

Education, Equity, Economy

*Series Editors:* George W. Noblit · William Pink

Michelle D. Young

Sarah Diem *Editors*

# Critical Approaches to Education Policy Analysis

Moving Beyond Tradition



Springer

# **Education, Equity, Economy**

## **Volume 4**

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Michelle D. Young • Sarah Diem

Editors

# Critical Approaches to Education Policy Analysis

Moving Beyond Tradition



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# Foreword

During the three years of my phased retirement (2005–2008) from a career that began as a teaching-principal in 1958, I co-taught a course at The University of Texas at Austin, *critical policy analysis*, with Michelle Young, one of this book's editors. The other editor, Sarah Diem, was a student in that class, as were some of the contributors to this volume. And you might say I, too, was a student in that class. So, before we get into this book, *Critical Approaches to Education Policy Analysis: Moving Beyond Tradition*, and what I believe is truly a seminal contribution to our field and an experience that brought a whole lot of meaning to my career, let me tell you about my earlier dalliances with this notion of *critical policy analysis*. I believe there were critical turns in the paths I took that challenged me to dig beneath the obvious and search for answers to what works throughout my career.

By the time I left the comfort of my Downeast Maine hometown for faraway California, like my great grandfather<sup>1</sup> nearly a 100 years earlier, I had been a teaching-principal in a three-room schoolhouse and the first principal of a relatively large middle school established in a recently vacated high school. I had also completed my master's degree and was headed for a doctorate and an uncertain future at Stanford University. I was the ripe old age of 27. I mention this beginning to a 50-year professional career, not because it's of much importance to the reader but because of how it shaped my thinking about how policies and decisions get made in our field and perhaps planted the seeds for my earliest courtship with critical policy analysis.

If you have ever lived in a small town, you truly understand the notion, "It takes a village to raise a child." Imagine a 21-year old entering a school as a teacher and a principal for the first time with two experienced middle age women who exuded excellence in the classroom. The school was a wooden framed building built by members of the community, and it served as a community center for the school club. The national Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) was anathema to parents and friends of the school because once school business and any organized program were

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<sup>1</sup>My great grandfather, Wallace Scribner, and his brother Charles were lumberjacks and arrived in California not long before Stanford University was established in 1891.

over, out came the bingo (beano) cards and the gambling began. The PTA did not permit such behavior.

Add to this my undergraduate professors, several with degrees from Columbia University where they were steeped in John Dewey's approach to "individual differences (ID)" and "unit planning." Their worldviews heavily influenced my approach to teaching. The ID approach to delivering instruction to students, individually and in small and large groups, was perfect for the multigrade situation. Moreover, students participated in planning weekly, monthly, and even semester-long interdisciplinary units around topics they chose collectively, sometimes spontaneously, because of some unforeseen event.

During this first experience, I was the consummate listener, everyone was engaged in the process, and opinions and ideas were shared. It was a great beginning, learning how creativity in policy and decision-making takes place in the context of the work.

I am certain my second experience as the first principal of a relatively large middle school with an entirely new student body, a whole new teaching staff, and a community wrought with skepticism about the disruption their children were perceived to be undertaking had a lot to do with how I viewed policy and decision-making in the workplace, not to mention, my later brush with critical policy analysis. My stance was *this is not my problem, this is our problem*, and we set out to organize a new curriculum with block scheduling and large and small group instruction, a brand-new faculty and student governance system, and the creation of parental involvement strategies that involved parents in all aspects of the school. The bottom line was to provide opportunities for every party to have a voice and play a role in creating new policies for a new school situation, and my role naturally evolved, as an initiator, instigator, and facilitator of the talent that surrounded me.

The third early influence can only be described as "cultural exasperation" or "a clash of cultures." My arrival at Stanford University as a new kid on the block was like sprinting as fast as one can move into an oncoming 18-wheeler. I had no idea what challenges a university of Stanford's stature would present for me. For example, it attracted a different kind of student than the laid-back Mainers who surrounded me during my earlier degrees, it provided an environment that fostered competition over collaboration, and it fostered a top-down approach to leadership and a new language that included theoretical frameworks, hypotheses making and testing, heuristics, and structural-functional systems analysis. It would take too long to tell how I adapted to all this, but all I can say is it was not easy.

I became good at developing conceptual frameworks, building models, and generating hypotheses. All of these because my natural instincts and earlier experiences taught me three rather compelling habits. First, I always tried to comprehend the big picture, rather than become burdened by details. Second, one might attribute this to a small amount of paranoia, but I learned early to never take anything at face value, to always look beyond the obvious for a deeper meaning. I have found this to be especially useful if what you encounter appears to be the indisputable, undeniable, and unmistakable *truth*. Third, very early in life, economic circumstances required that I move frequently to different locations. I think this may have contributed to how I learned to adapt and be flexible. I tend *not* to see each new situation or

condition, concern, or controversy before me as black or white, either/or, or a two-sided issue; rather, I approached the experiences life put in my path as many-sided and worthy of continued scrutiny, critique, patience, tolerance, equitableness, and humanity.

