6.7 Education Policy from the Perspective of Governmentality

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Presentation of the Research Report

The Research Project: Focus and Major Findings

Studies of governmentality address the field of education policy at the level of the enacted modes of government and self-government. Governmentality is a neologism introduced by Michel Foucault and refers to a perspective on the assembly of particular rationalities and forms of thought ("mentalities") with specific technologies and strategies to govern (Dean 1999). "To govern" is to be understood in a very broad sense: the structuring, guiding, or shaping of people's behavior in very different contexts and in very different areas (including the structuring or shaping of human beings as subjects). Except for a specific approach of educational policy, the point of departure of studies of governmentality is a particular concern for the present and for how we live the present. This paper reports on a research project that focuses on a particular region of what is considered to be important in "our" present education: the collection and distribution of feedback information (Simons 2007, 2014). I start with a short clarification of that concern in order to present the main findings of the study.[1]

An increasing number of activities in the context of educational policy can be placed under the heading "to inform people" and "to get informed." For example, the inspectorate in Flanders (Belgium) sees it as her task to spread information about

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[1] For the summary of research findings as well as for specific arguments about methodology and theoretical assumptions, I draw largely on previously published work throughout the article. The sources are listed in the references at the end of the article.

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the performance of schools.[2] International assessment studies, like PISA and TIMMS, and European benchmark reports inform the Flemish government about the performance of educational systems. Through electronic newsletters, principals and teachers in Flanders are informed about recent legislation and examples of good practice concerning administration, innovation, and teaching. And journals are used to inform teachers, parents, and students about a wide range of educational issues such as the experiences of teachers in the classroom, the results of recent and relevant research, the implications and assumptions of new policy measures, published lists of recent initiatives in teacher training, etc. In short, it feels as "we"—and this "we" includes the author of this article—are permanently in need of information.

The research focuses on the current need of information by studying in detail the role of information for the Flemish government (and its educational system) in a global/European environment, on the one hand, and for schools in the Flemish context, on the other hand. The general question guiding the research project is how and to what extent the evident exchange of information mentioned above (and its supply, demand, and use) can be regarded as the articulation of a particular governmental regime. In line with the perspective of governmentality adopted in the study, this requires an analysis of the kind of information that is regarded as being indispensable today, of how actors within the field of education come to understand themselves and how this self-understanding installs the need for a specific kind of information, of how (Flemish) government comes to understand (and justify) its role and task in terms of collecting and offering information, and finally of what kind of power is involved in the governmental regime that puts information central stage.

Drawing on the analysis of European policy discourses and instruments and the circumstances of current educational policy in Flanders, the study concludes that an ongoing circulation of "feedback" information becomes of strategic importance in the current mode of governing. Procedures such as the "open method of coordination" and the resulting European benchmark reports as well as initiatives to create an "information-rich environment" for Flemish schools aim at collecting and distributing feedback. Feedback has become of strategic importance for national governments, as well as schools who have come to understand what they are doing as a performance in a competitive environment and have come to identify learning as a fundamental force to optimize this performance. As far as they have taken up this managerial relation to themselves and seek to govern/manage themselves accordingly, feedback information from their environment and regarding their performance is being experienced as a permanent need to orient their learning towards competitive change. In short, the study clarifies that when feedback is experienced as needed in order to inform and orient the learning process of states and schools towards optimal performance, the ongoing exchange and circulation of information are of strategic importance. The strategy at stake is to secure an optimal

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[2] The analysis is limited to the current state of affairs in the Flemish community with the Flemish government being responsible for education within the federal state of Belgium.

performance for each and all and acts upon the "need for feedback" and "will to learn" of the actors involved. As the analysis of the policy documents and instruments indicates, this "need for feedback" and this "will to learn" are experienced as real and fundamental. However, they should not be regarded as organizational or anthropological universals. Although often conceived in this way, these are "singular, historical experiences" emerging within the current regime of "conduct on conduct" (Foucault 1984a, p. 13). The "need for feedback" (on one's performance) and the "will to learn" (in order to improve one's performance) are both the effect and instrument of a governmental regime that seeks to secure optimal performance.

Based on these findings, the study also formulates a thesis concerning the exercise of power in the present regime where the "conduct of conduct" takes shape as "feedback on performance." The main component of this regime is a particular conduct or self-government of schools on the one hand and the requirements of the central government on the other hand. Part of this self-government is to control one's performance (as a school, as a state) by using information from the environment that circulates through information media. The study clarifies that the mode of self-control and self-surveillance does not merely function according to the disciplinary strategy of the panopticon (Foucault 1972, p. 270). Modern panoptical power sought to discipline human beings through an internalized gaze of the other (i.e., the normalizing gaze of experts). Like inmates in a prison, pupils in a school, laborers in a factory, and patients in a clinic came to understand themselves in terms of normality and normalized development under the gaze of experts (teachers, managers, doctors). The panopticon referred to a form of power that works through the observation and surveillance of the many by the few, where the few (those in power) are often not visible. According to Foucault (1972, p. 298), this modern form of power is quite different from the classic form of power in the spectacle. In the spectacle of public punishments, as well as in the theater, for example, the many observe the few, and this observation is meant as to control the masses. Mathiessen (1997, p. 219) refers to this as the synopticon and argues that our present "viewer society" combines both panoptical and synoptical mechanisms: "Increasingly, the few have been able to see the many, but also increasingly, the many have been enabled to see the few – to see the VIPs, the reporters, the stars, almost a new class in the public sphere."

The study argues that power mechanisms in the governmental regime of feedback performance indeed deploy mass spectacles. The instruments of information offer images of performance or best practice and organize a kind of spectacle. The arena of education, and its performance, is rendered visible to all. Thus, instruments of information function as a kind of "mass" media that allow the many (schools, states) to watch and observe the few (cf. Vinson and Ross 2001). What is being watched in this synoptical configuration is a spectacle or arena of the best performers or those representing in an exemplary way optimal performance or "good conduct." Yet at the same time, it is through this spectacle, and its potential of feedback, that each of those who are watching comes to know her/his own performance. As such, the spectacle of performance orientates each and all and puts schools and states in a position in which they are able to monitor and orient themselves, and it creates the information-rich environment that is indispensable in order to satisfy the need for feedback and learning for optimal performance. Above all, the spectacle of performance puts states

and schools into a position in which they long themselves to become an image of good performance, to be part of the happy few being watched and admired by the many, and to be a champion themselves.

