudices and idols that put impediments on the human mind's progress. In Bacon's thinking idols are identified with moral thinking and this is the reason why it has to be excluded from scientific knowledge (Smith 2007: 41). Finally, in the mechanistic picture of the universe, the world is divided into the primary properties, which provide things with their unchanged essence and the secondary qualities which are dependent upon the point of view of the perceiver. As a consequence, how data seem to be to the observer (that is, qualia) either has to be excluded or data have to be reduced to the primary properties of the things themselves. Qualia, according to this philosophical tradition, are subjective and ephemeral and it is only the knowledge of primary properties of the things that deserves to be called objective. Hence, the ideal of value neutrality is but a defense against a) the uncertainties of doxa, b) the obstacles the bias, the idols and prejudices put on human beings' progress and c) the logical operations of accessing how the primary properties of the things are (Proctor 1991: 25-55; Railton 2003: 43-69)

This conception of extolling values from scientific practice has been dealt with in various ways by three different epistemological traditions within which divergent criteria for implementing educational policy have developed. In the next sections I sketch these three traditions and illuminate the basic determinants of how educational policy should be carried out in each of them.

Positivism and its offspring in educational policy. The managerial version

The managerial version is the dominant way in which educational policy is acted out across the western countries and is more akin to a positivistic epistemology for which educational policy should be seen as a problem solving mechanism. By transferring from business administration the know-how on the proper way to rule institutions, the managerial argument states that educational policy practitioners should provide international institutions and the state with the most effective solutions to economic, social and political problems. Secure and objective knowledge will be obtained only if educational research emulates physical sciences. Succumbing to a naïve version of

correspondence theory of truth, managerial educational policy claims that in so far as data speak for themselves, the scientific results of educational research should be transferred and applied to educational problems. Educational managers will have to play a crucial role in this process since it is they who control the knowledge directed to remedy those parts of educational institutions that do not function well. As a consequence, experts attain the status of rational reformers whose intervention aims to transform an irrational world into a rational one. Intellectuals in the managerial version of educational policy are considered to be those who give expert information for solving specific problems in educational settings (Heineman et al 2001: 33-47; Hammersley 2002: 39-50).

The managerial version suffers from the following drawbacks, which have been mentioned by many scholars. The first is that it gives credence to an old-fashioned division between the "enlightened" intellectuals and the policy makers who act as technocrats. The problem with this managerial division of labour is that the practical knowledge of the educationalists is devalued and considered as having a low status and as not being capable of stating what has to be done in the educational settings. According to Hammersley (2002: 65-67), from this obsolete hierarchical division of theoretical/practical knowledge it follows that the educational policy objectives are not to be welcomed by the educationalists (much less to be implemented) to the extent they are not seen as agents capable of setting policy aims.

The second problem is that positivist scientific research can not justify practical and value orientations, for the simple reason that, according to the Humean conception of how ideas are formed, value judgements can not be logically deduced from factual statements. However, in that way value rationality is excluded from the educational policy decision-making and what is promoted is the fallacious thesis that research can never be a basis for rational positions, value-laden ones included. Thus, the notion of applied research is but a fallacy in so far as what is proposed is always a value-laden proposition. In that case one can see here the full extent of a version of the Enlightenment bias according to which, given that they are reasonable beings, humans have to set in motion this reasonable-ness in their everyday life dealings should they

want to make sense of their interests and to make their lives better (Morgan 2016: 76-96).

The third problem is more epistemological in nature and has to do with the fallible status of scientific theories. The fallible character of educational theories means that whenever new evidence refutes what is already known, educational theories have to be re-built. As a consequence, the non observable entities through which every theory tries to explain what is going on in the external world and to solve a problem, are questioned in the light of new evidence, they have to be remade, transformed or rejected (Stockman 1983: 85-117).

To sum up, in the context of the managerial version a biased picture of how the Enlightenment sees the role of intellectuals in the modern world seems to prevail. According to this picture, they are depicted as the creators of a kind of knowledge, which can make education profitable to social, economic and political ends only if educational research assimilates the physical sciences. However, even if in physical sciences it is easy to say that "we can not deduce an 'ought' from an 'is'", this is not always the case in social sciences in which one has to reconcile what has to be done (that is, policy aims) with what there is out there. But how can the external world tell us what has to be done since it is our conceptual schemes which give us access to this world?

