

Metrics, Standards and Alignment in Teacher Policy: Critiquing Fundamentalism and Imagining Pluralism by Jessica Holloway. Springer, 2021, 168 pp., €96. 29. eBook ISBN 978-981-33-4814-1

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Metrics, Standards and Alignment in Teacher Policy by Jessica Holloway challenges readers to question the absolute truths we have come to accept about what constitutes “good teaching” in an audit society and during a renewed focus on anti-racism sentiment worldwide. Holloway asks us to consider how teacher dissension has been ‘discursively remade as something to be treated as unethical or dangerous for students and communities’ (5). This book is a significant undertaking to evaluate and (re)address teacher accountability and educational policy.

Committed to the view that reimagining education requires an engagement with social justice, Holloway draws on her own reflective moments and divulges her ‘ontologically privileged’ (12) status as a researcher and ‘a white... now middle-class, American-living-in-Australia woman’ (155). Cleverly weaving her theorising with her own lived experiences, Holloway embraces the entanglement of researcher reflexivity given the onto-epistemic impossibility of undertaking critical analysis from a position of exteriority. She asserts that, in the USA, accountability systems, good teaching and expertise are habitually shaped by an evaluative, positivist positionality.

Holloway uses the concept of governmentality (Foucault 1991), and poststructural perspectives to interrogate three interrelated realms of teacher policy — (1) teacher preparation and development, (2) teacher evaluation and (3) teacher leadership. She questions the increasing alignment of teacher policy with algorithmic thinking and teachers’ willingness to facilitate their own governance through ‘punitive systems that reward compliance’ (153) - including merit pay and termination. Holloway directs readers toward a deepened understanding of *what* it is that accountability regimes are altering and *how* teachers are being delegitimised. According to Holloway, teacher policy privileges ‘Western, white and enlightened ways of knowing’ (154) and this privileging narrowly defines authority, performance and quality. As such, performativity is sustained through datafication discourses leading to predefined and exclusionary trajectories of leadership. Holloway uses interviews and historical documentation (such as policy records, federal grant schemes and Presidential speeches) to examine the unchecked rigidity of teacher policy.

Holloway’s arguments are presented in eleven well-integrated and synthesised chapters, that can each also stand on their own as distinct publications. Throughout the book, there is necessary departure from typical US policy critique studies that tend to focus on the successes and failures of policies. Instead, Holloway problematises the conditions that such policies have created and sustained, using policy-as-discourse theorisations (Bacchi 2000). She expertly draws the reader through the complex policy maze associated with the System for Teacher and Student Advancement (TAP System) and value-added models to highlight how perceptions and acknowledgements of “effective” teaching are ‘structured by an increasingly narrow discourse of evaluation and datafication’ (147). Holloway argues that data instruments, like the rubrics used to measure teacher effectiveness within the TAP System, ultimately

reshape teacher subjectivities and discursive practices and also erase the possibility for pluralistic philosophies about teaching to be valued outside of the singular belief system. It is the very privileging of singular ways of 'doing' teaching that sits at the core of Holloway's argument; critiquing specific teaching philosophies, techniques and policy matters far less than the very premise that singular practices are being promoted as opposed to the adoption of a plurality of practices.

A real strength of this book lies in the call to action that reimagining schooling needs to begin with a greater, anti-racist vision that transcends the traditional notions of our discursive plains. Holloway urges readers to disrupt preconceived notions of what education can, and should, be and deliberately supersedes practicality for greater imaginary. The concluding chapter supports an immediate appeal to reframe educative dissent as a productive and necessary component of systems that seek to achieve greater outcomes for their constituents in a genuinely democratic way.

Future studies extending Holloway's research may consider discussions around how top-down accountability impacts the retention of non-White teachers and the ways in which Black, Brown and Indigenous teachers, specifically, are constrained by the prescriptive boundaries that shape and uphold who is deemed an expert and the fundamentalism of metrics, standards and compliance. Scholarship on perspectives from international preservice teachers in Initial Teacher Education programs in Australia and the USA who do not come from Western countries or cultures, while justifiably out of scope for this book, are nonetheless important to build upon this critical work.

Holloway's interconnected consideration of teacher accountability and educational policy adds a new dimension to our understanding of the preparation and development, evaluation, and leadership of K-12 teachers in Australia and the USA. Transgressing hegemonic power and embracing differences in perspective, approach and dialogue, Holloway opposes the assumption that future forms of education 'must remain within a data-thinking bubble' (164). Instead, she challenges readers to think pluralistically as a means to enter a proverbial 'imaginary playground' (148) so that we may imagine educational possibilities outside of the confines of perceived practicality.

References

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Holloway, Jessica. 2021. *Metrics, Standards and Alignment in Teacher Policy: Critiquing Fundamentalism and Imagining Pluralism*. Springer Nature. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-33-4814-1>