However, the synopticon only partly makes current power mechanisms intelligible. The study takes a further step by formulating the thesis that the paradigmatic articulation of today's power is perhaps to be found in the technique of 360° feedback (Simons 2014). As a management tool, 360° feedback puts the employee in the middle of a feedback circle composed of all relevant actors in the employee's environment: managers, subordinates, friends, family, customers, etc. The ideal situation is when the employee's self-evaluation coincides with how all others evaluate his or her performance. It promotes a kind of self-government where one submits oneself permanently and voluntarily to the gaze of others—and actually installs a dynamic in which one's own gaze and that of others merge. Its logic of operation is not the panopticon nor the synopticon. The panopticon is the paradigm of disciplinary power and works according to a logic where the few in the middle of the circle continuously observe the many, however, without the many necessarily having to know whether there is actually someone observing. This is "the power of surveillance." The synopticon instead is the paradigm of sovereign power, where the many observe the few in the middle of the circle whose punishment or gratification is set as an example. This could be called "the power of the example" and, in its current form, "the power of performance spectacles." 360° feedback takes elements of both the synopticon and panopticon but works differently. What is installed is a permanent and collective gaze while staging oneself in the middle of the arena and turning one's life into a performance spectacle in need of an audience to become real. The driving logic of "the power of feedback," that is, the moment when feedback actually turns into a power mechanism and the circle closes, is when feedback decides on who and what one is and wants to become.

To conclude, the current governmental regime studied in the research project seems to be first and foremost accompanied by a power mechanism that turns feedback on performance into an indispensable navigation tool. Because power is involved in the governmental regime of performance, this is not necessarily bad but is potentially dangerous (Foucault 1984b, p. 386). And it is especially dangerous because the message becomes "perform, or else" (McKenzie 2001; Lyotard 1979) and because it becomes very difficult for us, in how we reflect upon ourselves and upon education, not to be part of it.

The Research Perspective

The analysis draws upon the work of Foucault in two related areas: firstly, on the analytics of government as "conduct of conduct" and, secondly, on the "ontology of the present."

From a Foucaultian perspective, government is to be regarded as a form of "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1982, p. 237, 2004a, b) or a more or less calculated and rational attempt to direct human conduct by the application of particular

technical means. An "analytics of government," Dean (1999, p. 23) explains, "takes as its central concern *how* we govern and are governed within different regimes, and the conditions under which such regimes emerge, continue to operate and are transformed." The assemblage and operation of these regimes of government can be analyzed by focusing on three related dimensions: the governmental rationality or program at stake, the "techne" of government being used, and the type of governable subject involved (cf. Foucault 1978a; Gordon 1991).

Governmental rationality refers to the mode of reasoning about how and why government takes place, the role of agencies and the justification of their authority, the entities to be governed, and the "telos" of government. It is important to stress at this point there is no single and universal governmental rationality. For instance, the perception of problems as social problems (e.g., accidents, illness), the reflections on the nation state as an agency that should organize social insurance, and the objectification of governable subjects as social citizens are all features of a particular governmental rationality (Rose 1999). This social governmental rationality however is quite different from a neoliberal reasoning that considers the nation state as an agency that has to organize and manage an enabling infrastructure for citizens to invest in themselves in order to protect themselves against risks (Rose 1996; Dean 1999).

A second dimension of analytics in a regime of government is the "techne" of government. This encompasses the instruments, procedures, techniques, and tools that are combined and used in order to accomplish the governmental objectives. Taxation and financial support are examples, as well as procedures of auditing and quality assurance. The focus on the technological dimension of governing however exceeds the common policy instrumentation (stick, carrot, sermon) at state level and includes a focus on the multiple instruments (e.g., benchmark reports), techniques (e.g., testing), and procedures (e.g., open method of coordination) enacted in multiple locales. Furthermore, the focus of the analytics is on the operational effects of governmental technologies, that is, how they shape the conduct of actors through what they make them do.

Finally, in order for people and organizations to be governable, they have to come to understand themselves in a particular way, to experience particular issues as relevant, and to govern or conduct themselves accordingly. As such, a regime of government presupposes a form of self-government in order to accomplish its goals. Within the social regime of government, for example, people have to understand themselves as being part of an entity with its own regularities (called "(civil) society"), as being protected by a central state, and to also experience their personal well-being as being connected to the progress of society as a whole and to govern themselves accordingly. This social form of governable self-government and governable self-understanding is quite different from what is at stake today. At present, regimes of government presuppose, for instance, that we come to understand ourselves as citizens who can and should invest in themselves in order to be "employable" and to perform well in networks and environments and to experience "choice" as a fundamental, human faculty (Miller and Rose 1997). At this point, it is important to stress that the aim of the

analytics is not to understand or explain the particular agency and underlying motives of multiple and different actors involved. The focus is, as explained by Rose (1999, p. 21), the space of thought and action for a particular self-government or conduct to emerge and hence the "conditions of possibility and intelligibility for certain ways of seeking to act upon the conduct of others, or oneself, to achieve certain ends." As such, the scope of the analytics presented here is the space of thought and action for a government and self-government in the name of information to emerge.

The last remark is closely linked to a second area where the study draws upon Foucault: the critical concern or care for the present (Foucault 1980, p. 108; cf. Rajchman 1991, p. 141). Foucault (1982, pp. 231–232, 1983, p. 448, 1984a, p. 573) used the concept "(historical) ontology of the present" in order to describe in a general way the aim and focus of his work and in particular his perspective on government as the conduct of conduct. In short, his aim was to make our present understanding of the self (others and the world) and our present experiences less evident and to show how our self-government is being shaped within a particular governmental regime. In Histoire de la sexualité, for instance, his point of departure was the present experience of sexuality as something that is fundamental, as something that can be oppressed, and as something that can and should be liberated in order for people to find their true selves (Foucault 1976, p. 16). Consequently, his objective was not to reveal what sexuality really is about but how, at a particular moment in history, "we" came to understand the inner self in terms of (possible repressed and to be liberated) sexual drives. It is the constitution of this "we" or this particular form of subjectivity and this particular mode of self-understanding and self-government in terms of sexuality that was the focus of his research. In short, sexuality is not conceived as a kind of (anthropological) universal, but as a singular, historical experience emerging within a particular governmental regime. As such, Foucault's focus is the (historical) conditions of possibility in order for sexuality to be experienced as meaningful.

