1

The Study of Education

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This chapter outlines the development of education as an area of study. Key theoretical issues and areas for investigation are raised and the development of a critical approach is emphasized.

What is education studies?

This is a difficult question to answer in any precise manner. In the editors' experience, education studies is made up of a variety of components. In what proportion and with what particular emphasis depends upon the perspective of the definer (see Bartlett et al., 2001, for a discussion of such issues). Education studies, as with all areas of knowledge, is contested by various interested parties. It is worth noting that the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) has developed benchmarks for education studies in higher education. These cannot be considered in any way definitive. They are another viewpoint amongst many, and QAA itself had difficulty in deciding exactly what the benchmarks should include and how they should be written. What the development of these benchmarks does indicate is that education is now such an important area of study that it warrants attention by the national body that monitors standards of subject teaching in higher education (HE).

Whilst accepting that there can be no single definition of education studies, let us consider what it should, could and often does contain. There is a need to question the nature and purposes of education, to engage in continuing dialogue about what education

is, what an educational experience should involve, why education is so often considered a 'good' thing, what its purposes are for individuals and for society.

Some analyses of education focus upon the education of the individual and involve such notions as the development of the mind, reasoning and the mental processes involved in cognitive development. Others focus upon content and what should be learnt as part of the educative process. These consider knowledge, its organization and appropriateness to learners. Both these approaches lead us to a further focus which is the relationship of education to society. One view here, for example, is that we are educated by society to play our part in that society. This approach emphasizes the notion of education being important for the inculcation of values and the maintenance of social stability. Without it – what might at times be construed as a certain level of higher control or at others as a degree of social consensus – society would collapse into lawlessness and chaos. Of course, a Marxist view sees education systems operating primarily as agencies of the state. They are there to inculcate the values of the capitalist system, legitimate inequality and ensure a passive workforce.

A liberal educationalist takes a more central position and argues that the purposes of education are to promote individual development whilst also developing a respect for others. This fits well with a social democratic ideology which holds that a combination of individual rights and responsibilities is a central tenet of a liberal democracy. There are many ideological standpoints on the purposes of education (see Bartlett et al., 2001) and these have implications for all aspects of the education process, such as how learning should be organized, what counts as appropriate content and how progress and achievement should be assessed.

What becomes apparent to the student of education at an early stage is the political nature of the process. Education plays a significant part in the development of the young and therefore in future generations of our society. Even though everyone in the system, from the prime minister to the classroom teacher, claims to be interested in the good of the pupils/students and wishes to keep politics out of the classroom, this is, of course, not possible given the ideologically vested nature of the whole education process. There are always significant arguments concerning what should be taught (curriculum content), how it should be taught (for instance,

whether individualized through online learning packages, in mixed or setted groups or through lecture or activity methods) and to whom it should be taught (considering equality of opportunity issues, access to different forms of education, the legitimacy of excluding pupils/students). There are political decisions to be made at all levels, from what happens in the individual classroom in a small rural school, to the formation of national policy in the seats of power, to international aid programmes involving education. It is interesting to consider the various groups who take part in the making of these decisions and the power wielded at different points. Politicians, teachers, parents, employers and even the pupils/students themselves are all involved and have differing degrees of influence over the process.

Who studies education?

The study of education was undertaken by large numbers of students between the 1950s and 1970s largely as part of their three-year teacher training courses. When teaching became an all-graduate profession courses were lengthened to four years and became Bachelor of Education degrees. In this way they were able to incorporate degree-level study, of which education studies was a significant component. At this time Bachelor of Science and Arts degrees were not usually modularized and students took one or sometimes two subjects over a three-year course. Education was not a widely offered degree subject and it was generally confined to a component of a major discipline area such as philosophy, sociology, psychology or history (see McCulloch, 2002, for a discussion of the disciplines contributing to the study of education). Within the BEd courses the study of education was usually broken down into the separate areas of philosophy of education, sociology of education, history of education and educational psychology, each of which was studied separately from pedagogy.

