

Inclusion politics reshaped

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Robin Simmons and John Smyth (eds), *Education and Working-Class Youth: Reshaping the Politics of Inclusion*. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018. ISBN 978-3-319-90670-6

This book critically considers the dominant influence of social class in the educational experiences of working-class youth in the UK and elsewhere. As captured in the cover image, the text represents education as a cauldron or furnace capable of continually shaping and reshaping the prospects and experiences of young people. The eight chapters, written by authors based in England, Australia and the Republic of Ireland, draw on a range of conceptual frameworks, and focus on different educational settings, including schools, vocational education and universities - although they all highlight how education contributes to the marginalisation and continued disadvantage of working-class youth. The book covers contemporary issues such as Brexit and austerity education, whilst also adopting a socio-historical lens, emphasising the effects of de-industrialisation on coalmining communities and others from working-class backgrounds. It also draws attention to the reality that, despite numerous educational reforms and initiatives, little has changed to ameliorate multiple disadvantages faced by those from working-class backgrounds.

A particular feature of this book is that it draws on the work of leading scholars whose own experiences of class-based inequalities contribute to their understandings of the relationship between education and social class. Reflecting on her experiences of attending an elite university in her youth, Diane Reay provides some sobering insights into the strains and struggles experienced by working-class students in such settings. Here, Reay revisits her previous work, 'The zombie stalking English Education' (2006), and argues that little if any progress has been made in education for the working classes. She argues that social class still

haunts the English educational system, lurking as an absent presence in dominant political and educational policy discourses, yet visible in the lived experiences of students from working-class backgrounds. The notion of an invisible presence affecting the here-and-now is echoed in Geoffrey Bright's chapter on the effects of de-industrialisation in the former coalfields a generation or more after the 1984-85 strike and pit closures. Bright draws on Avery Gordon's (1997) notion of social haunting, associated with 'social violence done in the past' highlighting 'that what's been concealed is very much alive and present [and] showing up without any sign of leaving' (Gordon, 1997: p. xvi). Bright's chapter provides a detailed empirical account of the lived experiences of working-class youth in four neighbouring former coalmining villages in North Derbyshire still coming to terms with social and economic loss. James Avis's chapter, in contrast, argues that large sections of middle-class youth are now experiencing labour market precariousness, over-qualification, under-employment and increasing exploitation driven by neoliberalism and variants of contemporary capitalism. Garth Stahl deals with White working-class boys' relationship with education; Louise Archer's chapter focuses on working-class girls' experience of science in schools. Terry Hyland explores some of the philosophical debates surrounding craft and vocational learning; Dave Hill's chapter uses a range of Marxist and neo-Marxist perspectives to analyse the role of education in producing and reproducing class-based inequality over time.

Each chapter recognises that education plays an increasingly dominant role in the lives of young people and, although it has the potential to promote at least a degree of social justice, the way English education settings in particular are structured within a deeply unequal society instead exacerbates inequality and social exclusion. Simmons and Smyth conclude the text, interweaving key arguments from each chapter within broader debates

about the classed nature of education. Their candid analysis argues that the nature and purpose of participation in education vary considerably according to social class. Whilst recognising the challenges involved, Simmons and Smyth argue that there is a pressing need for change to create an education system which engages with the lived experiences of working-class youth. Taken together, this book is thought-provoking and makes an important contribution to the discipline of education and social class. It is highly recommended: educators, researchers, policy-makers and students would certainly benefit from the contributions in this book.

References

Gordon, A. (1997) *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the sociological imagination*. Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press.

Reay, D. (2006) 'The zombie stalking English schools: social class and educational inequality', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 54 (3), 288-307.