These earliest personal accounts had a lot to do with what Young and Diem reference in their introduction to this volume. For example, concerns about the differences between policy rhetoric and practice reality; about how policies and decisions emerge; about how power is distributed; and about the effects of how policies and decisions impact inequities and the development of humane and democratic contexts were inherent in my early socialization.

One last vignette, in the early 1970s, we instituted an Urban Educational Policy and Planning Program at UCLA, where I was a faculty member. It was considered highly successful as a portal for a diverse group of students from East Los Angeles, Watts, and throughout the city, and we provided in-service, preservice, and mid-career educational experiences, as well as preparation for the professorship. Around two decades later at The University of Texas at Austin, I worked with my colleagues to develop an Educational Policy and Planning Program concentrating on research and preparing still another new cadre of educational researchers. At UCLA where we had the Center for the Study of Educational Evaluation, our focus was on policy evaluation, alternatives, and practices. In contrast, our approach at UT was interdisciplinary, with a program made up of core faculty steeped in discourse theory, critical ethnography, critical race theory, queer legal theory, and feminist analyses. The UT policy students received a markedly different preparation for their careers as policy scholars.

When 15 years after the establishment of the UT policy program I found myself co-teaching with one of the program's first graduates, I welcomed the challenge to explore and share "what counts as critical policy analysis." I continued to view myself as "a willing student" in this final classroom experience of my career. As noted, I learned firsthand some of the elemental premises of what have become known as critical policy analysis through life experiences, and I expanded my thinking through my engagement with the scholars and students with whom I have worked over the course of my career. Thus, this book, at least in some measure, not only makes a significant contribution to our field as it currently exists, it represents a meaningful capstone to my career.

Finally, this book and its authors not only resonate with me on an intellectual level but also on a personal level. I have been blessed to have either known the authors as students or colleagues, played a small part in their professional development, coauthored and collaborated on projects with them, or in a few instances come to know them through their outstanding contributions to the field (Oh yes, I was there when one of them was born!).

I hope you enjoy this book, as I did, and also I hope it helps you to think deeply about how these new perspectives in our field challenge us to see the big picture, penetrate beyond the obvious, and remain flexible and open to the new and unexpected.



# Preface

In the spring 2007 semester at The University of Texas at Austin, we were both fortunate to be a part of a course (as professor and student) aptly titled *critical policy analysis*, where each week we examined the complexities surrounding the policy process through a critical perspective. Frank Fischer's text, *Reframing Public Policy: Discursive Politics and Deliberative Practices*, served as our foundational reading for the semester, and through his writings we were exposed to the methodological, theoretical, and political approaches to policy research that are working to challenge the dominant, traditional models in policy studies. Additional readings by scholars across the globe operating under the growing umbrella of CPA supplemented Fischer's text and guided us through our exploration of multifaceted and often convoluted policy contexts. Each week introduced a different policy framework and a new set of policy theorists. Yet while we recognized an increasing number of scholars being drawn to CPA work, and we understood our own attraction to the work, we were unable to locate an attempt to capture the state of this policy subfield. We were interested in developing a stronger understanding of who was influencing this work, what theories and methods were being utilized in critical policy analyses, and what rationales scholars gave for engaging in critical policy work, particularly within the field of education.

Before the semester closed, several members of the class interested in CPA came together to conduct a study that sought to examine the methods, tools, theories, paradigms, and influential people and experiences informing the work of critical policy analysis. Our intent was to build a deeper understanding of nontraditional approaches to policy work, critical policy analysis, and the methodological approaches used to do this work. The first step in this project included conducting a series of focus group discussions around CPA through a World Café Conversation at the 2008 University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA) Annual Convention. We felt that a World Café Conversation would be an ideal venue to discuss CPA as the World Café process itself is created to bring people together around important questions where people have the capacity to work together, share knowledge, and ignite innovation to emerge ideas and perspectives through the power of conversations.

The focus of the CPA World Café session was what “counts” as CPA (and what doesn’t). We hoped to attract and create a network for scholars who were interested in building on knowledge of CPA in filling the gaps of the current political dichotomy between “traditional” and “critical” camps of policy analysts in the educational leadership and policy fields. In the session, members of our research team facilitated a conversation at each table (4–5 people per table) as participants discussed and came to a consensus around this policy analysis approach. Questions asked during the World Café discussion included: How do you define critical policy analysis? What and who has informed this definition? Has your understanding/definition changed over time? How does critical policy analysis differ from other approaches for policy analysis? What is significant about critical policy analysis? What is the value added of doing a critical policy analysis compared to more traditional policy analyses?

The World Café session helped give us a better sense of how US-based educational leadership and policy scholars were conceptualizing CPA and utilizing it in their own research. It also helped shape the next phase of our data collection, which included a series of 19 in-depth oral history interviews with scholars who were identified as using critical theoretical frameworks in their policy scholarship. The scholars we interviewed represented a diverse group of researchers at the early and later stages of their academic careers, each of whom discussed with us why and how they conduct critical policy analyses. We presented our initial findings of this research project at the 2010 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, which resulted in our CPA network expanding further.

