REVENGE OF THE BLOB: agonism, globalisation and the social contract/s of education research

In one of the more interesting moments in education policy, Michael Gove, M.P., previous secretary of education in England (2010-2014), referred to opponents of his education policy reforms as The Blob: a collective and amorphous conglomerate seemingly impervious to attack yet swallowing all in its wake, including the fate of English students. Gove’s reference was to a 1960s B-grade science fiction film, and helped to set a subsequently antagonistic tone to his time in the role of secretary of education, characterised by derision in public debate about education and education policy. Representing his problems in this way, Gove was innovative in indicating a new kind of logical fallacy: an ab hoc fallacy (a “post hoc, ergo propter hoc” fallacy), attacking The Blob not the arguments.

While seemingly a media stunt convinced as a way to divert attention from the legitimate concerns of an increasingly wide circle of groups in the UK, this presentation takes this event as representative of a larger and globally travelling phenomenon in which discussions about education and education research may be viewed as agonistic (Moore 2014), and presented as a kind of mediated spectacle with sat pieces, opponents and plots (Papadopoulos 2013). The concern for education researchers is that debates about education policy - such as Gove’s comments about The Blob - are located in and framed by the fields of journalism, in newspapers, radio broadcasts and TV programs in which access of researchers is limited and potentially treacherous. With increasing emphasis in research exercises on the impact of education research, increased scrutiny of research funds and decreased funding, where does this leave education researchers? This presentation draws on this debate to discuss what might be called the social contract for education research, when considered as both a national social contract and as a global social contract. While intended as a provocation, the presentation draws on three research projects related to mediated, contractualism and globalisation to discuss the consequences of viewing education research through social contract analysis (Rawolle, 2013).

Dr Shaun Rawolle is a senior lecturer in the School of Education and a member of the Centre for Research in Educational Futures and Innovation at Deakin University. Shaun’s research is located broadly on the way policy impacts on practice in education and education systems, and globally. Shaun's recent research has focussed on the impact and potential of policy in education institutions. These policies include the global travel and translation of school improvement policies in a network of schools in Victoria, Australia, the role of degrees in meeting equity goals in Vocational Education and Training institutions in Australia, and the role of contracts in the governance and funding of policy obligations in schools and universities. Shaun has published in the areas of communications, new contractualism, sociology of education and education policy. He has two forthcoming books, one with Bob Lingard, Bourdieu and the Fields of Education Policy, and another with Deakin Colleagues, Improving Schools: Productive Tensions Between the Local, the Systemic and the Global. Shaun’s major contributions to the research field involves the development of research-based, conceptual and methodological innovations in the study of education policy, globalisation, comparative education and sociology of education.

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GLOBALISATION THEMATIC

14 August 2015
10 am - 12 noon
Kingswood Campus Room X9W14.04
Light refreshments will be served after the presentation
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