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***Knowledge and the Study of Education: An international exploration*, edited by Geoff Whitty and John Furlong**

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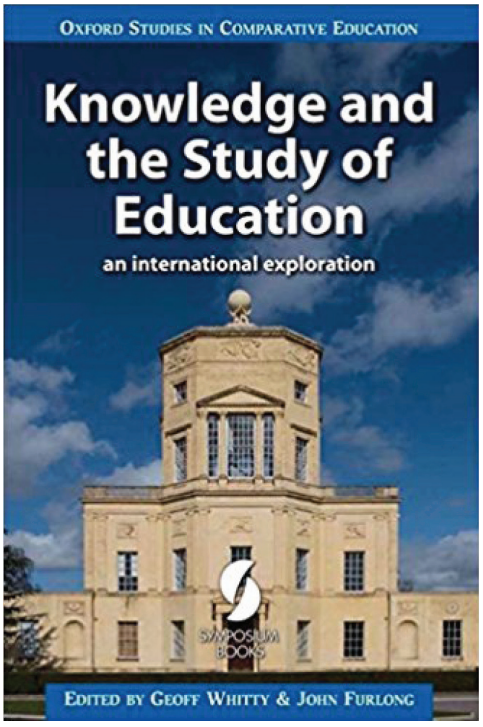

If someone asks what you do for a living and you say, 'I teach teachers', they will probably think they have some idea about your job. But saying 'I teach education' is likely, in Britain at least, to lead to an unproductive exchange on the lines of, 'Yes, but what's your actual subject?' And it is true that anyone teaching or studying education must surely have asked themselves, what exactly *is* my subject? What sort of knowledge is involved? Formal knowledge or tacit knowledge, as in a craft? Both? Tricky questions, when 'education' can be about any aspect of the whole field of human learning, and how to understand and present knowledge to that end. It seems on the face of it to be a category error to compare education with, say, chemistry, a field that chemists have clearly delineated – at least to their own satisfaction. But is it?

Whitty and Furlong tackle this central (if usually sidelined) question for educationalists in their book, and, for me, they nail it. They bring together accounts of how education is theorized, taught and studied in six countries – France, Germany, Latvia, Australia, China and the United States – and compare them with the variable picture found in the UK. These country studies are then drawn upon in a number of comparative chapters. The work of Basil Bernstein provides the sociological framework for several of these.

In their introductory chapter, Whitty and Furlong argue that the study of education in anglophone countries developed differently to the courses it took in, particularly, France and Germany. While the anglophone countries saw the study of education largely as a means to the end of training schoolteachers, in continental Europe the editors suggest that education quickly became 'a largely autonomous and coherent academic discipline … a recognised discipline in its own right' (14) – an intellectual end in itself, then, rather than merely a set of techniques.

This offers an enticing prospect, surely, for anyone working in the instrumental anglophone tradition. What, exactly, does this 'autonomous and coherent' discipline consist of, and what have Brits and others been missing? But the chapter on Germany by Jürgen Schriewer, a comparativist at Humboldt University in Berlin, will disappoint such a reader. In this telling, the study of education in Germany emerged in the period immediately after the First World War as a result of status struggles between primary schoolteachers, who wanted to gain professional legitimacy on the basis of a 'scientific' discipline based on psychology, and *Gymnasium* teachers, who allied themselves with university departments of philosophy and history. This split in educational studies appears to have continued until the Nazi takeover from 1933, when the objectives of education were promptly redefined in terms of political and ideological support for the regime. In the post-war period, German educational research focused on 'the integration of different social science disciplines … [to create] a form of interdisciplinarity considered as

indispensable for an … explanation of complex education processes' (83) – bringing together historical, philosophical and 'science of education' studies. Although this does not sound very different in practice from the anglophone approach – where 'the assumption was that disciplinary knowledge, however abstract in itself, could be a direct guide to practice' (19) – what Whitty and Furlong perhaps want to emphasize is the 'insistence of German educationalists on their field's disciplinary "autonomy" (*Eigenständigkeit*)' (87). So although German educational studies have the hybrid quality of similar studies elsewhere, those working in the field have somehow managed to create a sense of distinctiveness in terms of approach that has eluded those in other traditions.

In his concluding chapter, David Labaree from the Stanford Graduate School of Education points out the tensions that exist globally across the field of education studies, and that, it seems to me, are nicely highlighted by considering the anglophone and Germanic models. One tension is what Labaree summarizes as that between the normative and the objective, between what various national stakeholders require education to do in terms of inculcating values and attitudes on the one hand, and transmitting practical skills on the other. As we noted, the German *Gymnasium* tradition placed emphasis on the former, while the English (at least) tradition has focused on practical, perhaps narrower, educational skills – which of course has not prevented politicians demanding from time to time that particular values are highlighted in the school curriculum. Another of Labaree's tensions is between seeing education as a group of discipline-based activities, and seeing it as a discipline in itself, or at least as an interdisciplinary field, based around the school setting. Again, the Anglo-German axis shows that this tension is a problematic one in practice.

Labaree suggests that the cause of the 'apparent inefficiency of education is that we cannot agree on what goals we want it to accomplish' (280). These goals might include nation-building, human capital development and gaining social advantage. (Personal emancipation might be another.) Labaree argues that 'the global education reform movement', and its 'policy police' in the form of PISA (281), is producing an unhealthy focus on just one of these goals, human capital development, at the expense of rich, differential national educational traditions. That is to say, the national variations that this book analyses should be seen as a source of strength, not as some kind of failure to find a global 'one best way'.

Anyone working in education, particularly those teaching it and researching it – and whether you regard it as a coherent discipline or as a collection of disparate, possibly contradictory, disciplines – will find this book deeply thought-provoking.

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