As we worked to finalize our project for publication, we found ourselves in multiple conversations that emphasized the importance of providing guidance around what counts as CPA and how CPA is done. As a result, we reached out to critical educational policy scholars who utilize different theoretical approaches in their scholarship, some who assisted us in our initial CPA project at The University of Texas at Austin, and asked them to contribute a piece to a special issue proposal we were working on for the *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*. Thanks to the support from QSE’s editor and a CPA scholar himself, Jim Scheurich, we were able to share a collection of CPA scholarship representing five different theoretical approaches to educational policy, including queer legal theory, feminism, critical race theory, postmodernism, and critical discourse analysis. The QSE special issue was an initial attempt to provide the education field with a better understanding of how CPA is employed in educational policy research and specifically how theory connects to research design and methods. The authors of the special issue presented their research in a symposium session at the 2013 AERA Annual Meeting, which Jolanda Voogd from Springer attended. As the end of the session, she approached us to discuss the possibility of a publication based on the presentations—thank you, Jolanda!

The possibility of contributing an edited volume on critical policy analysis was simultaneously exciting and daunting as such a book, we felt, was long overdue. Yet we were overwhelmed with encouragement and gratitude when the contributors of this volume expressed their immediate excitement around the opportunity to

be involved in such a project. We were even more grateful when the contributors extended themselves to being a part of two CPA sessions at the 2015 AERA Annual Meeting that were highly attended, as well as sessions at the 2014 and 2015 UCEA Annual Conventions. We have found these symposiums to be important venues for gaining critical feedback on our work as well as for expanding our network of CPA colleagues. The attendance at all of the CPA sessions at AERA and UCEA throughout the years has deepened our commitment to the work as more and more scholars are searching for a way to situate their own scholarship within CPA but may not have the tools yet to do so. Perhaps more importantly, through this work we have had the opportunity to develop strong, intellectually stimulating relationships with our colleagues, who have pushed our thinking and work to places we couldn't have gone alone.

Needless to say, this volume presented here represents many years of work and commitment on the part of a number of people we are deeply indebted to. Along with the authors in this volume, we would like to thank Erin Atwood, Margaret Grogan, Pei-Ling Lee, Patricia López, Catherine Lugg, Katherine Cummings Mansfield, Jason Murphy, Jim Scheurich, and Angela Valenzuela for their CPA contributions over the years. We would also like to thank Helen van der Stelt at Springer for her patience and assistance throughout the publication process. Thank you to Jill Blackmore for her contribution to the book and Jay D. Scribner or who us Longhorns refer to as Dr. J. Dr. J has been a mentor to both of us as students and now professors and paved the way for our current work. We would also like to thank our former colleagues and professors at The University of Texas at Austin for providing a setting where critical scholarship is valued and expected.

Finally, we acknowledge and thank our families and dear friends who have stood by and supported us throughout our careers. Their encouragement has been crucial to all stages of this project, and we are forever grateful. Similarly, we acknowledge each other as general editors for the hard work and mutual support essential to an effective editorial partnership.

Columbia, MO, USA  
Charlottesville, VA, USA

Sarah Diem  
Michelle D. Young

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# Introduction: Critical Approaches to Education Policy Analysis

Michelle D. Young and Sarah Diem

Our purpose in this book is twofold. The main purpose is to discuss the methodological implications of critical approaches to educational policy analysis. A second purpose of the book is to provide concrete examples, and thus road maps, for engaging in critical policy analysis. Neither of these purposes can be achieved without an introduction to the basic ideas in this approach. We therefore devote this chapter to introducing some of the basic elements of critical policy analysis (CPA), including some of the fundamental ontological and epistemological claims as well as their implications for investigating educational policy. From this starting point, the reader will then find a variety of ways that other critical policy scholars have chosen to pursue this work.

Critical policy analysis is not a homogeneous movement in social science. There are many different perspectives and developments. For example, some authors foreground methods in their work, and others discuss CPA from a philosophical perspective, while others ground their analyses in policies and policy contexts. Although the studies collected within this volume explore, build upon, and extend the work of CPA, the intention of the book is not a contribution to the philosophical debates concerning critical perspectives; rather, we focus on the methodological implications of critical perspectives in policy research and offer the reader a number of examples of critical policy analyses.

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One assumption of this book is that theory and method are interrelated. We have found a tendency within the policy community to think about the theoretical part of policy analysis as separate from the more practical part, the empirical and methodological details, as if theory is something that is applied only after data has been collected. However, theory and method should not be treated as two separate issues or stages in a process. It is our contention that theory and method should be considered simultaneously. Policy analysis is, by its very nature, theoretical; that is, it requires theorizing about the objects of study. Thus, this book seeks to demonstrate the interrelated nature of theory and method.

