

IEI in the 1930s. It is a book that should be welcomed for re-discovering a forgotten transatlantic initiative of the past, but its contribution is essentially methodological. It does not approach the question of whether there are lessons to be learned from the past. Might cross-border initiatives in the area of examinations and assessment be a worthwhile project for the twenty-first century?

As with many collections of essays, the chapters are variable in their approaches and quality. The reader might wish for a stronger editorial line on the organization of chapters, the balance of narrative and analysis and the presentation of conclusions. Intervention to modify some quirky subheadings, notably in the chapter on Switzerland, would also have been welcome. The volume is attractively priced, but it is a great pity, given the rich mix of international personnel featuring in the book, that there is no index.

## Reference

Lawn, M., and I. Grosvenor, eds. 2005. *Materialities of schooling: Design, technology, objects, routines*. Oxford: Symposium Books.

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**Education, equality and social cohesion: a comparative analysis**, by Andy Green, John Preston and Jan German Janmaat, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, 226 pp., £17.99 (pbk), ISBN 9780-2302-2363-9

Overviews of broad policy themes are rarely satisfying. They are often either so general as to lack flavour, or offer spicy critique at the expense of evidence. Recent interest among western governments in lifelong learning has brought further temptations to conceptual sloppiness. To some extent, ideas of lifelong learning are so broad as to encompass virtually any learning, regardless of its content or context; yet they can also represent an attempt to institutionalize the informal learning of everyday life and group together the various locations of that learning. Little wonder, then, that policy researchers have tended either to gorge themselves in the detailed smorgasbord of individuals' lives, or pick away at a more or less elegantly formed critique. What we lack are theoretically informed analyses that are grounded in robust evidence of trends and patterns over time.

Or rather, we did. *Education, equality and social cohesion* is an outstanding study of contemporary education policies, understood in a dynamic socio-economic context. It is concerned with one of the great questions in the sociology of education, namely the relationship between education systems and social equality. It analyses an impressive body of evidence, much of drawn from existing cross sectional survey data, which the authors then marshal and compare at national level. The authors draw on a range of different surveys in order to establish relationships between different factors, covering an impressive range of countries. So, for instance, they examine the extent to which a nation's education and skills are positively associated with trust (very much so), associational memberships (weakly or negatively), tolerance (multi-faceted and complex) and income inequality (clearly negatively). They explore the relationship between inequalities of attainment on the one hand and average attainment on the other, showing that countries with narrow skills distributions tend to show lower average attainment than countries

with a large gap between the strongest and weakest performers. They consider the impact of comprehensive education systems and ethnic diversity.

The analysis itself is systematic, and the explanations are invariably careful and often far-reaching. While emphasizing the need for further research, the book reaches a clear conclusion, arguing that their evidence shows definitively that excellence and equality, far from being incompatible, are closely intertwined. This conclusion is compatible with other recently studies, undertaken independently, notably that by Desjardins and Milana, who have produced detailed accounts of the Scandinavian cases. Nevertheless, the book is also highly original, and offers an unparalleled range of evidence to support its case.

This is, then, an unusually important study, and the original hardback edition was rightly praised on its appearance (indeed, some rather impressive scholarly names are dutifully quoted on the back cover). It is, or certainly ought to be, a landmark study. Future work on education and equality should start by engaging with its argument. It will also be widely cited by scholars interested in wider social theory, and has relevant things to say to those working on areas such as stratification, social capital, or social policy. As with any study, there are limitations and weak points. Because of its likely influence on the field, it might be helpful to note some of the more significant here. First is the use of the nation state as the basic unit of analysis. While I accept the authors' case for shifting the analysis away from the individual, their approach is to assume that nationhood is itself an unambiguous basis for comparative analysis. Given this, they are sensibly silent on some of the key contextual issues, writing of educational 'systems' as though these are simply tantamount to the national publicly funded institutions of each nation. This needs problematizing in future studies. Many of the institutions that support lifelong learning, from the family through workplaces to the various voluntary bodies that provide for third age learning, are not necessarily part of the state and often do not correspond to its boundaries. Also, the nature of the nation varies enormously. To take an obvious example, some countries are very small and others are large; size itself is an independent variable, as sociologists of small states often argue. Some devolve educational policy to extremely local levels (Switzerland), in others it is highly centralized (France). In particular, it is inadequate to refer to and treat the American states or German *Länder* as 'regions'. Future work should have a more differentiated approach to nationhood, if indeed that contested notion is to remain the basic unit of comparative analysis.