Educational policy from a Durkheimian point of view

Durkheimian social theory has much to say on these complicated questions and it is not by accident that educational policies in France have been influenced by Durkheim's epistemological and ontological assumptions. In particular, by drawing upon the "organism" metaphor of society, Durkheim does not hesitate to discern normal from pathological social formations according to whether its institutions are capable of aligning the goal of social cohesion with the goal of smoothly socializing personal needs (Rawls 2004: 1-17). In that way Durkheim rejects the principal metaphysical dogma of positivism, the fact/value distinction, in so far as he wholeheartedly believes that social science can empower people in choosing between different or contrasting

aims and values and can give them the means for discerning right from wrong. Unless science can tell people the objectives that deserve to be yearned for, science will be senseless to humans since it will not have the means to assess why some pedagogical actions proposed by educational policies are more profitable than others (Jones 2004: 9-45).

The key one needs for understanding the interconnections of Durkheim's views on educational policy with his theoretical assumptions is his conception of causality. For Durkheim, causality is what should be striven for not only from the natural but from the social sciences as well. Empirical observation should be used by the social scientist as the means for accessing non-observables such as causality. Hence, in that sense Durkheim's thought retains positivistic tones since he subscribed to the ideal that physical and social sciences should share the same methods, that one should view institutions as *fait social* and that one should distinguish metaphysical reflections from scientific theories. However, there is one position that does not unite Durkheim with positivism but sets him apart from its basic tenets in so far as he epistemologically prioritizes theoretical entities, which are not accessible by the senses. In particular, such non-observable theoretical entities are what make things what they are (for example, mechanisms). In other words, what distances Durkheim from positivists is that he believed that the non observables are real entities of the external social world, that they exist independently from whether one is conscious of them or not. That's why he despised what he called "spontaneous sociologies", that is the motives and the reasons the laypersons draw upon so as to "explain" their practices. Social scientist should put these pre-conceptions in brackets and question them not because laypersons are stupid but because their preconceptions do not have the same explanatory power as the "previous social facts" have. Durkheim's rationalism has a holistic grounding in the sense that the whole is not to be reduced to its parts, in contrast to the methodological nominalists who refuse to give epistemological priority to supra-individual entities (Baert 2005: 10-13; Rosenberg 2008: 144-158; Hollis 2002: 99-102).

What follows from the above analysis is that Durkheim believed in the independent existence of what he considered to be a valuable distinction of normal from pathological societies and that empirical educational research is the means for identifying the causes,

which make society normal. The principles of this identification are to be sought not in the human nature that prescribes what social forms corresponds to it, as economists often do, but in "the functional relationships deployed between the institutions and the parts which provide it with coherence" (Durkheim 1982: 86). Durkheim's line of reasoning was twofold. On the one hand he holds that it is only empirical research that can bring to light which relationships are functional and, thus, normal, and on the other he wanted to distance himself from those who attempted to define the essence of what it is to be considered as normal and pathological. What Durkheim stressed was that healthy institutions are those that seem to correspond to the developmental level of the society's needs, which frame them. Needless to say what is healthy for one society is not to be seen that way from another society's point of view and it is the task of scientific research to examine the social morphology and the functional relationships that bond its members. This point should not be misread for the simple reason that Durkheim does not seem to identify the functions institutions satisfy with the efficient causes, which make them what they are. It is one thing to say that there are some social formations within which specific sports emerge and quite another to say that football is the means through which society satisfies its need to make working-class kids subservient to the ruling class.

