

Call for Papers

The WPR approach and policies on education in the digital age: China and its global peers

Digital technology is increasingly used globally in education. Not only state governments but also other agencies, especially Edtech companies, are actively involved in the design and implementation of digital tools for education. Digital technology is seen as a tool that can address challenges in teaching and learning, can provide a vision of what good education is and shape daily education practices. Introducing digital tools into education could be understood as government in the sense defined by Foucault – as the conduct of conduct, referring to any form of activity or technique that aims to shape, guide or affect the conduct of people.

Policy is a significant component of government. Following the position developed by Foucault, Carol Bacchi has developed an analytic strategy, or thinking tool, called ‘What is the Problem Represented to be?’ (WPR) to facilitate critical policy analysis. The WPR approach challenges the premise that policy attempts to solve ‘problems that exist’, rather, the key term in the WPR approach is problematisation: in order to shape the conduct, something must be problematised, namely presented as a certain sort of problem that needs fixing. WPR starts with a simple idea: particular representations of problems are implied in the solutions and suggestions for change or action. This proposition leads scholars to think about the presuppositions that underlie these representations of the problems, how objects, subjects and places are produced and categorised, what are the rationalities and technologies of governmentality, as well as what is unproblematic and possible alternatives. The WPR approach could be applied to specific proposals or plans of action, including but not confined to policy texts, images, videos, and other forms of digital communication.

In this workshop, we want to bring scholars together in order to use the WPR approach to analyse policies on educational digitalisation in China and to explore the following three areas. Firstly, we want to bring fresh theoretical impulses into the analysis of policies issued by the state. For decades China has been a policy ‘borrower’ in the field of education but in recent years the Chinese government has placed an increasing emphasis on the construction of its own discourses and on positioning

itself as a key player in the field of educational digitalisation. We aim to move beyond a merely descriptive analysis, and primarily to understand what visions of good education or of good pupils, teachers and parents are articulated and normalised in state discourses. We furthermore intend to look into the role ascribed to other agencies involved in the digitalisation of education such as ed-tech companies and NGOs. Secondly, because ‘government’ is not limited to the state but includes other agencies as well, we also want to question the visions articulated by those other agencies. For example, in recent years the number of companies providing digital solutions for school education has increased significantly. Traditional tech giants such as Tencent and Alibaba as well as newly emerged Edtech companies such as Class In and Seewo are presenting their innovative tools to teachers and local officials, receiving feedback on their use and thus shaping the practices of schools and administrations. Finally, the workshop will seek to contribute to the discussion surrounding governmentality in China. Scholars have noticed the emergence of a hybrid type of governance in China, apparent especially in the relationship between neoliberal and authoritarian politics, both of which are shaping social norms and the behaviour of individuals and collectives. The policy and practice of educational digitalisation provide both macro and micro perspectives that illustrate the interaction between different agencies in shaping educational digitalisation, which in turn contain social orders and norms. *We would also welcome scholars who focus on policies of educational digitalisation in other national or international contexts to provide a global and comparative perspective.*

The workshop covers a range of topics, including but not limited to:

1. How do specific forms of governmental problematization articulated in policies and other techniques normalise conduct? What visions of good education in China are produced through these problematizations?
2. In term of the subjectification practice, how do people respond to the different subject positions ascribed to them by different discourses? Is there resistance and, if so, what form does it take?
3. What similarities or differences exist between China and other countries with regard to policy discourses as well as with regard to types of relationship between policy discourses and micro practices?

Keynote speaker and the Organisation of the Workshop

We are excited to announce that Professor Carol Bacchi, creator of the WPR approach, will be our keynote speaker for the workshop and will provide comments on participants' articles. Prof. Bacchi is an internationally renowned scholar in the field of policy analysis and gender studies, and has published numerous influential works on these topics. She is a Professor Emerita of Politics in the Faculty of Arts, the University of Adelaide, and her research focuses on critical policy studies and feminist political theory.

The workshop is organised by the D_Trac project based at the Leibniz Institute for Educational Media| Georg Eckert Institute with funding support from the Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Germany) (01D021002). All travelling expenses and accommodation costs will be covered by the organiser.

The workshop is supported by ECNU Review of Education, a journal initiated by East China Normal University. Selected papers will be published in a special issue of this journal.

Timeline of the workshop:

15.08.2023: deadline for abstracts and authors' bibliographies. The abstract should include three parts: (1) a maximum 600-word introduction (including research questions, theories and concepts), (2) a maximum 300-word methodology (including methods, research instruments or sources used), (3) a maximum 300-word section outlining the conclusion, expected outcomes or findings. An author's bibliography should include name, title, affiliation, research fields and selected research publications (if applicable). Please save abstract and bibliography as a Pdf file and send it to yuan.yuan@gei.de with the e-mail subject 'WPR Abstract, surname'. The deadline is 24:00 UTC+01:00.

25.08.2023: Announcement of selection

11.09.-15.09.2023: Online lecture by Prof. Carol Bacchi on the WPR approach (the concrete date will be announced together with the announcement of selection)

10.10.2023: Submission deadline for full papers

25-26.10.2023: Two-day workshop at the GEI, Braunschweig, Germany

If you have any questions regarding the workshop, please send an email to yuan.yuan@gei.de

Here is some suggested reading to prepare for the workshop

1. Bacchi Carol and Goodwin Susan, *Poststructural Policy Analysis: A Guide to Practice* (Palgrave Macmillan 2016).
2. Bacchi Carol, *Analysing policy: What's the problem represented to be?* (Pearson 2009).
3. Bacchi Carol, 'Governmentalizing "policy studies"' in *Handbook on Governmentality: Research Handbooks in Political Thought Series*, edited by William Walters and Martina Tazzioli, Goldsmiths (Edward Elgar, 2023)
4. Gordon Colin, 'Governmental rationality: An Introduction', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, edited by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller, (University of Chicago, 1991).
5. Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose, *Governing the Present: Administering Economic, Social and Personal Life* (Polity Press, 2008). Chapter Introduction.

We encourage scholars who are interested in the workshop to learn more about WPR at <https://carolbacchi.com/blog/>

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