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## **Book Review**

Hill, D. & Cole, M. (2001) (eds) *Schooling and equality: fact, concept and policy*. London: Kogan Page Limited.  
ISBN 0 749 43370 (hb) 0 7 494 33698 (pb)

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In a series of accessibly written sketches, this book makes an important contribution towards a critical understanding of the political dynamics associated with the persistence of inequality in education under a regime of quite radical government educational policy changes since the 1970s. While the book draws on the British experience its analyses will resonate in other English-speaking countries.

The issue of inequality is one which strikes at the heart of what education in a modern society ought to be about and its cause and persistence for education practitioners needs explanation especially in the current crisis of education restructuring.

The strength of the book lies in its attempt to fulfil this need through a critical methodology which clarifies the concepts involved, presents the fact of inequality as it occurs in some of its various forms and offers a way forward towards a positive and progressive education based on the principles of equality. These three aspects structure the book's content as well as the individual chapters. They are, as it were, the guiding thread throughout the book.

With policy as its focus, Part I takes the reader through the ideologies that have shaped and are shaping government education policy; through some of the ways in which inequality is maintained; and through some of the strategies for promoting equality in education. Part II presents the facts of inequality, a reality check so to speak, in those areas in which inequality is manifested in a major way.

In detail: Chapter 1 by Dave Hill introduces those ideologies and their underlying principles, namely social democracy, liberal progressivism, radical Left and Right, neo liberalism and neo conservatism, which have been influential in the formulation of education policy and debate in Britain since 1945. He

concludes the chapter with a critique of the New Labour government's policies and by way of contrast provides a summary of a radical left framework for education and equality.

In Chapter 2, Hill situates the issue of equality and inequality in schools and the education system in the broader context of economic rationalism, globalisation and the world-wide restructuring of education and schooling. He examines the theoretical assumptions of economic rationalism and the effects of this ideology in education and society. Finally, Hill identifies three factors, infrastructural conditions, consumer related regulation and legitimisation, which tend to limit economic rationalism's activities.

In Chapter 3 Kenneth Dunkwu discusses the concepts of pluralism, relativism and cultural 'assimilation' which have also influenced government policy-making. He summarises the impact on education policy of political and economic developments during the 1970s and 1980s; and finally focuses on research, its use and abuse in education and the significant role it can play in developing education policy and practice for equality.

In Chapter 4 Leena Helavaara Robertson and Rachel Hill report on a small-scale research project which identifies types of exclusion as experienced and understood by students within the school and in the wider social context. They outline the ways in which exclusion occurs in schools and explore children's perspectives of the exclusion process in an attempt to identify those characteristics which make children more 'at risk' of exclusion than others. Of particular interest is their critique of the literacy hour program in relation to inclusion and bilingual children.

In Chapter 5 Dave Hill examines the political nature of the construction of the National Curriculum with reference to how the formal and hidden curricula impact on equality in schooling. In this task Hill draws on the work of Althusser and Bourdieu. The National Curriculum, he concludes, constitutes the imposition of ruling class knowledge and its enforcement is ensured through legislative and statutory regulations. Hill sees his analysis as contributing to the critical development of radical strategies for resistance and for alternative egalitarian processes in a contentious and contested area of education.

In Chapter 6 Chris Gaine considers the processes and factors in the management, practicalities and success of change. It is important in his view for equality activists who are not primarily concerned with this side of change to understand, analyse and encourage egalitarian change in schools and classrooms.

Each of the next five chapters sets out factual evidence and recent trends concerning equality in education and in society, and the authors evaluate the various explanations for the inequalities. In Chapter 7, Mike Cole and Dave Hill examine social class; in Chapter 8, Tim Waller, Dave Hill and Mike Cole study 'race'; Kate Hirom focuses on gender in Chapter 9; in Chapter 10 Iain

Williamson looks at sexuality; while Richard Rose, in Chapter 11, examines special education needs.

While most of the contributors include some historical data in their essays as befits a critical approach Kevin Myers and Ian Grosvenor in Chapter 12 adopt a historical framework as the basis of their analysis in order to find an explanation for the persistence of prejudice against ostracised groups. For Myers and Grosvenor tracing the history of settlement and education in Britain of children of refugee and asylum seekers not only provides a way of understanding the contemporary experience of exclusion of refugee children but also reveals instances and examples of resistance to intolerance and racism. Their conclusion is that a critical reading of history offers not just a means of understanding the past but concrete examples of how to organise change for the future.

In the Conclusion of the book Mike Cole cites Richard Johnson's 1979 book 'Really useful knowledge' in which Johnson identifies four aspects from the popular 'radical education' tradition in the period 1790—1848 which Cole claims have considerable relevance today as a guide for future radical action for equality in education.

This book is recommended not only to a general education readership but also to researchers at any level of education as a reference text. It offers a wealth of material and bibliographical detail making it a good research starting point. It would also be a boon to teacher educators and student teachers alike as an introductory text.

In my view, however, one of the main appeals of the book lies in its demonstration of the method of critique. In this regard, although the method is undeveloped and the structuring of the material somewhat forced at times resulting in a series of what appears to be unconnected parts, the book is something of a landmark in the development of a contemporary Marxian critique. The initiative is important if we are to understand why capitalism thrives and survives on inequality and how this state of affairs might be changed.