Contrasting the Dynamics of English and Finnish Education Policy-Making

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Abstract

The paper aims to understand and contrast the dynamics in English and Finnish education policy-making. Dynamics are understood as patterns of interaction between the main policy actors embedded in the socio-historical contexts in the two countries. Data is drawn from 16 theme interviews with key policymakers in England complemented with a body of official documents. The Finnish data is based on earlier research projects, their results and policymaker theme interview data used in them.

The English education policy-making on the surface level reflects a rather reactionary dynamics. On a deeper level, policy-making is guided by an institutional structure created over the course of history: centralisation of power to the Department for Education and a shift of balance in consulting from formal or professional organisations to think tanks and political advisors. Finnish education policy-making dynamics is restricted by radical municipal autonomy, consensus-supporting decision-making system, and a bureaucratic tradition all which buffer against rapid changes and result in a continuity of the comprehensive school.

The analysis is still on-going and conclusions tentative. In policy-making, the relations of the English actors are conflictual whereas in Finland they are consensual. In both context there seemed to be a governance gap between the central and local administration. The difference in centralisation seemed to explain change potential. The main difference in dynamics is the fluidity of the education institutions, particularly school types. In England, the changing political emphasis has changed the basic organisation of schooling, while in Finland changes took place inside the comprehensive school institution.

References