From the 1970s onwards, often with the aid of in-service funding for practising teachers, education came to be studied more widely at Masters level. This added to the size and status of schools of education at universities and polytechnics. At the same time, as a consequence of the reorganization and rationalization of HE provision, the old colleges of education found themselves shut down,

became free-standing colleges of HE or were subsumed into the poly-technics. Thus schools or departments of education assumed greater stature within many HE institutions. The study of education was at this point considered to be primarily about teacher training and concerned exclusively with schooling (i.e. compulsory education).

From the mid-1970s onwards, when Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, made the landmark Ruskin speech, publicly funded education came under increasing criticism, and pressure for reform and calls for greater accountability of the teaching profession grew. The curriculum and standards of teaching were increasingly placed under the spotlight. There was concern about what was being taught to pupils, the teaching methods employed, which were seen as too progressive, and the increasing indiscipline which was apparently occurring in schools (see Bartlett et al., 2001). The curriculum issue was 'solved' by removing control of what was taught away from the teachers through the introduction of a National Curriculum from 1988 onwards. Teaching methods became greatly influenced by the need to ensure that pupils achieved good results in the National Curriculum assessments, especially since league tables of school performance were published. The introduction of regular school inspections through the 1993 Education Act increased the external constraints on teachers and schools. The preparation of teachers for the classroom was also examined and 'reformed' (Furlong, 2001). Emphasis was now placed upon the training of how to teach rather than on the discrete study of education. The previous 'academic' approach was alleged to have failed to prepare trainee teachers for their future role adequately. Sociology and psychology were seen as subversive influences and philosophy as an irrelevance to classroom teaching. In this way old teacher training courses and the academics teaching on them could be blamed for contributing to the crisis of low standards of achievement and even for the declining standards of behaviour in society generally (Cox and Dyson, 1969).

In the l980s and 1990s great changes were made in initial teacher training (ITT). The academic study of education was marginalized in what Crook (2002) characterizes as a sustained attack upon the theoretical aspects of educational studies. Sets of competencies which students had to achieve were developed. These itemized skills were rooted in classroom practice with students spending a great deal more time in schools. Regular inspection of initial

teacher training (ITT) provision ensured 'compliance' with the competencies, later known as standards (DfEE, 1998). Partnerships between schools and HE were developed which enhanced the integration of theory and practice. However, many would argue that this was at the expense of deeper questioning and analysis of education.

Since the 1990s there has been a growing demand by students to study education. However these are not teacher training students. Education studies has become increasingly important as an area of study within the modular degree programmes of the 'new universities' and colleges of HE. Students are now able to study modules in education as part of their first degree. Education studies may make up a large enough portion of their studies to be a named subject in their award or they may just take several education modules in their first or second year as subsidiaries to their main subjects. These 'new' students of education wish to study the system in which they have been involved as a learner and, though a number may wish to become teachers later, many do not. Their aim is to develop an analytical understanding of what education means rather than to be trained in the mechanics of classroom control. It is worth noting that a high proportion of students of education studies are expecting to pursue careers in a range of areas, such as industrial management, personnel, social services and marketing, and see their study of education as applicable to employment in these areas.

A number of other study areas such as early childhood studies, special needs and inclusion, and youth studies have also been developing rapidly alongside education studies within HE departments of education. These reflect the academic expertise that exists in these departments and also how degree-level study is broadening to consider newly developing professional groups and expanding areas of employment.

The aims of this volume

Education studies programmes often begin with more general modules that introduce the student to the major concerns or purposes of education, theories of learning, sociological aspects of educational achievement and some historical consideration of the change and development of education systems. Students then go

on to choose specialist modules that look in more depth at particular areas. The difficulty for any student is in relating the fundamental issues learnt in the introductory modules to the specialist modules. Modules can often be treated as separate units of study with their own assessment rather than stressing the overarching and inter-related issues within the study of education. This is not to advocate some kind of neat functionalist view where all parts of an education system dovetail neatly together. On the contrary, the conflicting views around aspects of education, such as content, assessment, opportunity and pedagogy, are well known. However, it is helpful to avoid the tendency to think only within modules. Students need to explore education at what Ball (1987) identified as the macro, meso and micro levels and to be aware of interaction between the levels. The very partitioning of the curriculum into neat packages, which has facilitated the development of education studies, encourages an approach whereby students often consider only the immediate assignment. They can become overly concerned with the knowledge required for the assignment, avoiding anything that does not at first appear to be directly linked to the module title. What we wish to nurture through this text is an approach that is broad and explores theoretical links whilst still looking at particular areas in depth.