## 1 Critical Policy Analysis as Critique

One of the drivers behind the development of CPA was a critique of the positivist approach to policy analysis—an approach that has dominated the field since its inception (Diem and Young 2015; Young 1999). Researchers began to question the very nature of policy, its formation, and assumptions about its impact. As such questions emerged and evolved, scholars questioned the way policy was traditionally thought of, examined, and analyzed.

Traditional policy analysis is often characterized as theoretically narrow, relying first and foremost upon positivist notions of reality and knowledge, such as functionalism and rationalism (Levinson et al. 2009; Nagel 1984). As Ball (1994a) noted, “educational policy studies have tended to spawn a growing number of concepts which are primarily descriptive, and which are dislocated from any coherent explanatory or predictive framework” (p. 1). Many traditional policy analysts have viewed policy-making as a deliberate process, undertaken by a bounded set of actors, who use research and reason to ensure the best possible policy outcomes (Rist 1994). Indeed, elsewhere we have identified four key tenets of traditional approaches to policy analysis. These include the following:

1. Traditional policy researchers, who are concerned with planning, adoption, implementation, examination, and/or evaluating educational changes or reforms, tend to view change or reform as a deliberate process that can be planned and managed.
2. Traditional policy researchers generally view behavior as goal-driven and that rational individuals will weigh the costs, benefits, and subsequent outcomes of a given action or strategy.
3. Traditional policy researchers believe they are capable of obtaining, accumulating, and understanding the knowledge necessary for identifying and deciding between policy solutions and planning for implementation and evaluation and that this information can be expressed to others.
4. Traditional policy researchers assume they can effectively evaluate policies, policy alternatives, and practices and then based on these evaluations are able to identify and ameliorate problems (Diem et al. 2014).

As these assumptions demonstrate, the locus of concern was primarily placed at what was considered to be the end of the policy-making process: the policy, the implementation of the policy, and/or the impact of the policy (Ball 1994a). Though, as Levinson et al. (2009) point out, this focus was implemented “with an eye toward policy reformulation and/or the reform of local structures for policy implementation” (p. 768).

As part of the policy studies field, educational policy research has tended to operate within a traditionalistic (i.e., positivist) paradigm and reflects a group of taken-for-granted assumptions, norms, and traditions that institutionalize conventional ontological, epistemological, and methodological traditions (Diem et al. 2014; Young 1999). The four assumptions listed above are identifiable in policy research theories and approaches such as systems theory and analysis, structural analysis, cost-benefit analysis, information technology approaches, decision theory, problem-solving frameworks, technicist models, and political models (Adams 1991; Becker 1986; deLeon and Vogenback 2007; Dunn 1994; Levin 1988; McDonnell 2009; Troyna 1994; Weimer and Vining 2011). The result is a circumscribed set of research findings, garnered through a restricted grouping of theory and method (Diem et al. 2014; Young 1999).

Over the last 30 years, however, a growing number of policy researchers have shifted from traditional approaches and used critical frameworks to interrogate both the beliefs and practices associated with traditional work as well as the policies, insights, and recommendations that result from such work (McDonnell 2009). Levinson et al. (2009) refer to this as the “first generation of critical policy research” (p. 774). Work from the United Kingdom by Stephen Ball (1991, 1993, 1994b) and in the United States by Michael Apple (1982) and Tom Popkewitz (1997, 2000) has been particularly influential. These scholars problematized the rational approach associated with traditional educational policy research, elucidated the role of power and ideology in the policy process, and broke new ground for critical policy scholars.

Importantly, during the same period of time that scholars struggled with and perforated the boundaries of traditional policy studies, the study of educational policy moved beyond the borders of individual countries to the consideration of global trends and the imposition of educational policies cultivated in primarily western countries in developing nations (Ball 1998). Some of the more troubling global trends under examination have included the tightening of control on students, educators, administrators, and the schooling process through national-level educational policies (Levinson 2005). Although one could argue that these trends are completely unrelated, it is interesting that as power and control in education became increasingly consolidated and as the movement toward accountability and consolidation marched across the globe, a growing number of educational policy scholars, dissatisfied with traditional frameworks, began using critical frameworks in their analyses (Diem et al. 2014). We do not see these trends as merely coincidental. Rather, it is our contention that developments in critical educational policy analysis are a response to conditions in education, just as they signal an important shift in the field.

## 2 The Basic Elements of Critical Policy Analysis

Within the educational policy realm, scholars have studied, critiqued, and offered alternative strategies for examining a variety of educational policy issues (e.g., Brewer 2014; Lipman 2004; Mosen-Lowe et al. 2009; Young 1999), and they have offered a variety of new perspectives and approaches. Examples include Marshall (1997) and Taylor's (1997) use of discourse theory to critically examine educational policy and its impact, Young's (2003) critical analysis of state-level policy work on Iowa's leadership crisis, Levinson's (2005) use of critical policy ethnography to study policy appropriation in Mexico, and Brewer's (2008, 2014) examination of federal policy histories and microhistories. Other examples include Ball and Junemann's (2012) examination of new philanthropies and policy networks in educational policy-making; Winton and Brewer's (2014) use of microhistory and cultural history to analyze policy-relevant political events; Carpenter et al. (2014) analysis of policy vocabularies within federal and state education reform policies concerning the evaluation of public school leaders; Atwood and López's (2014) utilization of critical race theory to question everyday racial politics; Lugg and Murphy's (2014) employment of queer theory and queer legal theory as a means to understand institutional and cultural practices that frame sex, gender, class, and race in education that can lead to policy changes that benefit all students, teachers, and staff; and Mansfield et al. (2014) critical feminist analysis of STEM policies in education.

