Chapter 1, from Ross, A (Ed) 2021,*Educational Research for Social Justice: Evidence and practice from the UK*. Cham: Springer, pages 1-28 [Volume one in the series *Education Science, Evidence and the Public Good*: World Educational Research Association)

# Chapter 1

# What do educational science and the public good mean in the context of educational research for social justice?

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## Abstract

This book has been written by a group of researchers who worked together variously over 2000–2015, who broadly share a commitment to educational research that leads to social justice. This introductory chapter sets out what we understand social justice to mean, and how this gives a particular connotation to the terms ‘educational science’ and ‘the public good’. We share the same approach to the nature of educational policy research and its purposes, namely that it should be designed and conducted with the intention of illuminating or having an effect on public educational policy, and that this effect should be generally to counter the inequalities between the treatment and outcomes of different social groups within society, whether those groups were determined with respect to class, gender, ethnicity, disability, and other social categories. These values, we argue, are central and critical components of our professional and intellectual research and judgments. They contribute to what we conceive of as the public good: a society in which structural inequalities are minimised; where diverse identities are valued; outcomes (educational and other) for individuals and groups are broadly equal; all individuals are valued and have agency; and all members of society are engaged and empowered.

## Our purposes

This book has been written by a group of researchers who worked together variously between 2000 and 2015, who broadly share a commitment to educational research that leads to social justice. Our joint work was in a single research institution – the Institute for Policy Studies in Education (IPSE) – based in London Metropolitan University (UK), which collaborated with researchers across the UK and Europe, some of whom contribute here. Most of our work was funded by policy-oriented institutions, who commissioned research to meet particular briefs; some work was investigator-led, funded by research councils and foundations. We were established and developed as a research institute with a specific focus on contributing to social justice and equity in educational policy. We are thus a group of scholars who share the same approach to the nature of this kind of educational research and its purposes, namely that it should be designed and conducted with the intention of having an effect on public educational policy, and that this effect should be generally to counter the inequalities between the treatment and outcomes of different social groups within society, whether those groups were determined with respect to class, gender, ethnicity, disability, etc. This chapter sets out what we understand the terms social justice and equity to mean, and how this gives particular connotations to the terms ‘evidence’, ‘educational science’ and ‘the public good’.

We begin by setting out our objectives in writing this volume. We intend to justify a particular perception of knowledge and understanding of educational enquiry and research, examining through practical examples its foundations, validity and limits, based on the values of social justice and equity which we acknowledge in our approaches to educational inquiry, to our analysis and findings. These values, we argue, are central and critical components of our professional and intellectual research and judgments. They contribute to what we conceive of as the public good: a society in which structural inequalities are minimised, in which diverse identities are valued, and the outcomes (educational and other) for groups are broadly equal. All individuals are valued and have agency, and all members of society are engaged and empowered.

Secondly, we set out our understanding of social justice and equity, particularly as they affect educational policies and practice in the settings and contexts in which we work. This is based on a critique of the ways in which educational ‘efficiency’ is seen to trump equity in policy-making. We challenge the promotion of educational institutions as participants in the competition of league tables, and of individual learners in a zero-sum game of meritocracy. We argue that these are based on instrumental views of education and a human capital model of education that essentialises, commodifies and values a particular form of education that is underpinned by neoliberal ideology.

Thirdly, we examine how such an understanding impacts on the meaning and nature of educational science. Educational practice is contingent and contextual, taking place through a myriad of social interchanges between learners and learners, and teachers and learners. Their circumstances and settings mean that they are not necessarily reproducible, and are thus not part of those branches of science that require results to be replicated. Our scientific approach to education recognises this, and seeks to examine and describe the constraints of particular kinds of data, and to use this to both qualify and illuminate our analysis. The social construction of social structures and processes means that terms and categories are imprecise and may be understood in a variety of ways: the quantification of social categories needs to be approached with caution (and is not infrequently used by the state as a means of control and surveillance); but they can nevertheless be used in educational research in a heuristic manner. We also recognise and try to account for structural inequalities in our research approaches.

Fourthly, we consider how our understanding of social justice influences our construction of the public good. We question whether and to what extent state institutions – even in those countries that profess to be liberal democracies – can be seen as necessarily in a position to define the public good. The way in which such states have embraced international competitive league tables of ‘educational performance’ illustrates how the notion that education should be based around individual needs and aspirations has been overtaken by an assumption that league table success will lead to improved economic outcomes. There are many very germane examples of this in current UK government policies in education, most notably in England.

The emphasis on equality of opportunity over equality of outcomes is, we believe, used to justify social inequalities by victimising weaker social groups and constructing them as the authors of their own misfortunes. Our research tries to identify structural inequalities and point to their significance in educational outcomes, and is based on the premise that, if there are inequalities between groups, there should be a presumption that there are institutional prejudices behind this, at school and policy levels, and in wider society (albeit possibly unwitting and unintended prejudices).

We then briefly describe our own institutional setting, focusing particularly on the processes by which we operated. How we developed our research practice, how we recruited, and how we operated: all of these may help the reader understand how and why we believe that using educational research in the ways we describe can contribute to specifically democratic, humanistic and values-based educational development for individuals, groups and societies. This is followed by an outline of the structure of the book and the individual contributions within it.

## Towards a social justice axiology of education research

The intention of this book is to challenge what we see as the dominant epistemological norms of educational policy research in the neoliberal context, and to offer some steps towards the re-definition of what might constitute ‘the public good’ that stress the values of social justice and equity rather than the mere summation of each individual member of society’s conception of ‘good’. What are the characteristics of educational research that contribute to our understanding of social value? Some of our IPSE colleagues have previously considered ‘what would a socially just educational system look like’ (Francis and Mills, 2012; also Reay, 2012). Here we consider the same question as applied to educational research.

There has been a long and consistent literature that shows how education systems serve to reproduce and perpetuate social inequalities, from Stan Bowles and Herb Gintis (1976) outlining the correspondence between the practices of schooling and the labour requirements of capitalist production, through Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron’s (1990 [1970]) work *La Reproduction*, to the work of Stephen Ball (1994, 2003) and Diane Reay (2017) on social class and education. Inherent in all of these is not simply a*description* of inequality, but an insistence that policies be devised to *change* this. There has been an equally distinguished – though less voluminous – literature on social justice in education and educational research. The contributions in Morwenna Griffiths (2003) explored the tensions between striving for and implementing equality while also acknowledging individual and group differences. Carol Vincent (2003) explored similar issues, particularly with reference to diverse cultural identities. Melanie Walker and Elaine Unterhalter (2007) took a rather different approach, taking Amartya Sen’s ‘capability approach’ to social justice, in which fairness and justice are determined less by the overall impact on society as a whole than the freedom of each person to make decisions they value and remove obstacles to those freedoms – the expansion of their capabilities (‘the ability to do valuable acts or reach valuable states of being; representing the alternative combinations of things a person is able to do or be’: Sen, 1993, p. 30). There have also been special issues of journals devoted to the topic, notably the *Journal of Education Policy* in 1998 (Gewirtz, 1998) and in 2012 (Francis and Mills, 2012).

Not all educational researchers feel this imperative: Becky Francis (2011) has criticised educational research as ‘far too removed from policy and practice’ (p. 4) in England and the UK, and that ‘as educationalists, we should be concerned to increase our research ‘impact’… beyond the narrow drivers of research assessment measurements’ (pp. 4–5). But she also notes firstly the dissonance between researchers and policy makers embedded in neoliberal ideologies who drive ‘instrumental understandings of the purpose of education as exclusively economic, and of education credentials as exclusive indicators of “quality”’ (p. 7), and secondly the dominant ideology of many educational researchers apparently leading to a focus on deconstructing contemporary policies and their suppositions rather than proposing constructive alternatives. Francis attributes this lack of direct engagement with policy to four factors: (a) the relativism that encourages deconstruction rather than construction, discounting claims to ‘truth’; (b) the research evaluation in UK Higher Education (and increasingly in other countries), which prioritises publication in relatively esoteric journals rather than communication with practitioners and policy audiences; (c) the expectation that policymakers will disregard research findings; and (d) a tendency to criticise, rather than to become associated with existing policies and practices. Elsewhere, Francis and Martin Mills challenge education researchers as possibly being ‘in danger of becoming knowing observers of psychological phenomena, comparing clever notes within our own exclusive circle, while practice and policies that exacerbate inequalities continue oblivious and unabated’ (2012, p. 578).

Structural inequalities, both in educational provision and in educational outcomes, are an important part of the problem that needs to be addressed in educational research. Reay, however, makes the point that schools and education (and research) cannot compensate for social and economic injustices: ‘social class [must be] recognised as a fundamental division in British education that requires urgent, far-reaching attention’ (Reay, 2012, p. 588), and she argues not just for broadening the idea of educational success beyond the academic, but that our focus should not be on ‘perceived differences of ability and aptitude but rather [on] children’s very unequal and unfair educational starting points’ (Reay, 2011, p. 2). She draws on Richard Tawney’s seminal work, *Equality*, in which he describes the ‘barbarous associations of differences of educational opportunity with distinctions of wealth and social position’ (Tawney, 1931, p. 210), that create perceptions of social inferiority to become ‘the cannon-fodder of industry’ (p. 203) that cannot be rectified until ‘children of all classes of the community attend the same schools’ (p. 204). The inequality between private and public education continues to persist nearly 90 years after Tawney wrote: private schools, with about 7 per cent of the UK’s pupils, consume 21.3 per cent of total educational spending, and spending per private school pupil is 3.6 times greater than the amount spent on a state school pupil (Ryan and Sibieta, 2010, p. 2; OECD, 2012, p.257).

Perhaps more significantly, Tawney also challenges the commonly perceived purposes of education:

individual happiness does not only require that men [*sic*] should be free to rise to new positions of comfort and distinction; it also requires that they should be able to lead a life of dignity and culture, whether they rise or not, and that, whatever their position on the economic scale may be, it shall be such as is fit to be occupied by men. (Tawney, 1931, p.146)

This is another cause of educational injustice: the utilitarian and instrumental imperative that the purpose of education is to valorise and maximise the *economic* capacity of every individual. Griffiths has challenged this, writing that education should ‘also concern itself with living educational experiences as part of what makes a good life’ (2012, p. 655). Education should be valued when ‘it cultivates valued outcomes in an individual, such as autonomy, citizenship, imagination and critical thinking, all of which are significant for the establishment of cohesive, democratic and free societies’ (p. 656). Such a conception of education, of cultivating or building the individual within and as part of broader society is cognate with the German educational tradition of *Bildung*, the cultural maturation of the self, recognising individual diversities, developing agency, talents and abilities. *Bildung* is thus, as Georg Hegel argued (1986 [1840]), about keeping oneself open to that which is the other (Jurist, 2000).

Griffiths maintains that education should be liberal, in the *Bildung* sense, as being an intrinsically pleasurable process that is ‘part of what makes a good life good, not just as part of what is requires to produce a good life [in the future]’ (2012, p. 656). Such a broader, humanistic education has at its core both individual, personal growth and fulfilment, but also the improvement of society (and the whole of humankind). Eleonora Belfiore refers to humanities and arts education as having the power to ‘instil civic values, thus contributing to the progress of humankind’ which ‘have a crucial moral function of guidance’ (Belfiore, 2011, p. 32).

This contrasts most uneasily with the exposition of the English Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, in an address on ‘The purpose of education’ (Gibb, 2015a). In this he stresses that:

Education is the engine of our economy, it is the foundation of our culture, and it’s an essential preparation for adult life. … [it is] about the practical business of ensuring that young people receive the preparation they need to secure a good job and a fulfilling career.

The purpose of schooling, he went on, was to ‘ensure that more people have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in a demanding economy… [which] starts by getting the basics right. Here too, our long-term performance has lagged behind those of our international competitors’ (Gibb, 2015a). This sense of education as a competitive performance has pervaded the UK’s neoliberal discourse for more than 40 years, as will be examined in more detail below, and Gibbs’ views on various aspects of teaching and testing in Chapter 3, (Hutchings, 2020a). By comparison, the Scottish Executive’s policy of the purpose of education is significantly broader, less instrumental, and aspire to combine both individual and societal outcomes and benefits: ‘our aspiration for all children and for every young person is that they should be successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors to society and at work’ (Curriculum Review Group, 2004, p. 12).

## What do we mean by social justice and equity?

Before examining our approach to the key terms that define this book series – ‘educational science’ and ‘public good’ – it may help to offer some notes towards a definition of our underlying axiological drivers, social justice and equity.

In some ways, equality has been a particularly British (or more precisely, English) obsession. Matthew Arnold (the poet and critic – and the Chief Inspector of English state schools in the 1880s) spoke of the English ‘religion of inequality’ (1878, p. 333). In an address to the Royal Institution, he spoke of the greed of the aristocratic and middle classes for ‘wishing and trying for the bigger share’ (p. 313). Arnold had at this point nearly 27 years’ experience of visiting elementary schools across England on a near daily basis: he deplored ‘the wall of partition’ between the middle classes and the working classes: ‘they seem to belong to two different worlds’ (p. 323).

A commonly used measure of economic equality is the Gini coefficient (Gini, 1911, 1936), which measures the frequency distribution of a population on a scale from zero (perfect equality, all incomes are the same) to one (total inequality, one person has all the income). The Gini coefficient on disposable income (after taxation) can be used to show both changes in a country over time, and comparisons of the relative distribution between countries (ignoring actual differences of overall or average incomes in each country). Most European countries had a Gini index of between 0.25 and 0.35 in the 2010s (Balestra and Tonkin, 2018), and these have shown slight rises in inequalities over the past 50 years (for example, Germany rose from 0.25 to 0.29; Italy rose from 0.30 to 0.34; Sweden rose from 0.21 to 0.26 and the Netherlands from 0.26 to 0.29); in contrast, in the UK the index has risen more rapidly from 0.24 in the mid-70s to 0.35 in 2010 (thus a growing inequality). Another measure of inequality is the share of wealth or of post-tax income between each tenth of the population: Table 1.1 shows the changes in income distribution between 1979 and 2015/6 and the even greater disparities in the distribution of wealth in 2012–2014 by deciles.

John Rawls addressed issues such as these in *A Theory of Justice* (1971). He argued that the rules of distribution within a group would be fair if a person agreed to be bound by those rules, even when s/he was unaware of how those rules affected them – whether by adding to their personal share, or lessening it. Rawls thus combines egalitarianism with a form of mutual moderating liberalism: his innovation counters the way that utilitarian models of equality subordinate individual claims to the overriding demand for the general public good. Inequalities were only permissible to Rawls if they left everybody better off. From this he concluded that:

… resources for education are not to be allocated solely or necessarily mainly according to their return as estimated in productive trained abilities, but also according to their worth in enriching the personal and social life of citizens, *including here the less favoured.* (Rawls, 1971, p. 107; emphasis added)

## Table 1.1: Distribution of post-tax income 1979 and 2015/6, and wealth 2012-14, United Kingdom

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  | Income Wealth | | | | |
|  | 1979 | | 2015/16 |  | 2014/16 |
| Top 10% | 21 | | 23.0 |  | 40 |
| Second 10% | 14 | | 15.3 |  | 20.5 |
| Third 10% | 12 | | 12.3 |  | 13.5 |
| Fourth 10% | 11 | | 10.3 |  | 9.5 |
| Fifth 10% | 10 | | 8.8 |  | 7 |
| Sixth 10% | 8 | | 7.7 |  | 4.5 |
| Seventh 10% | 7 | | 6.8 |  | 3 |
| Eighth 10% | 7 | | 6.0 |  | 1.5 |
| Ninth 10% | 6 | | 5.3 |  | 0.5 |
| Bottom 10% | 4 | | 4.6 |  | 0.1 |

Notes. 2015/16 income figures exclude non-taxpayers, and include tax credits for some in the bottom decile. Wealth includes property, financial, physical and private pension fund wealth.

Sources: Income: 1979/97: Joseph Rowntree Foundation. (1997). *Income mobility in Britain (Social Policy Research Report 121)*. York: JRF.

2015/16 ONS. (2018a). *Household disposable income and inequality in the UK: financial year ending 2017* Table 3.1a. London: ONS.

Wealth: ONS (Office for National Statistics). (2018b). *Wealth in Great Britain Wave 4, 2014 to 2016.* Figure 3. London: ONS.

He observed that this countered the model of meritocracy, because the upper classes had disproportionate access to means, rights and organisational authority: ‘Equality of opportunity means an equal chance to leave the less fortunate behind in the personal quest for influence and social position’ (Rawls, 1971, pp. 106–7; see also Chapter 14 in this volume).

Meritocracy has proved to be an unusually and perversely interpreted concept. It was by no means a twentieth century construction: imperial China had established this through competitive examinations for bureaucratic office in the Tang dynasty in the eighth century, and the ossification that followed in the effective inheritance of posts into closed circles of families (Moore, 1967, pp. 164–5). Both Rawls and Barrington Moore were drawing on the seminal satire by Michael Young, *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870*–*2033: An Essay on Education and Equality* (1958) – the title is usually abbreviated to the first five words: the two dates in the title should have alerted all those who have subsequently referred to the book without reading it that this was no ordinary ‘essay on education and equality’. Young’s work is a satirical fiction, supposedly written in 2034 – a half century after George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* – as a sociological explanation of the populist riots May 2033. Young took the term from an article by Alan Fox (1956), who wrote of ‘the “meritocracy”; the society in which the gifted, the smart, the energetic, the ambitious and the ruthless are carefully sifted out and helped towards their destined positions of dominance’ (Fox, 1956, p. 13). In an academic style, Young sets out – with references to real social analysts before 1957, and many fictional reports and articles after this date – an explanation of how the development of equality of opportunity and attempts to increase social mobility, building on Tawney and many others, had led to the rise of a closed group of wealthier families, who gained privileged access to the educational systems that validated their children’s entitlement to power and position.

Many people were catapulted forward by their parents’ riches and influence … they were sent to the best schools and colleges, dispatched on trips abroad and given expensive training for the Bar, counting-house or surgery … Educational injustice enabled people to preserve their illusions, inequality of opportunity fostered the myth of human equality. Myth we know it to be; not so our ancestors. (Young, 1958, pp. 104, 106)

Young’s thesis was intended as a dystopian warning: if equality was reduced to the mere *opportunity* to succeed, then it would impede and militate against social mobility. As Reay, writing 60 years later, observes, a small number of elite universities:

… reproduce the British elite … polishing, refining and accentuating the elitism and sense of superiority acquired in earlier schooling. … Educational choice is based on the resources and social power and networks of the parents rather than the ability and effort of the child. Meritocracy is all ideological bluff with no substance. (Reay, 2017, p. 123)

Meritocracy has turned education into a competition for accreditation. Equality of opportunity is used to justify the concentration of educational resources on the fraction of the population who are judged to ‘best benefit’ by its efforts. Those with ability and application are rewarded with examination grades and access to particular higher education that entitle them to positions of power, influence and wealth. Those judged not to have ability, or not to make sufficient application to their studies, will fail: but this failure will be justified as a consequence of their lack of talent or of effort. It is turned into a game, with the metaphor of ‘a level playing field’ being used to justify winners and losers. Despite the rhetoric of ‘raising standards’, the objective of the educational system is to identify and mark sheep and goats. The losers – and there must be losers, if winners are to emerge – become the authors of their own subsequent misfortunes, and are encouraged to believe and accept this.

Young wrote in 2001, six months before his death, how ‘sadly disappointed’ he was at the misuse of his book:

It is good sense to appoint individual people to jobs on their merit. It is the opposite when those who are judged to have merit of a particular kind harden into a new social class without room in it for others. Ability of a conventional kind, which used to be distributed between the classes more or less at random, has become much more concentrated by the engine of revolution. A social revolution has been accomplished by harnessing schools and universities to the task of sieving people according to education’s narrow band of values. With an amazing battery of certificates and degrees … education has put its seal of approval on a minority, and its seal of disapproval on the many. (Young, 2001)

Access to higher education, in the UK and in most other countries, expanded dramatically in the 1990s and 2000s. But it did so differentially: most of the growth was achieved by recruiting more and more middle-class young people. Instead of a relatively small proportion of the middle classes attending university, as in the 1940s and 1950s, it became for them a *rite de passage*. For working-class young people – always a tiny minority of university entrants – it remains a far less common route (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003). This is a global phenomenon: Oliver Nachtwey has recently analysed what he calls the ‘regressive modernization’ of Germany, concluding that ‘the more a society is based on equality of opportunity, the more unequal it becomes, and the more legitimate its inequalities’ (Nachtwey, 2018, p. 99).

There is an argument that this does not matter: the size of the pot is increasing, and almost everyone is, in historical terms, better off than before. Steven Pinker **insists that there has been very real progress and change in the world. He is particularly dismissive of the concept of equality, referring to it as ‘spiteful envy’ (Pinker, 2018, p. 98). He suggests that inequality is frequently confused with unfairness, and that most people are unconcerned by inequality, and more concerned with ‘fairness’. Pinker cites a study that suggests ‘there is no evidence so far that children or adults possess any general aversion to inequality’ (Starmans *et al.,* 2017, p. 5). But this study firstly shows that people generally are unaware of the scale of inequality, and secondly assumes a context in which fairness is broadly constructed using Rawls-like understandings of equity. For example, another study of American adults showed that, given a choice between three distributions (two based on real, but unidentified wealth distributions, the third based on absolute equality) and asked which country they would prefer to live in if they were be randomly assigned to a distribution, 90 per cent of Americans would wish to live in a more equitable state than the USA (Norton and Arely, 2011). When asked to estimate the actual distribution of wealth in the United States, they thought it dramatically narrower than is actually the case, and they said they would prefer an even more equal distribution than the one they erroneously believe exists. The responses were broadly similar for women and men, Republican and Democrat supporters, and by income group.**

**Inequalities matter even more when they correlate with particular groups. The examples used above relate mostly to socioeconomic class; but there are also inequalities in income, wealth, power and influence between men and women, those with disabilities and those without, and members of different ethnic groups. When there are inequalities between such groups – in competencies or educational attainment, as much as in income and wealth – then there are a consequential range of invidious consequences, as shown in the work of Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett (2009, 2018). More unequal societies (countries, even different states in the USA) have greater levels of illness, premature death, social discontent, violence, and social immobility) than more equitable societies, and the same is true for groups with a society.**

Ides Nicaise (2000) has suggested that educational inequalities arise from two forms of failure. Those ‘on the demand side’ occur when the socioeconomic characteristics of a group lead to individuals in these groups not taking up educational provision. Failures on ‘the supply side’ happen when educational policies and practices disadvantage members of a group: this includes both institutional prejudice against these groups and the inability of institutions to actively respond to the specific and different needs of particular groups. Both are structural failings; and each interacts with the other. If the ‘supply side’ institutions cannot adequately support a group, they create a situation in which members of the group lower their aspirations and expectations, and make fewer demands on the educational system. This interaction creates self-sustaining failure.

Many students, teachers, schools and governments have low expectations of groups that do not, on average, do well at school, and such groups need to be supported to expect that they can achieve.

In most educational settings, those responsible for educational provision also have different expectations of how different groups will perform, and make decisions about what level of performance to expect based on the student’s gender, ethnic origin, social class – or whatever distinguishing characteristic they believe may impact on attainment and potential (for an example of this, see Strand, 2012). Low teacher expectations of a group create the conditions in which attainment is low: low pupil expectations lead to underperformance. We need to tackle both supply and demand in order to achieve equitable outcomes. Learners with low self-expectations perform less well. **As Young observed, those judged by the educational system not to have merit are** ‘easily demoralised by being looked down on so woundingly by people who have done well for themselves’ (Young, 2001). A teaching profession that represents all in society might be a first step towards raising self-esteem (Ross, 2002, 2012). David Olusoga, a distinguished historian and broadcaster, brought up in a working-class part of Newcastle, illustrates the point:

I never had a black teacher or lecturer, I never once met a black British person who held any sort of professional or managerial role. And by the time I was a teenager in the 1980s, I had, through some process of societal osmosis, internalised the idea that black people didn’t, or perhaps couldn’t, do certain jobs or hold certain positions … That is how racism operates. (Olusoga, 2019)

It is the *outcome* of policy and practice that is significant, not the *intention*. That various groups suffer educational disadvantage, despite policy initiatives to counter this, suggests that whatever the intentions, educational systems institutionally discriminate against the disadvantaged. The term ‘educational institutional inequality’ might be used to identify the collective failure of an educational institution(s) to provide appropriate educational services for minority groups, social, cultural, linguistic, behavioural or other characteristics. Such policies amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and stereotyping which result in the group as a whole achieving lower educational outcomes than the population as a whole (Chapter 13, Hartsmar, Leathwood *et al.*, 2020).

Concerns and ideas such as these about the nature and purpose of educational research, and its potential role in moving towards a greater sense of social justice and the need for striving towards equality of outcomes have permeated most of our work, collectively and individually. But they raise particular issues in the contemporary world: how do they equate with current conceptions of educational research as a science, and how to they relate to various understandings of what might constitute ‘the public good’ and how and by whom this might be determined? It is to these concerns that we turn in the following two sections.

## Educational science in the context of social justice and equity

Most of the authors of this volume have worked within postmodern and poststructural theory in our research. This creates particular issues when researching policy if one has the ambition of informing and effecting the practice of policy making. Policy makers want to know definitive answers: what works, and how can policy achieve this. Four issues about the nature of ‘science’ particularly appear to impinge on social justice and equity objectives: ontology, measurement, reproducibility and categorisation.

In everyday life, we look for patterns and certainty, for effects to be the consequence of causes. Working in the social sciences, many of us have rejected notions of a single ‘truth’ (Francis, 2011, p. 8). But one of the shibboleths of much science (or at least, common perceptions of it) is that science is a value-free objective process that produce results that can be replicated, and that social research must be judged by these criteria. In the UK, a government minister (Sir Keith Joseph) decided in 1983 that the country’s Social Science Research Council – the conduit for government funding of social science research – did not operate ‘scientifically’, and required it (under threat of removal of its funding) to redesignate itself as the Economic and Social Research Council. This view of the nature of science does not seem to be that of many scientists. Roberto Torretti (1999) observes that many physicists hold what is termed an instrumentalist position: that science can show nothing true or false about nature's unobservable objects, properties or processes. Scientific theory is simply a tool that allows no more than the prediction of observations and the formulation of laws that summarise regularities, but do not (and cannot) reveal aspects that *explain* such laws. Niels Bohr's (1928) ‘Copenhagen interpretation’ holds that reality is determined by the scientist’s choice of experiment: some experiments cause light to behave like a particle, while others make it act like a wave – there is no fundamental ‘truth’ about what light ‘actually’ is. