

Privatisation, Education and Social Justice, edited by Geoffrey Walford

Abingdon: Routledge, 2016, 150pp., £95 (hbk), ISBN 978-1-138-95439-7

The nine chapters in this book provide diverse perspectives on the controversial relationship between privatization, education (schools, in this case), and social justice from well-known academics in the field. They are based on articles first appearing as a special issue of the *Oxford Review of Education* (Volume 39, Issue 4).

The nine chapters include an introduction by Walford, which recognizes the growing diversity of forms of privatization around the world. He says that the book is part of the Privatisation in Education Research Initiative (PERI) funded by the Open Society Foundation's Education Support Programme and that the chapters extend key debates as well as providing empirical research. He clearly summarizes the chapters yet, understandably, does not attempt to bring them together in a single conversation. A single conversation would be difficult as different understandings of social justice (as well as of other central concepts such as 'choice') underpin each chapter.

I found the chapters that recognized social justice as multidimensional to be the strongest theoretically. These include chapters drawing on the work of Young (for example, 2002 [2000]) and Fraser (for example, 1997), who both understand social justice as more than redistribution. Robertson and Dale's chapter draws on Young and clearly shows why a focus on redistributing educational 'outputs' is always an inadequate model for social justice in education. They give a 'relational account' arguing for the significance of educational governance for social justice. Tooley's chapter on what he describes as 'grassroots' privatization in sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia follows. He justifiably rejects what he refers to as Rawls's 'transcendental institutionalism' as an approach to social justice, although this approach is not used in other chapters in this collection (again making the book feel less like a conversation than it might have done). Instead he draws on Sen (2009), who makes valuable points about 'practical reason' (9). In applying this, Tooley appears to understand education in terms of inputs and outputs and to conflate the considerations underpinning choices by individual parents with those underpinning the choices faced by policy actors. However, Sen's emphasis on a contextualized understanding is important and it could be productive to draw on Sen in conjunction with Fraser's understanding of social justice as consisting of redistribution, recognition, and representation, as discussed by Power and Taylor in their chapter on the multifaceted nature of social justice.

Bray and Kwo, in their chapter, are particularly successful in recognizing the diverse histories of public education around the world and the significance of this. They discuss the vast scale of private tutoring, which they describe as 'shadow education', and reflect on the implications of this for social justice in relation to the right to education.

The remaining chapters use the particular contexts of their research to make broader points. Lubienski uses his chapter on charter schools in the USA to demonstrate that the privatization of policymaking itself is a significant form of privatization. Levin, Cornelisz, and Hanisch-Cerda discuss the Dutch school system in terms of trade-offs between private gains and equity and social cohesion. Their conclusions stem from an analysis that presents schooling as having a list of apparently incompatible goals. Walford explores the social justice implications of using private schools in India's right to education policy by comparing this with the defunct British Assisted Places Scheme. Härmä explores the limited 'choices' of parents in a slum area of Lagos between inadequate government schools and low-quality private schools that significantly impact their household budgets. She concludes that private schools operate as 'a temporary solution for those families who can afford to pay: a much needed bandage over the problem of providing free, good quality basic education to all' (144).

The chapters in the book, with the exception of a discussion of Education for All by Bray and Kwo, do not take a rights approach to social justice. However, the right to education needs to

be an important consideration in this conversation. Significantly, in June 2016, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child stated that ‘low fee’ private schools ‘may contribute to sub-standard education, less investment in free and quality public schools, and deepened inequalities in the recipient countries, leaving behind children who cannot afford even low-fee schools’. It recommended that the Department for International Development (DfID) should ‘ensure that its international development cooperation supports the recipient States in guaranteeing the right to free compulsory primary education for all, by prioritizing free and quality primary education in public schools, refraining from funding for-profit private schools, and facilitating registration and regulation of private schools.’ (CRC, 2016: 4). This statement is important as an assertion that children’s rights are an important dimension of social justice. It is also a reminder of the role of international ‘development’ actors such as DfID and the World Bank in promoting ‘low-fee’ private schools. This challenges Tooley’s claim that such privatization is a ‘grassroots’ movement, as does the existence of his own chain of ‘low cost private schools’ (Omega Schools).

Changes are rapid in the field of privatizations, meaning that some detail can become out of date as it is published (especially in the case of this book, which has appeared three years after the journal). So long as this is recognized by the reader, the broader points made in the book are still of major significance. In England, for example, Power and Taylor wrote about free schools being set up by parents. However, in 2015 only 9 per cent were (Whittaker, 2016) and now all new schools are to be created as ‘free schools’ (DfE, 2016). However, the broader point made by Power and Taylor about the need for a politics of representation remains. I would argue that such a politics requires collective democratic engagement by all citizens.

In this period of rapid change on the ground, internationally and nationally, serious engagement with multidimensional theories of social justice must be central to debates on education and privatization. The original articles make a valuable contribution to the debate and have already been widely cited since their 2013 publication. As the introduction notes, it is a diverse and complex field. An ongoing conversation is much needed.

In parallel to the place of privatization in schools, it is disappointing that the operation of the publishing market has led to this book being priced out of the reach of most people outside institutions with a subscription to the original special issue.

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