In a similar way and as explained in the beginning of the article, the point of departure is our present experience of information and feedback in order to understand within which governmental regime it emerges. Thus, what is at stake, according to Rose (1999, p. 20), is "introducing a critical attitude towards those things that are given to our present experience as if they were timeless, natural, unquestionable" and "to enhance the contestability of regimes" that seek to govern us. As a result, the aim is to draw attention to what is familiar (i.e., our present need for feedback) and exactly what is often invisible (i.e., emerging power mechanisms) due to this familiarity (Foucault 1978b, pp. 540–541). In this context, Foucault's claim that "knowledge is not made for understanding; it is made for cutting" is illuminating (Foucault 1984c, p. 88). The objective hence is not to increase our understanding by revealing hidden truths. Cutting refers to the (indeed almost physical activity) questioning of who we are and what we regard as fundamental in our understanding of ourselves and the world. Knowledge that cuts "introduces a discontinuity"; it cuts in our present and how we live and govern the present.

The Research Frame

The reported study of governmentality along this perspective draws on a specific analytical frame that focuses on processes of governmentalization and entails a specific approach to the interpretation of policy documents and instruments.

The main research interest is to understand the role of information for education policy and the Flemish government in the current global/European context and for schools in the Flemish policy context. In order to explain how a governmentality perspective allows to address these issues, additional analytical clarification is required. Drawing upon the terminology of Foucault once again, the concepts of the "governmentalisation of the state (Flanders)" and, in close relation to this, "governmentalisation of Europe" have to be introduced (Masschelein and Simons 2003; Walters 2004).

A main characteristic of the birth of the modern nation state, according to Foucault (1978a, 1981), is not the "etatisation of society" but the "governmentalisation of the state." This means that the state is to be conceived as a complex of centralizing governing relationships aimed at conducting the conduct of people (both as individuals and as a population). As a result, the birth of the modern state as a governmental state implies the emergence of a particular reasoning about the role of the state, its tasks and responsibilities, as well as its objectives and the entities to be governed. Furthermore, as Foucault (2004a, b) has elaborated in detail, the governmental state and its rationalities and mentalities have continually transformed throughout history: a governmentalization in the name of "reason of state" in the early modern period, in the name of individual freedom and security (and finding its intellectual articulation in the reflections on political economy) in the modern era, and in the name of "the social" in the twentieth century. Foucault (2004b) noticed a new phase in the governmentalization of the state in the second part of the twentieth century, and meanwhile many scholars (Gordon 1991; Rose 1999; Dean 1999; Olssen et al. 2004) have elaborated on this. The role of the state is no longer approached as a central agency of government that should intervene in society in the name of "the social" and in order to align individual freedom and social welfare (Rose 1999). Instead, the state today is increasingly regarded as a managerial agency that should enable an entrepreneurial type of freedom (at the individual level and at the level of organizations, communities, etc.) through, for example, marketization and investment in human capital and in collaboration with other agencies of governance (both local and global, public and private). This "advanced liberal" (Rose 1996) governmentalization of the state should be kept in mind in order to understand the current concern for information of the Flemish educational policy. Yet, this new phase in the governmentalization of the state is connected to a new phase in the governmentalization of Europe. Although in the reported research the focus is limited to Europe and its member states, processes of governmentalization both more local (e.g., public/private partnerships at regional and local levels) and global (e.g., transnational organizations) can be studied as well (Perry and Maurer 2003).

Instead of regarding Europeanization as a gradual process of integration ultimately resulting in a kind of "etatization" of Europe, we look at it in terms of a governmentalization of Europe (Masschelein and Simons 2003). Different mentalities, rationalities, and governmental procedures have emerged from the creation of the Coal and Steel Community to the present objective to make of the European Union "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy" (Walters 2004). From the 1980s onwards, and focusing on the creation of single European market and ultimately of a single currency, the role of Europe and the entities to be governed (such as the member states and their economies and financial policies) become rationalized and reconfigured in terms of "harmonization" and the "mutual recognition of national standards" (Barry 1994; Walters 2004, p. 166). As such, harmonization functions as an art of European government, and it constitutes the European Union and its institutions and experts as central agencies of coordination, i.e., of harmonization of the conduct of member states. Moreover, this governmentalization of Europe in the name of harmonization is connected with a governmentalization of (member) states. "Europe" and "Brussels" enter in a particular way governmental rationalities and mentalities of member states, that is, they come to understand their standards, capacities, and resources in relation to other member states and European norms and as being more or less in harmony. Thus, in analyzing, for instance, the open method of coordination, it is possible to address intertwined developments at the level of the governmentalization of Europe and the governmentalization of member states.

The Approach

A study of processes of governmentalization (both at the level of Europe and member states) premised on the assumptions of an ontology of the present includes a particular approach to interpretation. In line with Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982), the approach can be called an "interpretative analytics" for there is a concern to depict the conditions of possibility and intelligibility for the current discussions about the role of information in policy making to emerge. The approach to interpretation therefore is not hermeneutical. The aim is not to come to an understanding or to grasp the (true) meaning of particular policy decisions, policy measures, and polity texts by taking into account the historical or social context, the intentions of actors, or a particular systematic logic. Instead, the point of departure is that particular practices and the circulation of (feedback) information are to be considered as meaningful today and are part so to speak of our common lifeworld: it makes sense to reason about the collection and circulation of feedback information, to use techniques of benchmarking, and to ask for information about one's performance as a member state and school. The question then is what are the conditions of possibility at the level of governmental reasoning, technologies, and self-government for these discursive and nondiscursive practices to become meaningful. Thus, instead of asking who or what is imposing for what reason a particular meaning to these practices, it should be asked for who, that is, for what form of

subjectivity and within what sort of governmental reasoning the circulation of feedback information becomes meaningful and even indispensable.

Furthermore, the objective of an interpretative analytics is not to look for "sources of meaning" behind or below the written (policy) texts and the policy instruments adopted in order to confront policy makers and other actors in the field of education with the true meaning of their words and the real reasons for the decisions that are taken. Contrary to such a kind of vertical interpretative move from surface to depth, the presented interpretative analytics includes a horizontal move and remains at the surface of what is given in experiences and practices. Hence, instead of an explanation based on a deep interpretation, the study is a "cartography" (Deleuze 1986) that "maps" (Flynn 1994) the present or, as Rose (1999, p. 57) puts it, an "empiricism of the surface" focusing on what is said and done and what allows it to be said and done. A cartographic description thus seeks to describe the governmental rationality, technology, and modes of self-government that are enacted in how the Flemish government positions itself within the European policy context and towards Flemish schools. Methodologically speaking, this requires to bracket the authorship and any contextual information of documents and policy instruments. These de-authorization and decontextualization allow to approach what is done and what is said as discursive and nondiscursive events and to put them side to side in order to map specific patterns and processes. By putting different documents (e.g., communication of European Commission, policy declaration, European report, etc.) and instruments and procedures (e.g., open method of coordination, benchmark graphics, etc.) side to side, what becomes visible is their interrelatedness in a field of discursive and nondiscursive practices whose "meaning" escapes the actions and attributed reasons of those involved. The effectuated field allows for a description of common discursive patterns (e.g., forms of argumentation, conceptualization, addressing problems and framing solutions, visual schematization, etc.) and technological processes (e.g., modes of operation, procedures, instrumentation, etc.) as part of emerging ways of governing and ways of thinking about governing. As a consequence, a cartographic account of the state of affairs has not the form of an explanatory report on formal structures and general mechanisms nor that of a story that gives meaning to actions and decisions in narrative terms. The map instead traces the characteristics of the technology and reason of current modes of governing by taking current practices of governing as a point of departure.

In line with an interpretative analytics that aims at a cartographic account of the state of affairs, specific sources are to be searched for. The data collection does not follow the exemplary logic of a case study design. A case study—also a single case study—has a fixed point of departure (general theory, (hypo)thesis, domain, entity, etc.) and assumes a predefined unit of investigation that allows to decide on a well-defined and exemplary practice. The assumed logic of unity and difference, and the presupposed horizon of the particular and universal, is not in line with an ontology of the present. The practices that make up the state of affairs regarding education policy in Flanders articulate who we are today and, hence, are not to be treated as an exemplification of who we are today or of what is the case. This means that what

comes into account for sources to be interpreted is everything through which current governing is enacted and, more specifically, in which the current need for information is manifest. As a consequence, the regional ontology of the present results in a cartography that does not make global claims. Due to that point of departure, the decision on practices to be investigated is to a certain extent arbitrary in time and space. In an ontology of the present, a decision has to be taken about what is considered to be "today" and "we." For this study, it is indeed the researcher's present—both in space and time—that motivates the decision. The focus thus is on policy-related practices at the level of the Flemish government and specifically during the first part of legislation period of Frank Vandenbroucke, minister of education between 2004 and 2009. This should however only partly to be considered as arbitrary, for what motivates this study is exactly the assumption that the logic of my personal self-understanding is not different from the logic of the self-understanding of others; it seems as "we," today, are in need of specific information. It is the experienced self-evidence of information and feedback that constitutes the "we" and "today" and hence orients the researcher to particular practices.

Sources and Process

Two types of sources are collected and interpreted for the study: textual and technological materials. The textual material includes the policy declaration of the minister of education, policy notes of the minister that explicitly reflect about challenges to and developments within policy making today, the memoranda of new legislation, and a selection of European policy documents (communications and reports and narrowed down to education and training and the open method of coordination). For the technological material, the focus is on the enacted instruments, techniques, and procedures (and related discursive practices) where collection and distribution of information is of major importance: benchmark reports, rankings, reports on examples of best performance, assessment tests, testing grounds, and coordination procedures in view of European harmonization. Despite the analytical distinction between the textual and technological, the collected material is approached as practices that articulate how governmentalization takes shape today. Text thus is approached as a discursive practice. It is not regarded as a medium to transfer meaning or ideas about reality and, hence, not to be interpreted by looking for the intentions (on the side of messenger), by asking how reality is represented (on the side of the content) or by focusing on the reception of the content (on the side of audience). In a similar way, the technological material is not approached as a set of tools used by someone with specific intentions in order to arrive at certain objectives. Instead, these materials are considered as being part of practices that make up our current world, and since these technologies and this language is used, they make sense to us or have meaning for us. Hence, the question is not which meaning actors impose on particular texts or how they use particular technologies, but what kind of self-understanding from the side of the actors is

"required" for these practices to be meaningful and hence for these texts and technologies to make sense.

Applied to the research project, the interpretation process of the material follows three steps. The first step aims at an understanding of the kind of information that is suggested to be indispensable or required today and, based on that, an understanding of how the actors within the field of education have to come to understand themselves (and others) for this information to become needed and even to be indispensable. In answer to these questions, the study clarifies that the promoted and required information is "feedback information on performance" and that the Flemish government comes to understand itself as a calculating agency that embraces specific "managerial virtues": a readiness to learn from comparison, to benchmark, to collaborate in order to compete, and to be proactive or reactive. The second step then focuses on how (Flemish) government comes to understand (and justify) its role and task in terms of collecting and offering information. An interpretative analytic of the sources allows to describe a governmental rationality which renders both educational policy and the educational system intelligible in terms of performance in a competitive, international environment that frames the state as a competition or performative state with a managerial and enabling role and that regards optimal performance as a governmental target. Through technologies such as benchmarking and the collection of practices of good performance at an international level, the new governmental state explicitly tries to satisfy its need for feedback, to orient itself within a competitive environment of nation states and to learn from comparison for the sake of optimal performance. The interpretative analytics also clarifies that part of this governmental rationality is a mode of thinking in which the Flemish government defines its role towards schools that are in "need of feedback" and hence where the centralized collection and distribution of feedback information on school performance becomes a critical issue; mutual learning, based on the stories of best performing schools, becomes regarded as a solution for optimal change in a competitive environment. The third step attempts to describe the kind of power that is involved in the governmental regime that puts information central stage. By drawing on literature that discusses several modes of power, this step aims to grasp the power mechanisms—that is, how power actually works—when the "conduct of conduct" takes shape as "feedback on performance." In this synthetic research step, the study elaborates on how current processes of governmentalization are accompanied by mass spectacles and its images of best performance (through which each state and school are able to orient and optimize their own performance) and ultimately how power relations seem to culminate in full-circle feedback mechanisms.

