

Editorial BJSE SI

Educational inclusion: towards a social justice agenda?

Social justice and inclusion are complex and contested terms that feature prominently in current global and national education policy rhetoric. The latest Global Monitoring Report (UNESCO 2014) for example, assesses progress against the Education for All (EFA) goalsⁱ that were established in 2000 with the aim of securing universal access for all children to basic education by 2015. The EFA framework, along with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals is underpinned by a particular view of social justice as ‘distributional justice’ (Gewirtz 1998) and an assumption that the provision of standardized systems of teaching, learning and assessment to support ‘the weakest learners’ will bring about ‘equality for all’ (EFA 2014, i). However, as Connell (2012) has argued, social justice in education is not just about equality in the distribution of, or access to, an educational service, which is important, but ‘social justice concerns the nature of the service itself, and its consequences for society through time’ (681).

What Connell means is that the shape and direction of education is never neutral but is influenced and structured by dominant agendas and interests that shift over time to reinforce and reproduce particular forms of privilege and inequality. In the last two decades, education sociologists have mapped the various ways in which neoliberal policies have come to be embedded and resisted within educational sectors – albeit unevenly across different locales and with different effects. This has resulted, as Ozga (2011, 307) notes, in market mechanisms displacing the state, services being outsourced to hybrid public-private organisations, and an increasing devolution of responsibility for self-management, choice-making and the management of risk to individuals and families and away from state institutions. In terms of education policy making, transnational actors such as the World Bank the IMF and the OECD - organizations that were established in post World War II period, have, since the 1990s, increasingly shaped the direction of national education systems towards what Amin (2010) has called a ‘Western-centric’ project of neoliberal governance.

Even before the onset of the Global Financial Crisis in 2008, it was clear that neoliberal policies had not delivered the promised economic growth and that income inequalities had increased (see for example International Labour Office and United Nations reports and analysis (Peck and Tickell 2002, Jessop 2002, Harvey 2005, Amin 2010). However, the

austerity measures that have imposed large public spending cuts in countries such as Portugal, Spain, Ireland and Greece have further sharpened longstanding inequalities by hitting directly on the state's ability to deliver on equity. In England, a series of policy changes since 2010, including the scrapping of the Educational Maintenance Allowance, the rise in higher education tuition fees to £9000, the expansion of Academies and the introduction of Free Schools point towards greater educational disadvantage for already marginalized groups. Those most affected include poor, working class and minority ethnic young people particularly in relation to their entrance into higher education, and consequently their chances of social mobility and future success in the labour market (Sutton Trust 2013).

It is against this background that this special issue explores notions of inclusion and social justice in educational settings ranging from elementary schools to higher education. The nine papers inevitably discuss a selection of social justice and inclusion issues and all but one focuses on education in the 'neoliberal heartlands' (Peck and Tickell 2002) of Western Europe, North America and Australia where market-oriented policies have been pursued relentlessly since the 1980s. Collectively, however, the papers explore policy, practice and pedagogical considerations covering different dimensions of (in)equality including disability, race, gender and class.

A range of 'policy buzzwords' (Cornwall and Brock 2005) appear across the papers including 'participation', 'empowerment' and 'involvement' and are critically explored in terms of their potential for genuine inclusion or whether, paradoxically, they support the further marginalization of already marginalized groups. While the articles focus primarily on student experience and the social policy contexts that underpin these experiences, research (Bhopal and Jackson 2013) suggests that despite the existence of 'equality and diversity' frameworks in England, Black and minority ethnic academics continue to experience racism, discrimination and marginalisation in higher education institutions with few such staff promoted to senior grades. Higher Education Statistical Agency data in 2012/13 (HESA 2014) showed that only 85 out of a total of 17,880 professors were Black (less than 1%), 950 were Asian (5%), 365 were 'other' and the overwhelming majority, 15,200 were White (85%). Less than 1% of senior managers are Black; 3% Asian and 92% White. If such inequalities continue to persist for staff in higher education, then how can we move towards greater equity for the students we teach?