In this volume we have deliberately chosen to look at areas that are the most popular in education studies programmes – what could be termed the 'hot spots'. Each of these has its own particular issues, developments and debates as each inevitably relates to political and social concerns. The chapters deal with their own areas of interest in a self-contained way, outlining key themes and arguments. In reading the whole book, readers can see and make the connections between the chapters, thus developing both their overall understanding of education as well as of the individual topic areas.

By its nature the study of education is influenced by, and provides commentary on, the issues and concerns which characterize policy and practice at the time of study. This allows the authors to do two things. First, they can analyse past issues within their topic area with the benefit of both hindsight and the knowledge of how these issues have impacted on current trends. Thus they are able to comment upon developments in a systematic way that is imbued with both their own perspectives and those of the analysts and researchers they refer to. Secondly, the authors are able to inform

readers of this book of the very latest developments in their areas of discussion. This might be events, policy, practices, legislation, but all are contextualized within contemporary socio-political frames of reference and are analysed through the particular lens and discourse used by commentators on the subject or selected by the author. To this extent, books of this type have a degree of in-built redundancy for their purpose in building arguments and analyses is for others to review, amend and develop them in the light of new events or perspectives. As student readers it is your job to synthesize information from the chapters with that from other sources, adding your own voice to the analysis of the issues.

It is possible to organize the approach to the study of education in any number of ways. We could start with the young child and follow the pupil through the system chronologically. Alternatively we could look at the individual, then the organizational, the national and then beyond into the global. Or the book could be divided into compulsory and post-compulsory education. Some important areas of study, such as citizenship, differentiation, special needs and inclusion, the nature of teaching and lifelong learning, straddle the aforementioned categories.

Constructing education studies, then, is a controversial process and though we, the editors, have done it ourselves in organizing this text, it is debatable to what extent the contributing authors would agree with our creation. To exemplify, if one looks closely at the government discourse around its major legislative proposals, the 'story' that it creates to support its plans is, according to the Centre for Public Policy Research (2002), an exercise in the obfuscation of fundamental questions about the purposes of education. Their commentary was in relation specifically to the government white paper *Schools Achieving Success* (DfES, 2001). It is argued that the white paper's discourse creates hegemonic status for the 'truth' that it conveys about the successes that previous Labour government reforms have achieved (p. 24). In using phrases such as 'successful schools' and polarizing these with 'failing' ones the paper creates an image that schools either succeed or fail with no shades of grey, ambiguities or alternative explanations (p.16). Thus we see that in creating texts and discourses as authors and editors we are similarly developing and directing meanings.

It is expected that, in a reader such as this, students will pick and choose chapters as appropriate. In reading several chapters, readers

will discover that, although the chapters are written by different authors analysing their specialist areas, certain significant issues seem persistently to rise to the surface, such as the significance of market forces, equal opportunities and individual choice, the role of the state in controlling and monitoring education, a preoccupation with cost effectiveness and standards, and increasing global movements which operate beyond the scope of individual state boundaries.

Key issues in education studies

We begin this volume with Helen Moylett's consideration of early childhood education. There is currently a rapid expansion of provision for the very young and concomitantly the development of associated employment opportunities. This has resulted in the development of courses to prepare new employees and the publishing of relevant new texts. Whilst frequently neglected in the past there is now more interest in the whole nature of early childhood, how children develop and appropriate forms of education for young children. This growing interest in the content and nature of early childhood education is reflected in increased political involvement. Provision has become more formal at an earlier age and there is pressure to use the early years to prepare for the strictures of the National Curriculum. Experience in literacy, numeracy and basic formal learning is increasingly being presented as a way of helping young children prepare to engage with the National Curriculum and its assessment. Thus the education of even the youngest children is subsumed within the drive to raise standards, modernize education and, ultimately, develop the labour force.