An important aspect in the three steps of interpretation and the ultimate presentation of the results of the cartography is the particular way of developing and using concepts. For the cartographic account of the form of self-understanding, the emerging governmental rationality, and the mode of operation of technologies, the study is not relying on an existing conceptual framework or theoretical terminology. The implication is that a crucial part of the interpretation is finding and—to a certain extent—inventing a terminology that does justice to the investigated state

of affairs. Examples of invented terms are feedback on performance, managerial virtues, need for feedback, and competitive state. This terminology is rather close to the vocabulary used in the investigated practices; however, at the same time, it is used in a different way. The unusual use of common terms should be regarded exactly in line with the specific approach included in an interpretative analytics. The introduction of an academic terminology that circulates outside the examined practices often comes down to an interpretation from the outside. In that case, what is interpreted is assumed to be invisible because it is an underlying structure or not yet recognized intention or source of meaning. An interpretative analytics also assumes something remains invisible. But it is invisible because it is all too familiar and because that familiarity or self-evidence is always reinforced when being engaged in practices (Foucault 1978b, pp. 540–541). In that sense, the analytics includes an interpretative act from the inside, by taking fragments of the vocabulary of these practices as the point of departure but using it exactly to describe, for instance, the installed rationality, the emerging form of self-understanding, or the patterns of power. Linking common terms, managerial or feedback, for instance, to aspects at the level of self-understanding, virtues, or need, for instance, is an attempt to make the familiar unfamiliar. Another operation used in the cartography is to combine concepts that are often kept separate in current discourses, such as "competitive state." While common understanding considers the political and economic to be distinct spheres, merging the lexicon of these spheres allows to point at the constitution of new entities and new modes of reasoning. The merging however does not seek to indicate that the borders between previously distinct social fields have collapsed nor points at structural tensions or contradictions, but attempts to describe the new modes of reasoning as singular events that install a specific logic and strategy.

Reasons for Choosing the Governmentality Approach

Within the field of policy studies that have education as their major concern, there is a wide range of approaches depending on the disciplinary background (sociology, political theory, philosophy, etc.). This study could be located within the genre of critical education policy studies. Before discussing the value and contribution of the governmentality perspective for the critical study of education policy, a short sketch of the critical orientation in education policy studies is presented (see also Simons et al. 2009).

Critical Education Policy Studies

It was the book *The Policy Sciences*, edited by Lerner and Lasswell in 1951, that can be regarded as programmatically setting the scene for the social sciences' orientation to public policy in the welfare state. Especially after the devastating effects of World War II, with the expansion of communism and the economic crisis,

social scientists in the West were eager to actively support the development of the Western democratic state and its public policy. Lerner and Lasswell's book expressed Western social scientists' commitment to improve the social and democratic basis of the state by studying issues related to such phenomena as full employment, equality, and peace and to optimize the effectiveness of public administration and organizational structures. The educational reforms during the 1980s and 1990s, and specifically the confrontation with the neoliberal and neo-conservative governments in the USA, the UK, Australia and New Zealand, acted as a "catalyst" for the development of a new "genre of policy studies" (Troyna 1994, p. 3; Trowler 1998). The studies at the beginning of the 1980s were mainly rooted in the research tradition interested in power, politics, and social regulation in and around schools and particularly confronting the crisis of the welfare state and the public role of education. In line with the broadened field of study, these scholars not only petitioned policy makers and educational administrators with their research but combined academic work, policy engineering, and social criticism (Hammersley 1994).

Focusing on the context and impact of the educational reforms relatively ignored by regular political and social scientists, educationalists and sociologists of education hence developed from the 1980s onwards their own particular policy studies (see Prunty 1984). Echoing the term "policy orientation," the notion "critical education policy orientation" can be used to describe their distinctive scope (Simons et al. 2009). Despite the diversity and despite what has been referred to as a condition of "theoretical eclecticism" (Ball 1997; Ozga 2000), they share the following features: the policy studies express specific educational, moral, and social concerns; they adopt a broad conception of policy, including politics, the mechanisms of power, and the relation with the wider social context; and the studies include diverse forms of critical advocacy related to a concern for education in society—that is, "the public and its education." At one level, this is far removed from Lasswell's policy orientation and the problem-solving focus developed in line with that orientation. However, at another level, the critical education policy orientation is perhaps still close to that program, for underlying Lasswell's orientation towards policy was a deep concern with democracy and public policy.

From the 1990s onwards, and in view of the challenges of contemporary society, the critical orientation was considered in need of "de-parochialization" (Lingard 2006) and a "recalibration of critical lenses" (Robertson and Dale 2009). Several challenges had to be faced. One important challenge became the concepts "education" and "policy" themselves. Current discourses on the global knowledge economy, lifelong learning, and (global) governance are clearly challenging the education-, school-, and government-oriented vocabularies (e.g., Fejes and Nicoll 2008). In relation to the fields of lifelong learning and human capital investment, the least one could say is that the terms "education" and "education policy" have become something that have to be clearly defined. Related to that, researchers start to globalize their research agenda and broaden the often state-oriented methodological and theoretical approaches. An important aspect here is that a particular kind of global policy analysis, comparative education, and international benchmarking