In our analyses of critical policy work in education, we have found that scholars tend to focus their work around five critical concerns. These include the following:

1. Concern regarding the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality
2. Concern regarding the policy, its roots, and its development (e.g., how it emerged, what problems it was intended to solve, how it changed and developed over time, and its role in reinforcing the dominant culture)
3. Concern with the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge as well as the creation of policy "winners" and "losers"
4. Concern regarding social stratification and the broader effect a given policy has on relationships of inequality and privilege
5. Concern regarding the nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of nondominant groups (Diem et al. 2014)

As the above concerns illustrate, critical policy researchers have explored policy roots and processes; how policies that are presented as reality are often political rhetoric; how knowledge, power, and resources are distributed inequitably (e.g., Flyvbjerg 1998); how educational programs and policies, regardless of intent, reproduce stratified social relations; how policies institutionalize inequality; and how individuals react to policy and policy processes (e.g., Street 2001).

Three additional similarities mark the work of critical educational policy scholars. First, critical policy researchers tend to pay significant attention to the complex systems and environments in which policy is made and implemented. Indeed, CPA scholars tend to take time to provide the historical and/or cultural context of the policy issue under examination. Recognizing that the development of policy is "an

extremely complex, often contradictory process,” critical policy researchers work to capture the full complexity of policy contexts, those involved, and the evolution of policy over time (Weaver-Hightower 2008, p. 153).

Second, critical policy researchers emphasize the inextricable nature of theory and method. Critical policy researchers see theorizing as a vital part of methodology, and, as such, it is a central feature in the planning of a research project. Theory impacts the identification of the research topic or problem, it impacts the way the researcher thinks about the problem, and it impacts the questions that she/he asks about the issue. Indeed, every attempt to make sense of the world around us begins with our notions, conceptualizations, and theories about it. In the case of analysis, which involves close examination and distinguishing among various components or aspects of a data set, body of knowledge, etc., we engage in judgments regarding what patterns we attend to and how we go about separating and examining. We always have a perspective, and therefore our observations are always undertaken from a perspective. Yet, as Danermark et al. (2002) point out, “the all-important significance of concepts and conceptualization in all production of knowledge is generally a downplayed field in books on methodology” (p.15). This is not the case for most critical policy scholars; rather, most CPA scholars begin with the assumption that our different ways of seeing and thinking about phenomena determine what we see. From this point of view, CPA scholars, as you will see in this volume, take great care in delineating the perspectives they bring to their work and how those perspectives inform how they do research (i.e., their methods).

This brings us to the third similarity marking the work of critical policy researchers. Given the nature of their policy questions and perspectives, critical policy scholars are more likely to use qualitative research approaches than quantitative approaches in their work (deLeon and Vogenback 2007; Denzin and Lincoln 2005; Levinson et al. 2009). To be clear, we are not arguing that CPA scholars never use quantitative methods or a mixture of methods drawn from what the field has designated as qualitative and quantitative. Indeed, there is no single or correct critical policy analysis method. However, our observation has been that the majority of CPA work is qualitative in nature (Diem et al. 2014) and that this body of scholarship does provide guidance for others doing or hoping to do work of this nature.

Importantly, the preceding review of literature of traditional and critical approaches to policy analysis is not intended to be exhaustive. Rather, it is provided to draw attention to the general contours of traditional and critical approaches, as we have come to understand them, as a way of orienting the reader to the focus of our research project.

### 3 Outline of the Book

Due to the introductory character of the book, we have included a set of chapters by authors who engage in CPA, and we have asked that they share an example of their work that makes the theoretical and methodological connections clear—clear

enough for a novice researcher to develop a keen understanding of what CPA is and what conducting one involves. We hope that we have been able to achieve a balance between the task of simplifying and the need to do justice to the complexity of engaging in critical policy research.

Chapter authors use a variety of theoretical and experiential perspectives, including perspectives drawn from critical theory, critical race theory, feminism, post-structuralism, and queer theory, among others. The methods used to explore questions emerging from these perspectives include discourse analysis, document analysis, historical approaches, in-depth interviews, and critical policy ethnography. Their work reflects the tendency of CPA scholars to emphasize methods that explore below the surface of what to understand and why. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the authors demonstrate how method flows from the framework in use by the researcher.