This contrasts with other approaches which hold play and the development of the individual child to be central. The aim here is to keep education for the young child informal and for it to be based upon freedom of expression and experimentation for as long as possible. Chapter 2 shows how even in these initial stages education can involve tensions between this self-development of the individual and external direction or control.

The following three chapters on differentiation of schooling and pedagogy, special needs and education, and citizenship for social justice apply with equal relevance to all sectors of education. Chapter 3 explores both the growth of differentiated instructional

and assessment practices and the structural features of schooling policy which serve to create differentiated systems for pupils and students. Taking developments in the UK over the past decade, the emergence of differentiation as a discrete set of pedagogic strategies is analysed. Diana Burton discusses a range of research conducted during the 1990s into the educational achievement of pupils when calls for differentiated classroom approaches were at their height. This is contextualized within the changes taking place to the content and assessment of the National Curriculum and the publishing of league tables of examination results. Current legislative developments and proposals are outlined, including the creation of specialist schools, the establishment of an academy for the gifted and talented and changes to the 14–19 curriculum. These issues are set against the backcloth of competition for places in education and, later, for employment. The chapter highlights the conflict between viewing differentiation as a means of catering equally for every individual student's needs and as a means of preparing pupils for their future place in a stratified society.

Looking at special needs in education, Peter Clough and Philip Garner examine what is meant by the term special needs and how our understanding of the concept has altered over time. Chapter 4 considers learning, physical, emotional and behavioural difficulties in particular. Changes in the type and status of educational provision for those with special needs are evaluated alongside the policies of inclusion which form a central part of current government policy. These encourage the participation of all regardless of difference. The chapter reveals, however, that changes in provision may, whilst using the rhetoric of inclusion, be continuing to reinforce former divisions.

Citizenship is very topical at present, with the current government committed to it becoming a compulsory National Curriculum subject from September 2002. In Chapter 5 we see that citizenship is a complex social construct that can be interpreted in different ways. It may stress the active involvement of individuals in the development of their society and encourage constructive criticism. However, on the other hand, to be a good citizen may be seen to involve obedience, unquestioning loyalty to the state and being prepared to play one's part in ensuring the continuation of the social 'consensus'. Thus education systems may be considered to promote individual freedom and responsibility or they may be

regarded as an apparatus of state control. Due to the myriad of interpretations and uses to which the concept of citizenship can be put, Dean Garratt emphasizes in this chapter that too simplistic an analysis of citizenship is always likely to be inadequate.

All sectors of education underwent substantial change in the second half of the twentieth century. The development of market forces in education, the introduction of new teaching and learning technologies and the call for more accountability in the public sector significantly affected the work of teachers. The changing nature of teacher professionalism and the development of new management cultures in schools is examined in Chapter 6. Here, Steve Bartlett and Diana Burton explore how the professional status of teachers is currently being promoted by politicians. However, it is contended that the focus on achieving classroom targets based upon pupil performance has led to a more technicist approach to teaching and a more restricted form of professionalism than existed previously. Certainly the work of teachers is now focused in, rather than beyond, the classroom.

Chapter 7 considers associated issues within the curriculum for 16–18-year-olds. James Avis analyses the rapid increase in demand for post-16 education, the nature of an academic/vocational divide in the sector resulting from high-status A-levels and low-status vocational qualifications, and developments which have taken place in order to resolve these issues. Rather than being primarily concerned with the detail of changes to systems, the chapter analyses the political rhetoric that emphasizes the need to develop a highly skilled, adaptable workforce in order to remain competitive in world markets against the reality of low-skills training for a low-skills economy. A model comprising Fordism, post-Fordism and neo-Fordism is used to evaluate developments in post-compulsory education. It is at this point that world economic developments appear to be a useful means of justification for policy by national governments.

Pursuing the perceived political necessity to educate more of the population to higher levels for economic reasons, Anne-Marie Bathmaker (in Chapter 8) considers the expansion of higher education, reviewing the change in philosophy in England from Robbins to Dearing. Alongside the need to open up higher education (HE) to a greater proportion of the population there is the question of who pays for it. This was not such a problem when comparatively small

numbers of students could be supported by state grants in their studies as undergraduates. It is much more of an issue in a mass system where the majority of young people are expected to partake of some form of HE. The problem for the politicians has been how to expand student numbers whilst keeping costs as low as possible yet not compromising the quality of the education received. The political solution to this issue has resulted in massive change in the nature of the student experience and academic life. The chapter charts the rapid expansion in student numbers that has been achieved largely by the increasing control of successive governments over HE through funding of universities and colleges, the development of competition between increasingly diverse providers of HE and the introduction of student loans and fees. Once again we are left considering if such change heralds the opening up of opportunity for all sections of society or if the same old divisions remain largely unaltered.

Following on from the analyses of post-compulsory and higher education, Steve Bartlett (in Chapter 9) considers the process of lifelong learning, which is rapidly increasing in importance, at least in terms of political rhetoric. The concept of lifelong learning, and its development as an educational construct, draws together many of the issues discussed in previous chapters. A highly skilled, adaptable workforce is said to be needed to maintain and develop our competitive edge in world markets. Indeed, it is assumed that we now operate in a 'knowledge economy' in which continuous learning is of increasing value as changes in technology mean that there is a constant need for all to update skills. To fall behind in technological development would result in a low-skills, low-wage economy such as operates in the third world. Thus lifelong learning is a crucial part of Labour's modernization project. These vocational applications of lifelong learning link it closely to developments in post-compulsory education, HE and training. It is important, though, to realize that the term 'lifelong' means that it is relevant to all sectors of education and to learners of any age. The critical question is whether we are seeing the development of true lifelong learning for its own sake or if the whole policy is merely a sophisticated means of enforcing training and retraining on different sections of the population. Perhaps this is an example of how governments use the rhetoric of globalization, international capitalism and competition to develop their own education and training policies.

Up to this point we have considered educational developments as they relate to England, in particular, though, many of these can be applied more widely to other western industrial societies. In Chapter 10 education is examined as a positive force for development in third-world countries. However, Tim Wright also presents an alternative perspective showing that the 'exporting' of education from the 'developed' west leads to the domination of particular forms of knowledge and ideologies. From this second viewpoint education and knowledge are seen as a means by which colonial powers are able to maintain their hold over colonies or newly independent nations.

Having looked at a range of key areas of development in education it is clear that there were great changes in the last quarter of the twentieth century. What is apparent is the growing awareness of international transference of educational ideas and policies. Certainly the development of world markets and global competition has had considerable impact upon the lives of us all and on the policies of individual governments, particularly from the 1970s. In the final chapter (Chapter 11) John Robinson considers globalization and its impact upon education. He examines the meaning of the term globalization and how it is reflected in worldwide developments in education. Globalization is seen as a positive development for some groups signalling improved standards of living and increased wealth. For other sections of the world population, however, the impact of globalization has been more negative, bringing increased poverty and domination by international corporations.

In this volume we have examined a number of key issues in education studies. Though each chapter is looking at very different aspects of education there are a number of common threads that run through the book which students can analyse at different levels. In recognizing that we need to examine individual, organizational, national and global dimensions in our search for greater understanding, readers of this book can apply aspects of the authors' analyses to other educational settings, issues and developments. For instance, students may be interested in some of the issues which we have not been able to explore in this volume:

● The political drive within UK higher education for universities to select their mission as either teaching or research.

- The increasingly divisive effect on UK students of differential living costs between the north and south and the associated impact of the likely differential fee levels between old and new universities.
- The university in the community – links with local industry and regional economic development.
- The range of school-level initiatives designed to raise standards in areas of urban deprivation – e.g. Excellence in Cities (which have evolved from Education Action Zones), dissemination of best practice via advanced skills teachers and teacher sabbaticals for those working in challenging schools.
- The effect of integrationist policies within a pluralist society on ethnic and religious minorities' educational goals – for instance, the growth of single-faith schools and competing discourses around educational research (e.g. the emphasis on classroom-based research underpinned by a received view of 'effective' classroom practices competes with a problematizing approach wherein policy is critiqued rather than justified).
- The development of new thinking about how people learn, how brains function or how emotional intelligence impacts on educational performance.

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