has become itself part of the assemblage of the global policy field (Nóvoa and Yariv-Marshal 2003). Critically oriented research hence had to come to terms with the practice of comparison and comparative educational research and the underlying assumptions regarding commensurability and the role of modern states. One particular challenge that is related to governing through comparison is the role of the nation state in education policy and the reemergence of the problematic of the state in the global policy field. Dale and Robertson (2007), for instance, suggest that the nation state should not be located at the level of the "explanans" but the "explanandum" and that scholars should take into account different overlapping "scales of politics and policy." Here, scholars start to focus on the new policy actors that enter the global scene, how states are being repositioned and how they come to develop national education policies embedded within a competitive global/European framework (Lawn and Lingard 2002). This leads to a next set of challenges: the many guises of post-welfare policies. An interesting observation in that regard is that aside from the so-called liberal policy makers, also social democrats and "third way" political administrations came to rely on policy measures previously classified under the general term neoliberalism (Ball 2008). Measures related to output control, managerialism, and responsabilization did not disappear with the change of political coalitions. The widespread use of measures and policy options previously associated only with neoliberalism actually leads to a situation where social democracy can no longer be identified with social justice and neoliberalism can no longer be used as a synonym for social injustice (Seddon 2003). A final set of important challenges arises from the changed relation between research and policy making, particularly with the advent of the so-called evidence-based policy and related movements of evidence-based practice in teaching during the 1990s (Young et al. 2002). Confronted with evidence-based policy or the "governmental re-articulation of *analysis for policy*" (Lingard and Ozga 2007, p. 6, italics in original), the critical education policy scholar can no longer only be oriented towards the field of education policy but also towards the evidence-producing research fabric that becomes part of policy making.

The reported research study in this paper should be located within this line of critical educational policy studies and seeks to address several of the mentioned challenges. The study elaborates on the observed shift from the so-called welfare state to the "competition" (Yeatman 1994; Cerny 1997), "evaluative" (Neave 1998), or "performative" (Ball 2000) state and pays special attention to the way state government reformulates, justifies, and develops education policies within the global field of governance. As a consequence, it is important to locate this role within a European context and to focus on modes of governing and policy instrumentation beyond the classic state-centered approaches. The perspective of governmentality allows to address exactly those issues. The focus on processes of governmentalization helps to understand the state as what has to be explained instead of what is explaining current policy. Furthermore, the perspective of governmentality avoids a single focus on policy rhetoric but includes an analysis of governmental technologies and reasoning and how new entities and modes of self-government emerge.

Governmentality Studies

The work of Foucault has already played for a rather long period a role in educational research and in social and political theory of education. It is impossible to give an overview of all the—philosophical, historical, and sociological—uses of Foucault in educational research (Simons and Masschelein 2007). Yet, it seems that the teaching of Foucault on governmentality during his courses at the Collège de France in 1977–1978 and 1978–1979 has given a new impetus to critical education policy studies. One can rightly refer to studies of governmentality as a kind of new subdiscipline within the humanities (Dean 1999, p. 2). However, the term discipline may not be fully appropriate since it might mask the huge diversity of these studies, both in terms of research domain and in terms of method (Rose 1999, p. 9). What they share, however, is an interest in forms of governmentality, minimally conceived of as the strategies of governing people and governing ourselves. In this line of research, several scholars started to focus on processes of governmentalization in education and particularly in relation to educational policy and to restructurings in the wake of the so-called neoliberal and neoconservative governance (see the collection: Peters et al. 2009). Their focus is not in the first place on how education policy takes shape (e.g., policy process, political context) nor on the issue of legitimacy (e.g., institutional conditions, juridical procedures) but on how governing actually works and the kind of regimes of government that emerge. By addressing the regimes that emerge, it is possible to describe what was and is happening "to us" and "through us," that is, how specific forms of self-government—for instance, articulated in the "need for feedback"—actually enact and stabilize specific modes of governing.

Despite the substantial amount of studies on governmentality and education, critical debates of studies of governmentality are widespread. Speaking broadly, studies in view of governmentality seem to fall apart into two registers. On the one hand, there are governmentality studies that are merely descriptive but incorporated within the broader domain of sociological and political analysis. In this register, an ongoing debate seems to be whether and/or how studies of governmentality can rely more on empirical methods in order to be able to grasp the "reality" of governmentalities (and not merely what they refer to as "the programs") and to reveal the resulting contradictions and tensions (and not merely questioning what is self-evident) (Dale 2004). On the other hand, studies of governmentality seem to be integrated within broader critical programs that want to resist political, cultural, and social hegemony (and ultimately the consequences of different sorts of capital accumulation). In this register, ongoing debates include the issue of how agency (and the possibility of resistance towards forms of hegemony) can be thought of in the context of an analysis of governmentality and how the described processes of governmentalization can be explained by drawing upon materialist or idealist social and political theories (see also Reichert 2001; Osborne 2001).

Giving shelter to studies of governmentality in both disciplinary registers is tempting precisely when the particular critical heart is removed from these studies:

a critical concern with the present, that is, the critical ethos that is distinctive for an ontology of the present. The ethos is related to what according to Foucault is "the art of not being governed like that and at that cost" (Foucault 2007, p. 45; see also Foucault 1978a, b). Critique therefore is not to be regarded as the outcome of a theoretical standpoint that allows to take distance from the present in order to judge it, but a movement of conversion towards what in our experience presents itself as necessary or self-evident. It is a critical movement that is expressed in a question such as: "who are we for whom feedback has become indispensable to decide on who we are and what we should do?" As far as the critical attitude underlying these studies indeed is a kind of virtue or ethos (Butler 2004; Simons et al. 2005) and not the more common theoretical or normative attitude, the temptation to integrate studies of governmentality within one of the two registers is somehow understandable. The two disciplinary registers, then, are often welcomed as providing a sound intellectual and methodological context or an explicit normative foundation (e.g., Fraser 1981; Habermas 1985). Although we recognize and understand this temptation, this kind of integrationist and assimilating attitude towards studies of governmentality ignores their very heart: the concern with or vigilance towards how we are governed today—through governing ourselves in a particular way. The attitude of de-governmentalization—as Gros terms it—can be described in a very classical way as an "attitude of enlightenment," that is, bringing to light mechanisms of power or speaking truth to power (Gros 2001, pp. 520–523). The distinctive public dimension of this kind of critical gesture is discussed in the last section of the paper. For the moment, I want to stress that an important reason for adopting the governmentality approach is to articulate an attitude of de-governmentalization by taking the unease with the current need for information and feedback—including my own need in that regard—as a point of departure.