Educational policy from the point of view of constructivism

Educational policy implemented from the point of view of constructivism is based upon a (misused) idea taken from Kant according to which one can not obtain true knowledge of the things themselves but only of how things appear to be (or represented) in our mind. One can know the external world only by means of how his/her a priori principles of mind put an order on the raw material accessed by his/her senses. In the context of this epistemology, what exists is what I can perceive of. This simple idea has huge ramifications if one applies it to social matters. If one can not state that colors exist independently of the taxonomies language offers for discerning blue from red, then things are much more difficult for those who see "citizenship education" as an objective ideal which should permeate how university teachers ought to do their job. To the extent that knowledge of the external world is filtered through the categories of mind and that

the observations are theoretically charged, it follows that there are no mind independent and objective epistemic values which could have the power to direct educational policy practice. In contrast to positivists, who thought that values ought to be beyond the sphere of scientific practice because they express personal emotions, constructivists believe that each community's members create their own "forms of life" within which specific meaning structures and "maps" are developed (Cruickshank 2003: 40-43; Baert 2005: 127-131; Bishop 2007: 64-68). Two things are crucial here, first that the proponents of constructivism believe that the languages of these communities are not translatable to each other and, second, that giving voice to the "underdogs" is the only valuable goal educational policy should strive for. Needless to say for the proponents of constructivism the unity of science and the identification of unobservable mechanisms are harmful for educational policy aims.

In my view the above epistemological tenets present great difficulties as to what social researchers claim to know when they are doing research. First of all, what is left unanswerable is how the researcher's cultural baggage obtains knowledge of the other mind's subjectivities. In other words, how can a researcher's lifeworld communicate with the informants' lifeworld? Schutz's answer was that it is through the researcher's involvement with the informants' community of meaning that he/she could make sense of how they typify their social world. Be that as it may, such constructivist theoretical solutions deny the three basic principles of Durkheim's realism: a) they refuse to acknowledge that there is a world of mind independent unobservable entities, b) they deny the correspondence theory of truth according to which scientific theories describe the external reality and c) they refuse to say whether a theory is fallible or not.

It is not difficult for one to see the consequences of the application of the above remarks to educational policy practice. Educational policy for radical constructivism should serve practical purposes whilst value neutrality is seen as an ideological mechanism (Rosenberg 2008: 111-115; Risjord 2014: 57-60; Bishop 2007:124-147). What is at stake here is not how one ought to distinguish value neutral from value partisan knowledge but the differentiation of those who clearly state their value commitments from those who do not make such statements explicit. Consequently, epistemology is useless for radical constructivism and, instead, it is preferable for it to be replaced by

social criticism, for the reason that no knowledge of the things that matter is achievable. In that sense, there is no point in searching for which theoretical claims approach truth since it is power relations that sustain every such claim. For such theorists as Foucault, Derrida, Deleuze etc., theory itself is but a weapon to uncover power mechanisms and to give voice to the "underdogs". Martyn Hammersley has eloquently criticized such partisan conceptions of knowledge by saying that "they provide no basis for choosing between, for example, Heidegger's commitment to National Socialism, Merleau-Ponty's early attachment to Leninism, Sartre's later association with Maoism, Foucault's particularistic activism, or Rorty's adherence to bourgeois liberalism" (2000: 29).

It has been noted that under the umbrella of the constructivism-inspired critique of the positivistic version of educational policy various theoretical currents like Critical Theory, Marxism and Feminism are concentrated. One common theme permeating these criticisms concerns what has been referred to as "ideology critique" of which the argument runs as follows: "Ideology" is understood as the relationship between knowledge, oppression, and systems of power and authority. In human societies, power and authority are unevenly distributed. In modern societies, the distribution of power depends on various social groupings, typically combinations of gender (including sexual identities), race (including ethnicity or national identification), and socio-economic status (including caste, class, or profession). These differences in power are associated with oppressive practices, such as limiting access by persons of a particular race/gender/class to education, economic resources, or participation in the political process. The first step of an ideology critique is to recognize that the social scientists participate in the very same material conditions that create differences of power in the larger society. Western academics and researchers in the public or private sectors tend to be male, White, and have middle-class cultural backgrounds. Social scientists have the authority to set the research agenda, identify acceptable methodologies, and evaluate the results. What counts as a legitimate question for educational policy inquiry and what counts as a good answer—what counts as social scientific knowledge at all—is thus determined by a group of people with a position of power (Risjord 2014: 14-32). As is well known, the conclusion of this line of reasoning is that what exists in society is an asymmetry of power relations between those who have the means to impose their

worldview symbolically and materially and the disadvantaged who see reality through the eyes of the former.

