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Data and Education (Abstract)

Datafication, the increased transformation of information about education into digitally manipulable data, is a process occurring in educational practice and in (critical) discourse analytical research on education. In part one of this paper, I explore three ways in which ‘digital data’ have changed the way educational discourse studies perceives its object of analysis.

First, ‘data *about* education’ flow abundantly. Schools are producing more numeric data about their students than ever before. Critical discourse studies have analysed, e.g., PISA, ICILS and other international assessments, and the media reports about these assessments. Second, we have more ‘data *experts in* education’. Increasingly, data scientists are working alongside government agencies to write educational policy. Critical analyses trace these distributed policy networks, following how discursive elements move across sectors. Third, we can observe ‘data *encoded into* education’. Here, I see the most substantial change for discourse studies. Algorithms written by specific teams in specific (primarily for-profit) contexts shape the software with which teachers and students engage.

Discourse analysts begin to look at code, dashboards, data traces. In part two of the paper, a short “worked example” from predictive analytics walks through these three dimensions, reflecting on how data have changed the way discourse studies perceives its object of analysis. The paper ends by suggesting epistemological, political and practical questions for future research.