

**Simon, C. A., & Downes, G. (Eds.). (2020). *Sociology for Education Studies: Connecting Theory, Settings and Everyday Experiences*. Routledge**

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**Simon, C. A., & Downes, G. (Eds.). (2020).**  
***Sociology for Education Studies: Connecting Theory, Settings and***  
***Everyday Experiences.***  
**Routledge.**

Reviewed By: Richard Oppong-Bosomah, Western University

This book is a captivating entry on the sociology of education. It discusses key conceptual and theoretical questions throughout its twelve chapters. The authors did well to relate their discussions to practical examples and empirical cases, which provide further clarification. The chapters are well arranged and seamlessly connect with one another. In the introduction, the editors discussed the idea of education as a social institution; they highlighted the need to investigate the contribution of educational practices and structures to social processes, policies, and practices. This opening section concludes with an invitation to the reader to ponder if the sociology of education ought to be considered a discipline on its own.

In the first chapter, *Sociology and Education*, Graham Downes submitted that the study of education cuts across several disciplinary boundaries including sociology, psychology, politics, ethics, and many others, which makes it difficult to properly situate education as a field. The chapter argued that the sociology of education needs to find some detachment from the core discipline of sociology. This stems from the fact that although some educational researchers adopt sociological theories, education, as a field of research and practice, has its own discourses with its own patterns, languages, and modalities. Graham further submitted that traditional approaches to the sociology of education have placed greater emphasis on routines and symbolism which ultimately portrays education as a somewhat ritualistic experience (e.g., Durkheim, 1912/1995). Regarding the role of the state in compulsory education, the author made an argument to justify the role of the state in the provision of formal education, explaining how through history, education has progressively been made compulsory. The focus of this argument, however, is formal and compulsory education, which inadvertently sidelines informal education.

In chapter two, *Education and Habitus*, Dan Bishop dwelled on Bourdieu's work on habitus (dispositions which usually operate below people's conscious level), discussing the relevance of this concept for the study of education. Bishop, referencing Bourdieu, noted that habitus cannot be understood in isolation from the environment within which it is construed; explaining that habitus explains why people with common social backgrounds tend to exhibit common behaviour. Further, Bourdieu noted that habitus partly influences our decisions as it provides intrinsic alternatives upon which conscious choices are based. For example, the literature on access to higher education suggests that the habitus of the working class is alienated in high-ranking universities, where the habitus of high-income individuals is often privileged. Reay (2001), as presented by Bishop, argued that working class individuals often negotiate whole or part of their original habitus in order to advance within the social hierarchies. As social actors internalize new habitus, some dispositions become active while others become dormant, depending on the individual's aspirations. Bishop exemplified habitus further by referencing Mu's (2016) work. Mu (2016) noted that the habitus of immigrants does not often match their new environment which, together with challenges associated to the adaptation to new language and culture, may affect their educational outcomes. This view is nuanced by Chao's research, which showed how rich immigrants overcome challenges in their new environment by using their economic power. Finally, Bishop noted that habitus, as a concept, has been criticized because of its over-usage in social research and its multifaceted definitions

in the literature.

Graham Downes started chapter three, titled *Education as Hegemonic Structure*, with a basic definition of hegemony: the use of power to orient or compel others to desire what one wants. This initial concept is however, criticized for its simplicity and its failure to acknowledge the many facets that hegemony has in the complex structure of society. Dwelling on Poulantzas (Poulantzas & Martin, 2008) ideas, the chapter analyzes how educational policy fits as a part of a hegemonic system of state control. Poulantzas explained that state/society is complex and essentially comprises class relations between the dominant middle-class capitalist and the subordinate working class, which Marx (in Wallerstein, 1988) described as the political struggle between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. The chapter argues that the state models hegemonic structures, and that educational policy usually reflects these structures as policies tend to reflect the interests of those already in power.