In my opinion the weakness of this *à la française* critique is that there is a logical gap between saying that multiple points of views exist in the social world and inferring that one is able to know that these points of views are formed as power relations. To the extent that reality is unknown-able, according to the ontological presumptions of constructivism, how can one know that what exists in reality are power relations? Or to put it another way, given that the means of accessing the social world are socially constructed, what makes radical constructivism's point of view superior or better than the point of view of any other knowledge claim? In what sense is the knowledge of injustice stemming from power relations privileged, given that there is no value neutral knowledge?

To conclude, constructivists' unwillingness to set up a normative framework for processing decision-making rules is explained by the fact that such a choice would be in opposition to their ontological presumptions. Additionally, while the proponents of such relativistic claims are unable to state why the values of the members of X community are better than those of Z community, they eagerly acknowledge inter-subjective meaning as the basis of people's actions. In other words, while for a constructivism-inspired educational policy maker the proposition "university takes measures to help financially disadvantaged students" makes sense, he/she remains mute as to what kind of measures should be taken or as to how one should evaluate the social dimension of their effectiveness.

Beyond the fact/value distinction. The post-positivistic arguments of Bernstein and Putnam

Bernstein's phronetic rationality

In the next paragraphs I will present in detail the arguments of two philosophers who have disputed the fact/value distinction on various grounds. I think that their views are useful in the sense that they both overcome the pros and cons of each of the

abovementioned epistemological frameworks of educational policy and provide us with practical ways of using values in educational policy practice without it being accused either of relativism or absolutism. Bernstein's line of reasoning is based upon the idea of "Cartesian anxiety" according to which Descartes' project has been framed by his anxiety to find an Archimedean point of guaranteeing what one can know. It has been argued that God or cogito could be the representatives of this point. However, Bernstein believes, Cartesian epistemology is but a journey of the soul, a reflection on human finitude through which one can obtain a deep knowledge of what it means to say that human beings' limited nature is dependent upon a perfect and complete God. The more one becomes aware of this finitude and of the dependence on God the more one becomes freed from the anxiety and the fear that what he/she knows is not a fraud set up by the daemon. At the end of this journey one can be certain that his/her doubts stemming from this possible fraud are unattainable as God guarantees not only cogito but also that his/her representational contents are real, given that God is not a fraud maker (Bernstein 1983: 16-20). For Bernstein, Cartesian anxiety haunts all the versions of foundational philosophies of science such as those we presented above and of which the foundations are sought either in "protocol statements" (see the managerial version of educational policy), in external moral facts (see the Durkheimian version) or in cognition itself (see constructivism)

One way to escape this impasse is to re-examine the notion of "rationality". Bernstein cites such analytical philosophers as Carnap and Quine who adopt three ideas, which are very close to a hermeneutic epistemology. These ideas are that a) observation is always theory laden, b) facts are not presupposition-less entities and c) it is the web of scientific beliefs that, which determines the tenability of a scientific hypothesis (Bernstein 1983: 39; Bacon 2012: 63-100; Zammito 2004: 39-47). Despite the fact that analytic philosophers disagree with a lot of what the proponents of hermeneutic tradition have to say on ontological issues, these three ideas are indicative of a post-positivistic attempt to understand that humans are evaluative, interpretive and reasonable beings all at once. In that sense Bernstein thinks that the rational argumentation and the reasons humans give to each other in their everyday lives could function as values for problem-solving situations and for taking decisions. Deductive/inductive inferences are not the only criteria for assessing what counts as

truth and as knowledge. Neither one should identify subjectivity and values with the personal or with the irrational (Bernstein 2010: 106-110).