We have organized the book into two primary sections: a focus on methods and a focus on theory. Although each of the studies articulates a theoretical framework and a methodological approach, they are emphasized to varying degrees in the chapters. The first set of studies, chapters “[Critically Examining Policy Workers and Policy Work Within State Boards of Education](#)”, “[A Critical Policy Analysis of the Politics, Design, and Implementation of Student Assignment Policies](#)”, “[Public Educational Policy as Performance: A Queer Analysis](#)”, “[The Politics of Student Voice: Conceptualizing a Model for Critical Analysis](#)”, “[When Parents Behave Badly: A Critical Policy Analysis of Parent Involvement in Schools](#)” and “[A Feminist Critical Policy Analysis of Patriarchy in Leadership](#)”, emphasize methods, while the studies in the second section of the book, chapters “[Silent Covenants in the Neoliberal Era: Critical Race Counternarratives on African American Advocacy Leadership in Schools](#)”, “[Policy Enactments and Critical Policy Analysis: How Institutional Talk Constructs Administrative Logics, Marginalization, and Agency](#)”, “[Ontario’s Fourth ‘R’: A Critical Democratic Analysis of Ontario’s Fund-‘R’aising Policy](#)”, “[Examining the Theater of “Listening” & “Learning”](#)”, “[Utilizing Michel de Certeau in Critical Policy Analysis](#)” and “[Policy Studies Debt: A Feminist Call to Expand Policy Studies Theory](#)”, accentuate theory. We do this not as a way to divorce methods from theory, as critical policy scholars see the clear link between the two. Rather, similar to Wolcott’s (1994) presentation of the distinction between description, analysis and interpretation, we believe separating the chapters in this way provides insight into how the authors situate her/his own research within the CPA terrain. As Wolcott states (1994) in his discussion on qualitative research:

By no means do I suggest that the three categories—description, analysis, and interpretation—are mutually exclusive. Nor are the lines clearly drawn where description ends and analysis begins, or where analysis becomes interpretation. . . . I do suggest that identifying and distinguishing among the three may serve a useful purpose, especially if the categories can be regarded as varying emphases that qualitative researchers employ to organize and present data. (p. 11)

We agree with Wolcott’s assertion that qualitative data does not need to fit in the same manner within “all” of these categories, just as CPA work may differ in its attention to methods and theory. Thus, we present this volume as a way to make

sense of the two to better inform the education policy field about the methodological and theoretical perspectives used in critical policy analysis.

Chapter two, “[Critically Examining Policy Workers and Policy Work Within State Boards of Education](#)” by Michelle Young and Amy Reynolds, outlines a set of critical policy studies focused on State Boards of Education, a policy entity that has received scant attention from the research community, traditional and critical alike. They open with an overview of inquiry on state boards, the majority of which is offered through a traditional perspective. The remainder of the chapter is divided into three sections that outline inquiry projects focused on state boards. The first project outlined is a critical historical analysis, a core strategy of critical theorists interested in the historical roots and evolution of institutions, norms, and beliefs. The second relies on the work of scholars like Marshall and Young (2013) to examine the power and authority of state boards and individual members using a feminist critical policy perspective. The third project relies on the analytical work of scholars like Ball (2008) and Rhodes (1997), who employ network analysis to examine state boards as policy actors and the governing models they work with.

In chapter three, “[A Critical Policy Analysis of the Politics, Design, and Implementation of Student Assignment Policies](#)”, Sarah Diem provides a critical policy analysis of three present-day school desegregation policies that use a number of factors in assigning to schools to achieve diversity. As school districts are growing increasingly segregated, and legal and political environments favor race-neutral or color-blind approaches to addressing the continued racial disparities in education, Diem’s analysis sheds light on how school districts generate methods of student assignment to achieve racial diversity while not being race-conscious. She pays particular attention to how the politics surrounding student assignment policies (local, state, and federal) has an impact on their design and implementation. By utilizing a CPA approach to analyzing these policies, Diem is able to illustrate the complexities behind the development of the policies, how and why decisions were made when designing the policies, and the (un)intended consequences of the policy implementation process.

Chapter four, “[Public Educational Policy as Performance: A Queer Analysis](#)” by Michael O’Malley and Tanya Long, analyzes the recent case of the first school district in Texas to adopt domestic partnership benefits, inclusive of same sex couples, in order to understand and theorize the processes influencing LGBTQ-inclusive educational policy. They conducted a content analysis of print media articles that reported on the development and implementation of the policy in order to map the public process through which the policy was negotiated and adopted in the district. The chapter illustrates “the value of queer theory as an intellectual tool for problematizing and interrupting normalizing assumptions inscribed in specific educational policies that have the material effect of fostering inequity across multiple manifestations of difference.”

Using a critical framework when analyzing education policy enables the exploration of the voices of those typically not heard in traditional policy contexts and processes (Diem et al. 2014). In chapter five, “[The Politics of Student Voice: Conceptualizing a Model for Critical Analysis](#),” Anjalé Welton, Tiffany

Harris, Tierra Williams, and Karla Altamirano argue and focus on the potential of as well as the obstacles to developing educational policy that is informed by student youth voice. In their study, they examined a high school class focused on social justice education where students actively researched, made decisions, identified problems, collected and analyzed data, and provided recommendations for school improvement and transformation. The chapter shows how institutionalized structures and practices and hierarchies of power can impede students' attempts to have their voices heard when it comes to school improvement decisions. However, the authors argue that youth voice in the school improvement process "has the potential to be one of the most authentic, democratic forms of engaging in public policy" as "when students have a voice in school policy they can be the architects of their own educational trajectories."