The Role of Interpretation in This Study

To be able to discuss in more detail the role of interpretation in this study, it is helpful to return to some of the main findings. The interpretation of current practices in policy making starts from the question within which regime of governing a question for or concern with information on performance starts to make sense (and hence assuming that such a question or concern was not really expressed before). The interpretative analytics shows that this concern emerges when states understand themselves as competitive states, when actors in the field of education come to reflect upon themselves in terms of performance, and when policy objectives are being formulated in terms of competitive advantage. The study describes the birth of a kind of "need for feedback on performance," and this need is interpreted as being both the effect and instrument of how we are being governed today. The "need for feedback" takes shape as part of current technologies of calculation and comparison but becomes at once an instrument in order to

justify the further collection and distribution of feedback information and to increase the overall performance. The study also indicates that the many public discussions about optimal feedback and useful performance indicators do not question the new regime of governing. These discussions and debates are interpreted instead as an indication that a way of thinking about and acting upon education that is centered around performance has taken shape. Finally, the concept of 360° feedback is introduced to articulate in a paradigmatic way the kind of power that is being exercised: feedback on performance becomes an indispensable tool to know who we are and to orient and hence govern our future actions. It is our "will to know" (our position, our performance) that becomes the engine of the governmental regime.

For these findings, the interpretation does not rely on the hermeneutical tradition. Moreover, the break with a hermeneutical approach to interpretation has an important consequence. In the hermeneutical approach—and I will take the specific approach of Habermas as an example—the issue of legitimacy or justification precedes the issue of meaning or relevance. From the perspective of Habermas, the meaning of something can be grasped if we know under which conditions something is accepted as relevant (Habermas 1985). An interpretative analytics in line with Foucault instead assumes that questions about legitimacy—for instance, debates about adequate information or relevant quality indicators for education—only come to the foreground if a (self-) understanding in terms of comparison, quality, and information circulation has emerged. In other words, part of our assumption that practices related to information and feedback are meaningful today is that they are currently debated, that is, that certain aspects are treated as in need of justification. These debates are regarded as part of current governmental reasoning and not as a symptom of its crisis of legitimacy. An interpretative analytics thus seeks to make a cartography of the conditions of possibility both regarding what we consider today to be meaningful and the rules and principles according to which we start to discuss its relevance and judge its legitimacy. It is however important to elaborate in more detail on how exactly to approach these conditions of possibility.

An interpretative analytics along the perspective of governmentality does not seek to "explain" the current state of affairs on the changed role of the state and the changed self-understanding of actors in terms of feedback. Schematically speaking, such an explanatory interpretative approach can take two different forms. For instance, one could interpret the current insistence on feedback and benchmarking as an articulation of the logic of capital in late modern societies and hence explain competitive benchmarking as an attempt to align member states and their educational system with the requirements of capital reproduction. Or one could interpret the European benchmarking as part of a political project in which member states transfer power to European institutions. The power transfer, it can be argued along these lines, explains new modes of political coordination and juridical regulation through competitive benchmarking in an attempt to safeguard both national welfare and European economic strength. What these approaches share is that something (logic of capital or political power) is assumed to be given and—while standing

behind the phenomena being investigated—allows for an understanding of its meaning through explaining its coming into existence. From Foucault, the idea is taken that in order to understand the impact of politics and the economy on society and people's life, we have to investigate how people are being governed and come to govern themselves. This is formulated very precisely by Lazzarato:

> The remarkable novelty introduced by Foucault in the history of capitalism since its origins, is the following: the problem that arises from the relation between politics and the economy is resolved by techniques and dispositifs that come from neither. This 'outside', this 'other' must be interrogated. The functioning, the efficacy and the force of politics and the economy, as we all know today, are not derived from forms of rationality that are internal to these logics, but from a rationality that is exterior and that Foucault names 'the government of men'. (Lazzarato 2006, p. 1)

In order to clarify the consequence for interpretation, it is helpful to introduce Foucault's concept of "problematization." For Foucault (1990, p. 257), the concept "does not mean the representation of a pre-existent object nor the creation through discourse of an object that did not exist. It is the ensemble of discursive and nondiscursive practices that make something enter into the play of true and false and constitute it as an object of thought (whether in the form of moral reflection, scientific knowledge, political analysis, etc.)." What incites a form of problematization are clearly social, economic, and political developments in a particular period for they can render common practices problematic, that is, make it difficult to continue thinking and acting in the same way. Applied to this study, it could be said that developments at the level of the European Union or economic developments (related to changes in mode and factors of production in the knowledge economy, for instance) incite difficulties in common ways of governing education. However, the form of problematization that emerges at a given moment as an answer to these difficulties should not be approached as their direct manifestation or translation but elaborates the conditions based on which possible solutions can be proposed and debated. The focus hence is on the singular form of problematization that emerges at a given moment and that cannot be interpreted or explained as the logical or necessary outcome of given political or economic developments. The problematization of educational systems in terms of performance and the current experience of the need for feedback, for instance, should be approached in their singularity, that is, as an event. This is the "outside" or "other" that Lazzarato argues to be distinctive. The form of problematization opens up a space to think and act in a particular way, to discuss about possible solutions, and to start debates about legitimacy and relevance, and hence it installs a particular way of addressing the difficulties. The conditions of possibility investigated along the lines of an interpretative analytics exactly address the form of problematization. In that view, an interpretative analytics can be described as an act of re-problematization.

