

An Abductive Approach to Policy Analysis: Policy Analysis as Informed Guessing

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Abstract : This paper argues that education policy analysis tends to be steered towards empiricist oriented approaches, which place emphasis on objective and measurable data. However, this paper argues that empiricist oriented approaches are generally based on inductive and/or deductive reasoning, which are unable to generate new ideas/knowledge. This paper will outline the logical structure of induction, deduction, and abduction, and argues that only abduction provides possibilities for the creation of new ideas/knowledge. This paper proposes the neologism of 'informed guessing' as a reformulation of abduction, and also as an approach to education policy analysis. On one side, the signifier 'informed' encapsulates the idea that abductive policy analysis needs to be informed by descriptive conceptualization theory to be able to make relations and connections between, and within, observed phenomenon and unobservable general structures. On the other side, the signifier 'guessing' captures the cyclical and unsystematic process of abduction. This paper will end with a brief example of utilising 'informed guessing' for a policy analysis of school choice lotteries in the United States.

Keywords : abductive reasoning, empiricism, informed guessing, policy analysis

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