In chapter six, "[When Parents Behave Badly: A Critical Policy Analysis of Parent Involvement in Schools](#)," Erica Fernández and Gerardo López problematize the current discourse around traditional norms of parental involvement in schools by examining the power dynamics associated with parental involvement and how the meaning of such involvement is not only defined and prescribed for parents but also delimited within school spaces. They employ tools from critical race theory and Latino critical race theory, specifically the concept of counterstories, to illustrate the conflicts that emerge when an organized group of Latino parents challenges traditional conceptualizations of parental involvement activity set forth by the school's administration. Their CPA of parental involvement is critical in a time when parental engagement is on the rise in public schools as it helps us understand the types of involvement that become privileged and ingrained in schools and, subsequently, how these defined ways of involvement then marginalize certain populations of parents and lead to them being labeled as uninvolved in their children's educational experiences.

CPA scholars seek to understand the distribution of power and how policies can work to reinforce or reproduce social injustices and inequalities (Diem et al. 2014). In the last chapter in section one, chapter "[A Feminist Critical Policy Analysis of Patriarchy in Leadership](#)," Catherine Marshall, Mark Johnson, and Torrie Edwards examine the persistence of male dominance in education leadership roles, looking specifically at how cultural and political discourses play a role in undermining women's positions in education. They utilize a feminist critical policy analysis to uncover and deconstruct masculine tropes within dominant narratives on educational leadership. Through their analysis, they are able to demonstrate the nuances and complexity of patriarchy as it exists within a predominantly female professional field.

The chapters in the second half of the book shift our focus to the theoretical significance in critical policy analysis studies. In chapter eight, "[Silent Covenants in the Neoliberal Era: Critical Race Counter-Narratives on African American](#)", Chandra Gill, LaTosha Cain Nesbitt, and Laurence Parker problematize the current color-blind and context-blind educational policy context and its implications on educational opportunity. Specifically, in their chapter, "[Silent Covenants in the Neoliberal Era: Critical Race Counter-narratives on African American Advocacy in](#)



[Schools](#),” they argue for the need of critical race theory in providing an alternative critical policy lens that centers racial perspectives on policies and challenges the contemporary context-blind policy discourse. They use counter-narratives of African American leaders within a community to understand how they viewed the shifting policy discourse from desegregation to an emphasis on testing and accountability and “call out” the harmful effects of current color-blind and context-blind policy contexts “that create an image of policy development in schools that will ‘fix’ the achievement gap with students of color.”

In chapter nine, Rod Whiteman, Brendan Maxcy, and Samantha Scribner’s chapter, [“Policy Enactments and Critical Policy Analysis: How Institutional Talk Constructs Administrative Logics, Marginalization, and Agency,”](#) is based upon the CPA assumption that policy analysis moves beyond technical-rational analysis of policy design, implementation, and measurable, quantifiable outcomes (Diem et al. 2014; Fischer 2003). Specifically, they examine the role of institutions in structuring interactions between school administrators and historically marginalized communities. Their framework includes an institutionally structured micropolitical orientation to critical policy analysis, which allows them to focus on policy enactments and the relationship between institutionally contingent language and micropolitical negotiations within schools. They apply this framework through a secondary analysis of three ethnographic studies to illustrate how when historically marginalized communities assert their collective interests in their school communities, they find themselves in positions where they have to negotiate the institutional logic and language of school administration.

In chapter ten, [“Ontario’s Fourth ‘R’: A Critical Democratic Analysis of Ontario’s Fund’r’aising Policy,”](#) Michelle Milani and Sue Winton use a critical democratic lens to examine how fundraising policy in Ontario, Canada, is undermining the ideals of critical democracy in its public schools. They pay particular attention to what is occurring in the fundraising policy’s contexts of influence, text production, and practice in order to ascertain whether the policy supports equity, inclusion, participatory decision-making processes, and knowledge inquiry and critical mindedness. The findings of their critical policy analysis illustrate the contradictory nature of fundraising and critical democratic commitment to equality, equity, social justice, and community as it shifts the responsibility of funding education from the public to the private domain. Milani and Winton suggest that Ontario’s fundraising policy must be eliminated from the public school system and the government must adequately fund schools if critical democracy is to be achieved.

In chapter eleven, [“Examining the Theater of ‘Listening’ and ‘Learning’,”](#) Bradley Carpenter looks beyond the analysis of language and focuses on how dominant discourses are constructed through the performance of politics. Specifically, Carpenter seeks to ameliorate the limitations of traditional policy studies by utilizing Hajer’s (2003, 2005, 2006) argumentative discourse analysis to provide a unique approach to the analysis of deliberative policy-making. He describes how, unlike the traditional framing of the “Listening & Learning” tour as a tool for informing the developing of federal educational policy, the political performances



of the Obama/Duncan Administration in their “Listening & Learning” tour acted in coordination with neoliberal and globalized discourses to codetermine the authoring of the Title I School Improvement Grant of 2009.