Meshulam and Apple draw on the case study of a U.S. public elementary bilingual and multicultural school. They highlight the challenges involved in enacting social justice even in a school which has a history of fighting for it. Despite being a pioneer of an 'inclusive' multicultural curriculum, the onslaught of neoliberal policies have resulted in the school paradoxically reinforcing the cultural domination, marginalization, and at times exclusion of African Americans in ways that reproduce the unequal and racialised social structure in U.S. society. Konrad, Grant, Floch and Swenson discuss the closure in 2013 of 50 of the 54 Chicago public schools. Drawing on a 'critical spatial perspective' in which school closures are seen as counterproductive to the 'rights to the city', they also find that it is African Americans who continue to be disadvantaged. The authors argue for increased democratic participation from students, parents and community leaders who are involved in urban school systems on a national and international basis to resist these new forms of gentrification and colonisation.

Gale and Hodge draw on Australia as a case study for exploring the 'policy effects' (Ball 1993) of current social inclusion policy in higher education within OECD nations. They argue that a new 'imaginary' has emerged in the 'Asian Century', about higher education's role in interrupting the declining advantage of OECD nations in the 'rapidly changing profile of the global economy'. This new imaginary supports an expansionist agenda that shows evidence of widening access to education; however, it fails to translate into a second order effect of challenging existing relations of domination. Staying with Australia and a focus on the OECD's role in the global governance of education, Seller, Lingard and Savage examine the ways in which social justice is being rearticulated as 'equity' in education policies through the mechanism of national and global testing, such as the National Assessment Programs; literacy, numeracy and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). They conclude that standardised systems of measurement and comparison 'have become central in contemporary education policy regimes and this has weakened the influence of conceptual-discursive accounts of what constitutes social justice schooling'.

Kelly and Bhabha's paper moves the focus to secondary education in rural India. Drawing on Connell's gender and power framework, they explore the gendered power dynamics which restrict girls from benefiting from widened access to secondary education. The authors question whether the Indian government's focus on extending education programs to girls can deliver equal opportunities for girls. Without challenging existing material inequalities and

the dominant cultural values and patriarchal frameworks than underpin family and education systems, Kelly and Bhaba see the possibilities for a redistribution of opportunity as not only limited but as potentially further marginalising based on gender, class and caste. Mac an Ghaill and Haywood explore what inclusion/exclusion means to a group of young British Pakistani and Bangladeshi men in English Schools against the backdrop of the global war on terror. Focusing their analysis on reconstructions of masculinity, class and the emergence of a schooling regime which operates through neoliberal policies, they note ‘the increasing ambivalence surrounding race/ethnicity and the growing visibility of a neo-conservative nationalism that impels an absolute cultural (moral) difference means that categories of same and other are moving into sharper distinction’.

Veck locates his discussion of austerity policies and approaches to understanding the education of disabled people in the United Kingdom in relation to the decline of community and the longing for its existence. Drawing on the work of Arendt and Bauman, Veck argues that, ‘...in a society where individuals are increasing indifferent to one another, addressing disability means defending community and its possibilities for generating and sustaining caring, responsive and inclusive relationships’. Busher, James, Piela and Palmer focus on adult learner identities in ‘access to higher education’ courses delivered in the further education sector in England. Their study explores how students enhance their social and cultural capital by being active participants in their learning in which they worked with teachers to form communities of practice, intentional learning communities and emergent communities.

Finally, drawing on a Critical Race Theory, D’Arcy focuses on the policy of Elective Home Education (EHE) for Traveller families in England which facilitates the exclusion of Traveller children, D’Arcy challenges the dominant discourse which suggests that EHE represents ‘free choice’ deriving from Travellers’ mobility. Instead she finds that the take-up of EHE is often linked to the experience of racism and discrimination so that families who are deeply committed to their child’s education are forced to make the choice to home school their children.

The papers presented in this issue enable us to reflect on the establishment of neoliberalism, as the new global orthodoxy in the field of education and to begin to analyse what this means for social justice and inclusion. The papers do raise possibilities for hope and resistance drawing attention to established and successful attempts at democratic education or

community organisation. However, they also expose ongoing tensions between recognition and redistribution as principles for social justice and the entrenchment, under current neoliberal systems of educational provision, of longstanding patterns of (racialised, classed and gendered) privilege and disadvantage that need to be addressed.

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¹ These are to: expand early childhood care and education; provide free and compulsory primary education for all; promote learning and life skills for young people and adults; increase adult literacy by 50%; achieve gender parity in education by 2005, gender equality by 2015; improve the quality of education. Although UNESCO's statistics show that the number of children out of school fell almost of a half between 1999 and 2011, by 2011 57 million children were still out of school. In sub-Saharan Africa 22% of the region's primary school age population was still not school by 2011