In chapter four, *Spaces of Invisibility and Marginalisation in Schools*, Martin Levinson explained how schools reflect and reproduce the predominant socio-economic structures in society. This is exemplified by Baker et al. (2017) who, using cases from the USA, highlight the spatial discrimination created by the unequal access to school resources. In most jurisdictions in the USA, schools are funded from local taxes, which create inherent educational disparities between districts with rich tax bases and poor tax bases. These disparities go beyond socio-economic disparities and span across other considerations. Indeed, spaces in classrooms tend to conform to social hierarchies usually dictated by factors like gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, and age. School children tend to have a less restrictive environment at home, but at school, the environment tends to be more constricting, becoming even more constrained at the high school levels. In this chapter, Levinson reviewed a series of studies where students described their school environment as restrictive. Unknown to staff and as a reaction to the constraints placed upon them, the students created invisible zones of comfort and identity in schools. One aspect that could be further explored is the relation between psychosocial factors and the spatial dynamics of the school. This point was not developed in much detail in this chapter.

In Chapter five, *Morality, Education, and Social Ordering*, Catherine A. Simon characterized morality as the social agents' conception of what is good or bad. Stemming from the fact that schools are social institutions, they help to shape the individual's moral outlook. Morality tends to inform social and individual action, that is, internalized moral principles guide social behaviour. The author pointed out that, the most conversations on morality in sociology have been informed by the Weberian and Durkheimian paradigms. These refer to, on the one hand, the socially constructed meanings/interpretations of moral actions by people, and, on the other, the moral truths produced by the social interactions between social actors. The author explained that morality has been reinterpreted under neoliberal ideals, placing greater value on individual action and responsibility in detriment of collective action. Neoliberalism has created a structure of moral objectivity centered on individual values, including responsibility, self-reliance, and opportunism. This structure has been adopted by school systems through policies and practices, which ultimately replicates and legitimizes the status quo.

In *Turning 'Intersectionality' on its Head as we Navigate our Journeys Through Difficult Dialogue*, (Chapter six), Victoria Showunmi introduced key themes in Critical Race Theory (CRT), White Studies, and Intersectionality, using a case study focused on the experiences of the daughters of a Black mother who was adopted by a rich White family in the UK. The chapter notes that, CRT identifies racism, social class discrimination, oppression, and White supremacy as central structural components of contemporary societies. White studies investigate the privileges associated to White people as well as the perpetuation and consequences of racial advantage. Intersectionality looks at the interconnections between different forms of discrimination, such as racism, classism, ableism, sexism, and misogyny, and how they intersect to define people's identity. The author exemplified these themes using a series of narratives that demonstrate how race, class, and privilege shape the experience of racialized individuals. The chapter touches on the issue of identity, particularly for Black children raised in predominantly White communities, or who have mixed parents, a phenomenon that invites further research.

In chapter seven, *The Ever-Present Discourses in Education: Discourse and Educational Change*, Jessie A. Bustillos Morales dwelled on the application of the notion of discourse to the study of education. Bustillos Morales defined discourse as "much more than language or narrative, it is more than words and what can be said about something; it is rather more about how those possible statements create and

maintain meaning and purpose” (p. 69). The chapter explains how discourses deep-seated in the needs of the industrial revolution informed the emergence of mass education. The education of the poor was shaped by the demands of industry as opposed to the goal of individual growth and self-development. The children were technically regarded as raw materials for industry and were supposed to receive the basic skills for working in factories. Today, neoliberal policies continue to influence education through the prioritization of economic imperatives over the needs of groups and individuals.