There are also likely to be challenges to the sections that deal with ethno-linguistic diversity. Seeking a survey-based indicator that would allow them to examine the impact of ethno-linguistic diversity on educational performance, the authors opted for a single measure – language – as representing 'the crucial cleavage in liberal nationalist philosophy' (93). This is, though, a rather unsatisfactory indicator of diversity, lumping together autochthonous languages like Breton, Sorbisch or Basque with Hindi, Arabic and Swahili, as well as ignoring the differences between contexts where language plays a part in tense ethnically defined conflicts and those where different linguistic groups simply rub along. Using their language indicator, the authors find that ethno-linguistic diversity is entirely compatible with high levels of social trust and national pride, and conclude that it does no harm to social cohesion. Other diversity indicators, though, might produce quite different results.

Finally, some of the authors' judgements show a tendency to over-generalization. To take just one example, the authors claim that there is a 'close correlation' between coefficients of income inequality for fifteen countries on the one hand, and their own combined index (drawn from the World Values Survey) for social cohesion on the other. This is supported by a scatter diagram showing the relationship, which on my own reading suggests that the relationship may be negative, as claimed, but is not all that close. For some readers, this example might also raise the question of the ecological fallacy, but I had fewer doubts on that score, not least because

the findings for different measures are relatively consistent. In addition, the findings also show a clearly identifiable Nordic grouping. However, the authors then follow and adapt Esping-Anderson in categorizing other welfare, and educational systems, as Nordic, Anglo-Saxon, 'core Europe' (a particularly questionable category) and Southern Europe. This model only works if findings that inconveniently do not fit the model are spirited away. Given the authors' role in leading a major new research programme on the knowledge society, this conceptualization of welfare regimes needs some serious challenging.

While these are important limitations, they should not in any way be seen as undermining the value of an extraordinarily important study. A less important cause for complaint lies in the publisher's failure to tackle the many misprints that littered the original hardback, as well as the occasional missing reference. *Education, equality and social cohesion* is one of the most important educational studies in the last decade, and anyone – policy makers particularly – interested in lifelong learning should be made to read it before being allowed out of their office. It demonstrates clearly that how education is distributed, and the values that guide distributional patterns, are vital to the outcomes of any education system.

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**The common school and the comprehensive ideal: a defence by Richard Pring with complementary essays**, edited by Mark Halstead and Graham Haydon, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2008, 339 pp., £19.99 (pbk), ISBN 978-1-4051-3738-1

This outstanding collection of essays is published in memory of Terry McLaughlin who was Professor of Philosophy of Education at the Institute of Education, University of London, until his sudden and untimely death at the age of 56. As his successor, Paul Standish, says in the preface, issues relating to the common school were a significant feature of his work over many years and this book is a fitting tribute to his long-lasting contribution to the debate.

The contributors are some of the most distinguished people working in philosophy of education today, and a review of this kind cannot do justice to the richness and diversity of the topics addressed. After a wide-ranging discussion by Richard Pring, exploring the nature of and rationale for the common school, the editors assist the reader by grouping the chapters into five parts.

Part I, 'Defending and questioning the comprehensive ideal', contains a useful introductory essay by Graham Haydon who reminds us that it is far from self-evident what exactly it is to which one is committed when supporting either the notion of a common school or the comprehensive ideal. Haydon skilfully weaves in the views of the various contributors to such questions, and the respects in which most see the notion of a common school as a response to pluralism. The plurality of values, on which so many of the contributors rely are, according to Haydon, those relating to community, justice, equality, respect, freedom and non-discrimination. This section of the book contains essays by Michael Fielding, on the necessity of radical state education, Robin Barrow on the need for some important distinctions and Harry Brighouse on justice in education.

Barrow is persuasive on the need to provide children with 'the idea of experiencing difference as such... rather than introducing all children to all varieties of person, value and culture' (60). He sees it as fallacious to conclude that a common schooling entails a common curriculum