The twelfth chapter of the volume, “[Utilizing Michel de Certeau in Critical Policy Analysis](#)” by Curtis Brewer and Amanda Werts, explores Michel de Certeau’s concept of consumption in every day as an analytical tool for critical policy analysis in education. Brewer and Werts build off of the idea of policy enactment and argue that foregrounding the concept of everyday practices can work to assist educators in understanding their simultaneous roles as active democratic subjects and governed subjects. By offering an additional theoretical guide for the critical study of policy enactment, including a hypothetical application of the approach, Brewer and Werts hope that educators might be able to locate possibilities for radical forms of democracy in the current standardized education context.

In chapter thirteenth, “[Policy Studies Debt: A Feminist Call to Expand Policy Studies Theory](#),” Wanda Pillow discusses the “policy debt” occurring in education. Using a feminist policy analysis and, in particular, a women of color (WOC) feminist epistemology, as a lens, Pillow interrogates policy studies in the face of this debt. Pillow outlines and applies four characteristics of WOC feminist epistemology to the issue of improving young mothers’ access to schools in order to illustrate the impacts of policy debt by those facing it as well as those charged with fixing it. Through this analysis, she asks the reader to question our responsibilities as policy studies scholars, to consider what we are doing to face and respond to our policy debt, and to examine the tools we are using to disrupt and perform praxis in policy settings.

## 4 Conclusion

[T]he undoubted value of these analyses lies in their attempt to problematize policy through several of its ‘levels’ or ‘dimensions’ or ‘moments’ of activity and effect; and in their insistence on continuing to ask basic sociological questions about the relationship between educational practices and social inequalities. (Ball 1994a, p. 2)

This book offers a window into the work of critical policy analysis. It captures a variety of theoretical and experiential perspectives, including perspectives drawn from critical theory, critical race theory, feminism, post-structuralism, and queer theory, among others, and it foregrounds the methodological implications of critical approaches to educational policy analysis. The methods used to explore questions emerging from these perspectives include discourse analysis, document analysis, historical approaches, in-depth interviews, and critical policy ethnography. We consider these pieces to be important exemplars of CPA and the efforts of CPA scholars to engage in critique, to interrogate the taken for granted, and to use social theory to reveal what otherwise might have been left unseen.

There are, without question, critical policy perspectives and research approaches that are not represented herein. The book is intended to serve as an introduction to

critical policy analysis (CPA) for those less familiar to the approach, and as such, the contributing authors take care to articulate road maps for conducting CPA as they present their work. Thus, our focus is to promote depth of understanding of a slice of the critical policy work under way, rather than to survey the critical policy field comprehensively.

The weakness of much contemporary policy work lies in perspective—in a failure to explore outside the traditions of the field. Much educational policy work continues to operate inside traditional frameworks, while policy project designs, methods, analysis, and representations are generated by traditional assumptions, language, and politics. It is our hope that the work included in this volume will foster a break with tradition and assist educational scholars in their efforts to think, conceptualize, and analyze educational policy issues from critical perspectives.

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# Part I

## Emphasis on Methods

It is time now to worry about something that has been implicit throughout the discussion of methodology . . . those mysterious procedures by which you transform what you see and hear into intelligible accounts. (Agar 1980, p. 189)

By comparison with the numerous texts on policy analysis, few focus on critical policy analysis or more qualitative approaches to policy analysis and interpretation. Given the varied approaches to this work, one might reasonably expect a number of texts charting these processes.

The chapters included in part one represent critical policy work that emphasize the methods of CPA, though what makes an analysis count as more methodological than theoretical is not only a matter of degree but one of opinion. Depending on one's readings of these pieces, they could certainly be recategorized as each piece emphasizes the connection between theory and method. Different researchers have different purposes, and to achieve these different purposes, they may utilize different approaches and types of analysis.

Before moving forward, it is important to differentiate the analysis in critical policy analysis from traditional notions of analysis, wherein analysis reflect a rather perfunctory use of theory and a concern for being correct. Rather, critical policy analysis straddles the line between theory-based analysis and interpretation.

I do not jump to broad or aesthetically satisfying interpretations unless I feel I have a handle on my topic. My interpretations are never offered as mere conjecture. To my own satisfaction, I personally must believe that I am almost getting it right, but it is not the same kind of rightness that is associated with [traditional] analytical claims-making. (Wolcott 1994, p. 175)

How chapter authors approached their critical analytical-interpretive work, like the methods they used to gather their data, differed depending on their theoretical frameworks and research purpose.

The chapters included in this part, which were described in greater detail in the introduction, present six different methodological approaches to CPA. In reverse order, Chap. 7, "A Feminist Critical Policy Analysis of Patriarchy in Leadership," Marshall, Johnson, and Edwards use a discourse analysis approach informed