

Introduction to education studies

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This textbook forms part of a five-book series, *Education Studies: Key Issues*, for which Bartlett and Burton also serve as series editors. The twelve chapters of this volume are divided into the following three sections: Education studies – An Introduction to the Field of Study; Political and Historical Dimensions of Education; and Achievement in Education.

In the first chapter, *What is Education Studies?*, the reader is introduced to how the contributing disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and philosophy serve to inform a formal study of education; the reader is also invited to reflect back on his/her own educational journey and related events as a means to providing contextualisation for the new learning. In Chapter 2, *The Nature of Education*, the authors discuss the meaning of education, sociological purposes (e.g., basic skills development, socialisation, social order maintenance, work preparation) and processes of education (e.g., symbolic interactionism, post-structuralism, postmodernism), educational ideologies (e.g., Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau), and an interesting typology or categorisation of ideologies which include varying emphases on the individual, on knowledge, and on society. Chapter 3, *Researching Education*, focuses on the nature of research including paradigms, purposes, methodologies, ethical considerations, and various movements.

Section 2 opens with an informative chapter dealing with the modern history of schooling, primarily focusing on the large-scale legal and societal changes that have impacted education in England over the past two centuries. Topics of interest here include the first stages of elementary education, the establishment of secondary schools and local education authorities, the tripartite system, comprehensive schooling and the Education Reform Acts of 1870 and of 1988. Chapter 5, *Curriculum*, provides detailed information on the nature of curriculum, the structure of knowledge, and curriculum frameworks (i.e., pedagogy and assessment

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implications). It specifically focuses on the English National Curriculum in terms of its purposes, content, teaching, learning, assessment, criticisms and renewal. Next, *Politics and Policy in Education* provides the reader with an overview of the development of the state education system in England from the coming to power of the Thatcher Conservative government in 1979 to the present day – a prolonged shift from a comprehensive to a market forces approach to education policy. For those interested in the dynamic and critical relationship between education and politics, this chapter provides a detailed and eye-opening account of how various political parties, platforms, players and contemporary issues have deeply influenced and shaped an educational system over time. In Chapter 7, *Globalization and Comparative Education*, the authors discuss the meaning of globalisation, different perspectives on its effects, as well as the nature of comparative methodologies.

The third and final section of the text includes five chapters, beginning with Chapter 8, *Individual Achievement: Major Psychological Theories*, which focuses on the individual and achievement from a psychological perspective. Major perspectives on learning are outlined, including behaviourism, Gestalt theory, Piaget's cognitive-developmental theory, personality theory, humanist theory, and the information-processing approach. In *Education and Psychological Research*, the authors examine psychological developments that have been influential within education since the 1970s (e.g., social constructivism, multiple and emotional intelligences, situated cognition, metacognition), as well as learning styles and advances in brain research (neuroscience). Chapter 10 focuses on social/class factors, gender, ethnicity, and related achievement within schooling. In Chapter 11, *Organizing Teaching and Learning*, the authors examine pedagogical trends since the 1950s including streaming (i.e., tracking) of learners, mixed-ability groupings, differentiation, personalised learning and psychopedagogy.

In Chapter 12, *Education – A Contested Enterprise*, Bartlett and Burton contend that “to study education in any meaningful way requires an awareness of the interrelationship between the different disciplines involved, that is it requires a multidisciplinary approach” (p. 312). They briefly discuss related topics such as theory and practice in education, higher education, lifelong learning, early childhood, special needs and inclusion, social justice and organisation theory. Finally, the authors conclude that the textbook demonstrates the importance of treating education as a field of study in its own right, thereby allowing the reader to look at the major issues, structural features, and sources of controversy in education critically, and with the ability to create and ask meaningful questions (p. 324).

As is to be expected in any third edition, this textbook is very clean in terms of typographical errors. Each chapter is furnished with a synopsis paragraph, embedded “Reader Reflection” sections, related “Student Activities”, and a list of “Recommended Readings”. The volume also includes a helpful list of abbreviations, a comprehensive bibliography, a full index of topics and a companion website.¹

My criticisms of the text are few. The authors themselves indicate that the book “has limited itself to a consideration of the English education system” and that this

¹ www.uk.sagepub.com/bartlett3e.

focus might potentially have made them “blind to alternatives and may [have led them] to assume that other parts of the world have had similar experiences to [their] own” (p. 323). While I do not feel that the text itself reveals any such major shortcomings (particularly since the authors do reference international trends, authors, philosophies, etc. throughout the work), the fact that the text does primarily focus on the English education tradition does make me wonder if perhaps this should be reflected in the book title, for the sake of clarity. Having taught education studies courses at the graduate level here in Canada, I consider this to be an important point in terms of whether or not I would be prone to select this particular text as a comprehensive, introductory work (compared, for example, with texts such as Noddings’ *Philosophy of Education*, Gewirtz and Cribb’s *Understanding Education*, or Curtis, Ward, and Sharp’s *Education Studies*). Notwithstanding these remarks, Bartlett and Burton’s *Introduction to Education Studies* represents a fine piece of scholarship and research, a text both readable in its approach and stimulating in its presentation for the contemporary student of education; arguably a particularly recommendable work for those teaching and learning within the English system.