

Circulation of a mediated artifact

Questioning the consequences of PISA for education – the example of Poland

In my contribution I intend to depart from the difference in precepting the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in scholarly terms as a diagnostic investigation into a particular social reality (bringing knowledge about that reality), and understanding PISA in terms of a political agent (that induces a particular educational policies, and facilitates particular political events) (e.g. Sjøberg & Jenkins 2020; Landahl 2020; cf. Latour 2005). In the first case, the measurement is aimed to establish facts, in the second, however, it produces artifacts, as it enforces particular strategies on educational systems, and with that on schools, teachers and students which are then interpreted and implemented in various ways (depending on the cultural context) and – again – diagnosed with the intention to establish facts. This circular logic of PISA is not a methodological fault, rather it stems from the oscillation of this Programme between being a diagnostic investigation and a political agent.

There seems to be a lack of awareness of this entanglement on the methodological level of subsequent measurements withing the Programme, however the point I would like to rise refers to another issue stemming from this oscillation and from the circulation of artifacts it facilitates, namely: to the issue of responsibility. We can think of threefold responsibility in this case (ethical, political, and educational). Because of the time constrains, I intend to focus on the educational responsibility for the Programme by referring to the example of Poland, i.e. by making the attempt to understand the recently reported data (OECD 2019a&b), and following questions like: how come that Polish students perform so well (reading 512p., maths 516p., science 511p.) when they are taught by the least engaged (-0,2) and supportive (-0,3) teachers? My aim is to argue that only when taking into account the way that the artifacts produced by the Programme (as a political agent) are rendered on a particular cultural and historical terrain (cf. Zamojski 2018) one can make sense of the facts revealed by the diagnostic measurement of the Programme (as a scholarly inquiry). This is – moreover – essential for understanding the ongoing impact of the suggestions concerning educational policy that stem from PISA, i.e. for understanding what the Programme is actually causing on the level of particular educational systems, as well as the level of concrete educational practices.

References:

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