In contrast to this positivistic obsession, Bernstein believes that the more one examines the specifics of the theoretical knowledge upon which scientific knowledge is modelled, the more one realizes that the nature of the rational principles of scientific practice – especially those related to theory choice – are too close to the kind of rationality which characterizes the tradition of practical philosophy. It is the deeply ingrained intellectual bias according to which the moral-practical concerns should be dealt with only after one has solved the perplexed epistemological issues that forces us to accept the above-mentioned identification. Bernstein builds upon Kuhn's arguments in order to show the rationality process, which is entailed in theory choice. For him, positivistic devaluations of Kuhn's work stem from the fear that what drives paradigm shift is a matter of psychology. In contrast, Bernstein believes that in theory choice one can discern good from bad argumentations as to what theory has to be chosen (Bernstein 1983: 53-54). The crucial point here is the following: on the one hand Kuhn adopts value elements in crafting the criteria of theory choice and on the other he connects values with the kind of rationality which Aristotle tied up with *phronesis*. Phronesis constitutes a kind of inference which a) involves decision making and deliberation, b) deals with particulars and with that for which there are plenty of doxas and c) deliberation and choice is what mediates between particulars and universals. The end result of this kind of inference is not the product of some algorithm the usage of which could guarantee to those who apply it whether the subsumption of the explanandum to explananda is successful or not. On the contrary, phronetic rationality is flourishing only to the extent that arguments are justified publicly and that the scientific community evaluates through deliberation which of the competing theories explain best the collected evidence (Bernstein 1983: 223-233; Bacon 2012: 140-147). Thus, according to this kind of phronetic rationality the distinction between epistemic and non-epistemic values is retained in so far as it is through such values as "simplicity, coherence, exactness and fruitfulness" that decisions are taken. No matter how unclear these epistemic values are, the rational argumentation of a community's members is that which will make them concrete and practical and not some algorithmic rules dependent upon one's abilities. As a consequence, whether a theory will be accepted or not is not a matter of taste, of

doxa or of psychological virtuosity but it is embedded within the context of giving and receiving reasons, the status of which will be evaluated in public.

Putnam's realism with a small r

Putnam's thought revolves around the following three ideas: a) anti-skepticism, the thesis that one can argue on values in the same way he/she can argue on beliefs, b) beliefs are fallible and c) the fact/value distinction is untenable. The fact/value distinction, Putnam thinks, is predicated upon the analytic/synthetic distinction which is no longer to be used as an epistemological guide for the simple reason that it depends upon whether one subscribes or not to Hume's metaphysical assumptions. In particular, Hume identifies the impossibility of inferring an "ought" from an "is" in the difference between matters of fact and relations of ideas, which means that if values were attributes of the things themselves they would have to be impressed upon the mind in the same way that the idea of an apple is impressed upon the mind whenever one sees an apple (Putnam 2002: 28-40). However, such a process does not take place because ideas of "ought" entail emotions and feelings, which are not inscribed in the things themselves but instead are humans' projections. That is why values should be expelled from scientific statements. At this point Putnam disagrees with the above reasoning by wondering why one should accept physical scientists' theoretical entities (for example "gravitational field") for explaining the outer world? In what ways does the physical scientist interact with these entities and how are they formed in his/her mind? According to the Humean argument one should not adopt such non-observables entities in the same way that between event A and event B there are no causal relations but only regularities and patterns (event A is followed by event B). However, the regularity view of causality is considered as obsolete even by hardcore empiricists some of whom (the so-called "indirect realists") have taken the step of accepting that perception entails the triadic relation between the perceiver, the perceived object and a third private entity which is perceived directly (Putnam 1987: 71-76).

Putnam believes, like Bernstein, that one cannot deduce an action as rational by means of an algorithm, for the simple reason that whenever one states that something is rational he/she claims that it has to be seen as such by his/her interlocutors too. When one says that a scientific theory is good he/she claims that others ought to accept it as

well. Putnam, like Bernstein, retains the epistemic/non-epistemic distinction. In particular, for logical empiricists epistemic values have to be adopted due to the fact that scientific theories following them are more prone to approximate truth. However, for Putnam this reasoning is but a psychological expectation and not a synthetic truth. On the contrary, as Carnap and Quine have shown, what makes a theory approvable has to do with the theoretical entities it proposes for explaining observables. The addition Putnam makes regarding this Carnap-Quine thesis is that he believes that epistemic values have to regulate argumentation about "ought". What is essential to the rationality of research is essential to the deliberative rationality of arguing about values (Putnam 1987: 77-80; 2002: 96-135).