The following citation offers a point of departure to clarify in more detail the distinctive scope and objective of the act of re-problematization: "People know what they do, they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what what they do does" (Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982, p. 187). This citation allows to point out that the study, first, is not about a totalizing

explanation but a tracing of a singular assemblage and, second, does not aim at a foundational critique but is motivated by critique as a public gesture:

1. The descriptive, cartographic account of educational policy at the level of the enacted discursive and material practices addresses how power actually works in current forms of governing: what kind of power is exercised when governing—to be understood as "conduct of conduct"—takes shape as "feedback on performance"? The notion assemblage is useful to point out how heterogeneous practices with their own history and development connect with each other in a way that is mutually reinforcing and result in a kind of apparatus ("dispositif") that gives shape to more or less stable power strategies and forms of problematization by which to govern people ("regimes") (Foucault 1976). The resulted power mechanisms include a logic that cannot be reduced to the idea or doctrine of a single strategist (e.g., politician, economist, expert, etc.) and whose coming into existence is not to be explained by an underlying cause or actor (e.g., social class, state, etc.). In other words, what often escapes our attention—in our concern with distributing or collecting feedback information—is that it plays a role in the assemblage of an apparatus that works according to a logic that goes beyond our intentions. The "feedback apparatus" should be regarded, therefore, as a strategic assemblage that is stabilized and that has an intelligibility of its own and whose power operations are enacted to tackle problems in very diverse domains (Rabinow 2003, p. 54). An indication that the feedback apparatus is actually in operation is that European benchmark reports and international assessment studies, for instance, start to function as stabilizing mechanisms (Simons and Olssen 2010). The authority of these reports or studies is affirmed, and the collection and distribution of feedback gains further impetus, by the fact that they become "obligatory passage points" and hence indispensable in order to know and govern oneself (Callon 1986). Another indication of the stabilization of such a strategic assemblage is that increasingly problems in different domains are framed in terms of "lack of feedback" (for instance, about school performance), hence necessitating the production and circulation of feedback information. At this point of stabilization, it can be argued in Foucaultian terms that the current "need for feedback" (and "will to learn" and "will to quality") functions as both the effect and instrument of an apparatus whose power mechanisms seek to secure optimal performance of each and all. This statement however is not a "totalizing explanation," but results from an observation of the totalizing ambition of power mechanisms. Two additional methodological points have to be made regarding the description of how power works and the resulted apparatuses.

   First, in studies of governmentality and Foucaultian-inspired studies in general, there is a tendency to use Foucault's own concepts (such as disciplinary power, normalizing power) as heuristic or even explanatory tools in studying current or new practices. This mobilization of a kind of "Foucaultian apparatus" however contradicts the specific aim of an interpretative analytics. The objective is to describe practices as singular events and hence not to approach them as an illustration or interpret them as a manifestation of a mode of power existing out

there. The latter approach in fact results in a kind of deep or totalizing interpretation and often comes down to an explanation, as if the concept "disciplinary power" could explain what is going on today. Second, and as a consequence of this, the challenge is to conceptualize the exercise of power today. In describing modern disciplinary and normalizing power, Foucault introduced the concept "panopticon." The concept however was not invented by himself but was actually used by Jeremy Bentham in 1791 for a very specific architectonic model of an inspection house. However, Foucault uses the concept panopticon in a paradigmatic way, that is, it is used to reveal the singularity of modern forms of power. As the "diagram of a mechanism of power in its ideal form," Agamben (2002) argues, "the panopticon functions as a paradigm, as an example which defines the intelligibility of the set to which it belongs and at the same time which it constitutes." The panopticon as a paradigm hence escapes the logic of the universal and the particular; the panopticon is not a universal that is exemplified in particular practices (prison, hospital, etc.), nor is it a particular practice that allows to get a grip on universal power mechanisms. Instead, the panopticon is the example that makes the mechanisms of power and the problematic of governing in their singularity intelligible and at the same time constitutes the field of discursive and material practices. In the reported study, a paradigmatic articulation of today's power mechanism was explored by drawing on the technique of 360° feedback. It is an existing tool that makes the current problematic of governing intelligible and at the same time enacts the problematic.

2. The mapping of indirect consequences—that is, "what what we do does"—in terms of the assemblage of an apparatus in which feedback on performance becomes an obligatory passage point in order to come to understand oneself (as a country, a school, a teacher, etc.) leads to the critical ambition of the presented study of governmentality. As stressed before, critique should be approached in terms of an ethos of de-governmentalization that combines a "limit attitude" and "experimental attitude"; the critique of our current "need for feedback" takes shape through the description of the feedback apparatus that imposes limits on us and is at the same time an experiment with the possibility of modes of self-government beyond the imposed limits (Foucault 1984d, p. 319). This approach has to be distinguished from a foundational critique that judges the legitimacy of power mechanisms based on given principles ("limiting attitude") or that unmasks particular strategies and tactics by recalling what is given in original experiences ("experiential attitude"). From the viewpoint of foundational critique, studies of governmentality are often judged or unmasked for their so-called apolitical character, their crypto-normativity, and the insistence on ethics and aesthetics at the dispense of politics and issues of public concern (Habermas 1985). Although often not explicitly elaborated, a critical ontology of the present that addresses processes of governmentalization does include a particular political, or rather public, focus.

The point of departure of an ontology of the present is what is considered to be self-evident today, that is, our ontological makeup or taken-for-granted modes of reasoning and related practices. The critical activity, however, is not

to debunk or unmask (what we today consider to be) matters of fact but to suspend our common, appropriate modes of reasoning and usage of objects, words, and practices. This act of suspension or de-appropriation is not about destruction. Instead, the act disrupts the set limits or followed rules, suspends the taken-for-granted economies and usages, puts something out of order, and hence displaces something in view of public use. In line with Latour (2005), the critical gesture includes a movement of "making things public": an attempt to turn our dealing with education in terms of performance and feedback into a matter of concern and to gather people as a public around this issue. It is Dewey who explicitly links this notion of "public" with the unknown or indirect consequences of our actions ("what what we do does"): "The public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions, to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for," and he adds, "the essence of the consequences which call a public into being is the fact that they expand beyond those directly engaged in producing them" (Dewey 1954, pp. 15–16). What is at stake then is an attempt to turn the indirect consequences of our cherished "need for feedback" into a matter of public concern. And for that reason, the study's critical orientation is not about a form of teaching that addresses readers as ignorant citizens by revealing the matters of fact and not a form of judging that addresses readers as docile subjects by setting new limits or recalling old limits but about "invitations or public gestures" (Foucault 2000, p. 245). Critique as a public gesture aims at making things public, that is, turning the state of affairs in governing education into a matter of public concern again.

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