In chapter eight, *A Global Political Economy of Education: The Origins*, Joe Gazdula traced the historical development of global education and the intrusion of market forces in global education. Various shifts, including Neoliberalism and Modernization have influenced education worldwide within the context of the political economy. The chapter explains that a shift to a sustained interest in the marginal utility of consumption revolutionized economies around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This led to a focus on individualistic values as opposed to collective ones. In England, policy initiatives to level the playing field were not enough to stop the upper class from seizing the best educational opportunities for themselves. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century however, Keynesian socially informed reforms, as well as approaches to education based on institutionalism, gained prominence as a result of successive market failures. In contrast to institutionalism and neoliberalism, neo-Marxist approaches propose a shift in focus towards social and emancipatory goals in education; a move that would reduce the influence of the market in the provision of schooling. The chapter also reviews Becker’s (1994) Human Capital Theory, according to which education adds value to the economy by increasing the value of the outcomes of labour. Finally, Dependency theory posits that developed countries manipulate the trade of primary goods originating from developing countries, maintaining a systemic reliance on the Global North. Education systems play a pivotal role in maintaining the status quo by influencing curriculum reforms in developing countries that discourage creativity and eschew advanced skills. The chapter concludes with a review of recent reforms in the UK, showing how the economic efficiency imperative has become the dominant force in education policy.

In chapter nine, *The Global Political Economy of Education in the Twenty-First Century*, Joe Gazdulas explained how the economic downturns of the 1970s led to the resurgence of neoliberal approaches to education. Neoliberals advocated for a reduction of the state’s intervention in education, parental choice, competition, privatization, and austerity as key mechanisms in education reform. As a consequence of the introduction of these ideas in education governance, the private sector gained participation in the education sector weakening the role of public institutions. The chapter situates the analyses in the UK and US, where various reforms led to public-private partnerships and other initiatives that enhanced the private sector’s involvement in education.

In chapter ten, *Rethinking ‘International Perspective’ in Education Studies: ‘Knowing’ Education in the Global Era*, Tingting Yuan discussed globalization, interdependence, and international cooperation as trends that shape education worldwide. With increasing globalization, education needs to be analyzed in terms of state cooperation, interdependence, integration, technology transfer, cross-cultural understanding, and global convergence. The chapter presents various examples of globalization in education, explaining the components of a global agenda in education, including the role of multilateral organizations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as well as the impact of global policy frameworks, such as the Millennium Development Goals, the Sustainable Development Goals, and Education for All. The chapter calls for more research on the power relations and imbalances in the definition of the global education agenda.

In chapter eleven, *Education, Urbanisation, and the Case of ‘the Child in the City’* David Blundell, discussed the research on urbanization and childhood. He highlighted the role of educational institutions in responding to the social realities of children living in cities. Post-colonial and critical scholars have contended that the literature on childhood has traditionally focused on westernized images of children, leaving a vacuum in our understanding of the lives of children in ordinary cities, namely, urban centres that do not conform to the image of large, global, and influential cities, as well as cities in the global south.

In chapter 12, *Enacting the International Vision of Inclusive Education: A UK Case Study of Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties* Ben Simmons made a case for inclusive education, reminding us that inclusive education has been positioned as a human right. Inclusive education promotes partici-

pation, cohesion, and social cooperation. The chapter establishes that, although the international community supports inclusive education, there is, however, a growing resistance against it. For example, some commentators have argued that children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) represent a great challenge to inclusive education, even suggesting that these students must remain segregated in special education settings. For Simmons, this view defines disability in clinical terms, using a deficit model to pathologize students. In contrast, a social model of disability challenges the practices and discourses that create barriers for students, seeking to increase their political participation and recognition. The challenges to the social model become more salient under the current neoliberal restructuring of education that prioritizes individual knowledge acquisition and skill, instead of belonging and cooperation.

## Conclusion

The book is an important contribution to educational administration and leadership as it has the potential to enhance conversations on important issues such as inclusion of new immigrant students, ethics and morality, marginalization, culture, and the influence of social processes on the students' dispositions towards learning. The book contents are relevant to the contemporary needs in educational administration and leadership. Educational administrators, policymakers, researchers, and other related individuals and organizations, such as settlement support agencies, would find this book useful. The topics discussed in this book would inform investigations of social and organizational issues, providing basis for policy revisions and interventions on educational administration and leadership in an era of globalized economic and social inequalities.

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