Hence, Putnam thinks that just as theoretical entities are mental phenomena the acceptance of which depends on their fallibility, so values could claim a similar inter-subjective status. In a similar vein, Putnam grounds his rejection of the distinction between primary and secondary qualities on the following argument: if "redness" and "solidness" are not primary but secondary qualities which owe their existence to the fact that the things themselves have the power to create sense data, then of what kind of quality is this powerful tendency, given that for empiricism it is only the primary qualities that really exist? In other words, while empiricists reject commonsensical realism, for phenomenologists what exist are only those things for which the mind can provide a solid foundation (Putnam 1987: 82-87).

In contrast to this well known antithesis, Putnam proposes what he refers to as "realism with a small r", according to which, even though the meaning of the word "exist" depends on the ontological context one is committed to, people could agree upon the statement "Nazis committed crimes" because it could be deliberatively and publicly fallible. Just as what is a "fact" could be ascertained by rational beings and become disputable, so there are "values" which could be approvable or not. It is in this sense, Putnam believes, that there are "ought implying facts" and more or less successful beliefs. The problem with the fact/value distinction is not that there is no algorithm for inferring values while for facts there is (there is no such algorithm anyway), but, that such a distinction reduces rational inference to induction and deduction annulling the possibility that values could be rationally argued (Conant 1994: 160-162).

To conclude, moral beliefs are to be evaluated as good or bad according to whether they satisfy lifeworld needs, without it being seen as leading to relativism. In the same way that one can say that there are better and worse knives, so one could say that some moral images of the world are more approvable than others, no matter how temporarily. Deliberating about values and normative judgments is not a matter of taste but a matter of rationally using the language of justification and of objectivity in the course of argumentation. Moral disputes, Putnatm holds, are not senseless metaphysical reflections but they could become the beginning of criticizing institutional values in order for people's conceptions of the good life to be promoted and-social justice to be augmented. Disputations about the meaning of the good life do not lead to the impossibility of finding fair processes of arguing for such issues as respecting each other's moral autonomy or of agreeing on such regulative principles as replacing relations of superiority by relations of reciprocity.

Educational policy implementation within a post-positivistic framework. Sketching the principles of policy sociology

In this last section I will show how educational policy could be put in motion should one apply the post-positivistic arguments I presented through Putnam's and Bernstein's thought. I suggest three *regulative principles* through which decision-making rules are proposed for implementing educational policy from a post-positivistic epistemological point of view. The first concerns the principle that policy analysts should systematically, explicitly and publicly argue about the values they consider as worthy of being pursued through a specific educational policy. The second concerns the principle that policy researchers should use theory as a means for explaining what happens in the world out there, and not for checking whether state, private or international organizations' goals are implemented or not. Finally the third principle concerns the belief that policy makers should take into account the "definitions of the situation" of the actors whose social and educational everyday lives they aspire to understand. Let's see these principles in more detail.

The first principle aims at making educational policy makers capable of arguing rationally about the values their policy wants to serve. It is not uncommon to see policy articles talking about, for example, the importance of student-centered learning or of the students' inter-university mobility. My point is that what should be explicit in the policy discussion concerns the reasons why such goals should be realized. Policy researchers should publicly deploy well-structured arguments about the merits of claiming, for example, that a specific instructional methodology is valuable. This does not mean carrying out (qualitative or quantitative) research, which shows such merits but, instead, analyzing in detail the theoretical and philosophical assumptions underpinning such a claim. As we tried to show, policy researchers are not to use research as a means to prove their implicit values because rational argumentation is something more than the scientific procedures one uses for forging theoretical entities. In making policy researchers deliberate on the values they want to act out though their policies, the scientific community sets in motion competent arguments through which its members can evaluate the tenability, the appropriateness, the relevance and the rationality of its main components. In that sense, arguing in such ways is to aspire to reach a kind of objectivity, which is closer to pluralism, not to relativism. Moral objectivity is an argument for that which educational policy ought to be oriented to, that is for promoting those practices that can guarantee that rational deliberation will prevail. It is about what Putnam calls "epistemological justification of democracy" in the sense that democracy is the "precondition for applying practical reason to problem solving situations". A community that wants to know what is right and fair ought to be organized in accordance with democratic ideals, not because they are the par excellence ideals but because they constitute the preconditions for applying rational reasoning to research practice. Hence, educational policy as it is seen through the lens of the principle I tried to sketch is not a managerial issue that demands solutions by means of value neutral research techniques but a rational argument which is to be set up in accordance with value contexts within which one has to answer the following question: whose interests is the X value going to serve, who will it benefit, in which piece/domain and in what way? (Balias et al 2016)

The second principle states that research practice carried out for policy reasons should be evaluated according to whether it proposes theoretical entities capable of explaining

the external reality. Until now what policy makers do when they carry out research is to see whether the values promoted by international organization (for example, Unesco, European Council) have been implemented or not in some educational area (this is what is called "evaluation research"). Checking whether the goals promulgated by the international organizations are adopted or not by the universities is a very limited way of carrying out policy research for the simple reason that it identifies research only with its evaluative dimension. In particular, according to the positivistic conception of how theory should be used, a group faces a practical problem the solution to which demands information and know-how that only the policy researcher could provide. Thus, the policy researcher provides this knowledge which checks whether educational policy has achieved its goals or he proposes measures for reaching it.

In contrast, according to the principle I propose, policy researchers should break with these positivist accounts of explanation for which empirical statements are guaranteed by observational statements. Instead of seeing explanation as identical to finding regularities through statistical measures, educational researchers should bring to light the causal mechanism, which tends to sustain possible patterns. According to this Realist view of causality, adequate causal explanations require the discovery both of regular relations between phenomena, and of some kind of mechanism that links them. So, in explaining any particular phenomenon, we must not only make reference to those events, which initiate the process of change: we must also give a description of that process itself. To do this, we need knowledge of the underlying mechanisms and structures that are present, and of the manner in which they generate or produce the phenomenon we are trying to explain. In describing these mechanisms and structures we will often, in effect, be characterizing the 'nature', 'essence', or 'inner constitution' of various types of entity.

Suppose we wish to explain why a specific group of university students develops a vocational stance in relation to their lessons' tasks. The policy researcher should relate how these students define or experience what is demanded of them with the details of the university context within which they try to realize their goals. In addition, policy researchers have to take into account the totality of their life experiences, which frame their relation to knowledge. Hence, answers to how- and what-questions are the means

the policy researcher has for reaching answers to why-questions (that is, to requests for causal explanations). Thus, if asked *why* something occurs, we must show *how* some event or change brings about a new state of affairs, by describing the way in which the structures and mechanisms that are present respond to the initial change. To do this, it is necessary to discover *what* the entities involved are: to discover their natures or essences. It is sometimes said that science cannot tell us why things happen, but only how; or, that science is concerned only with description, and not with explanation. However, according to the realist conception we propose here, when one explains why he/she is saying how it is taking place then in that sense, causal explanations are not irrelevant to descriptions.

Finally, the third principle I propose is an extension of the previous principle. In particular, only on condition that the policy researcher takes into account how his/her research subjects make sense of themselves and of their lifeworld could educational policy achieve its goals. It is not uncommon to see educational policies fail for the simple reason that the official definitions about X (for example youth transitions, youth unemployment, vocational education) promoted by the state or international organizations contradict how the subjects to whom the policies are addressed define their situation. To the extent that educational policy initiatives are not grounded upon what matters to the subjects for whom these initiatives are going to be implemented, it is possible that the content of the policy is seen as alien to their lifeworld. One obvious connotation that stems from this principle concerns the fact that policy researchers should carry out qualitative research as a means for bringing to light what people in their every day lives care for. However, this is not identical to using qualitative research only as a means of bringing to light the emic accounts of the informants. The reason is that policy makers are not certain about the causal processes sustaining informants' worlds. In contrast, qualitative research could be carried out by policy researchers in such a way as to identify the formal and efficient cause creating people's forms of life.

Conclusion

In this article I argued that up to now educational policy is implemented according to three different epistemological frameworks, which present serious drawbacks regarding the relationship of facts and values. In other words, one of my points is that these three epistemological traditions have dealt with the fact/value distinction in non-fruitful ways. In particular, in carrying out educational policy through the positivistic point of view one cannot justify how policy researchers infer non-observable theoretical entities from statistical tables, since it is only observable statements that matter for positivists. In addition, the main drawback of the managerial version of carrying out educational policy stems from the fact that it tends to reproduce "elitist" divisions between the "expert" and the "lay person" which makes those to whom the policy is addressed indifferent or oppositional to it. On the other hand, the Durkheimian conception of educational policy suffers from its Kantian assumptions. In particular one could easily accuse it of imposing a "moral fact" or "duty" on the receivers of educational policy. According to this framework, moral values are facts, which ought to be accepted as they are. It is obvious that such a conception of values is liable to feed educational policies, which could easily be seen as moral absolutism. Finally, epistemological constructivism presents serious inadequacies as much regarding its one-dimensional way of seeing only power relations in the social world as regarding its tendency to remain indifferent as to what policy measures should be taken as far as a real life problem is concerned.

Putnam's and Bernstein's arguments have two advantages in comparison to the above epistemological traditions. Firstly, they highlight how values could be rationally deliberated both within the community of those who take policy decisions and within the community of those to whom these decisions are to be applied. Deliberating rationally about values is not a private matter but a publicly organized process through which partners are obliged to set in motion *phronetic* ways of giving reasons for implementing a specific educational policy over another. Secondly, arguing that every observation is theoretically charged is not conducive to cognitive relativism but it values the fallible character of scientific theories. According to these two scholars, scientific theories are not of equal value but they are to be evaluated in accordance with the extent to which the theoretical entities they propose explain best the observables.

Three regulative principles could be drawn from applying Putnam's and Bernstein's work in the area of educational policy: the principle of value deliberation, the principle of conceptual fallibility and the principle of lifeworld relevancy. It is obvious that these regulative principles are but a theoretical attempt at reconciling the epistemological justification of values with the Enlightenment project. Hammersley, expressing his reservations about this optimism, thinks that no rational solution to the problems education face is possible within the time-scale imposed and the resources available. The problem cannot be clearly enough defined for policy researchers to decide what would be the most appropriate direction in which to look for a solution. Above all, educational policy making is a political process, not a matter of intellectual problem-solving and even where a rational knowledge-based solution is sought, research information is usually only a small part of the knowledge used, practical experience and skilled judgment being much more important (Hammersley 1994: 158). Although I take such reservations seriously into account, the three regulative principles I sketched attempt at defining and cementing the grounds of what is called "policy sociology". As Raab (1994: 26) argues, policy sociologists examine the relationship between process and product, and between motive and action. In each case, however, knowledge of the former is to be gained empirically and not on the basis of inference from the latter or by deduction from grand theory. Hence the importance of going beyond the public pronouncements of 'policy makers' and actually talking to them, for meanings and 'assumptive worlds' are essential parts of the policy process and need to be understood if action itself is to be understood.

Despite the fact that there is a huge body of work from policy sociologists who highlight that inequalities take new forms within the contemporary climate of marketization of education, there have been projects designed to uncover, for example, how some schools with disadvantaged pupils had improved and succeeded despite their "lack of ambition". Maden (2001) showed that committed and talented heads and teachers could improve schools even if they contain a proportion of disadvantaged pupils. In order to achieve improvement, however, such schools have to exceed what could be termed `normal' efforts. Members of staff have to be more committed and work harder than their peers elsewhere. In addition, Whitty (2005: 128-130) brings to the fore a vast array of educational policy measures, which have been taken to break the

vicious circle of social disadvantage and of school underachievement. What these policy researches share concerns that they aspire neither to provide measurable outcomes nor to disentangle truth from method but to develop answers to questions such as "what should be done?" and "is this desirable?". As Flyvbjerg (2001: 4) has succinctly argued, this kind of phronetic research is able to restore social science to its classical position as practical and intellectual activity aimed at clarifying the problems, risks and possibilities we face as humans and societies and at contributing to social and political practice"

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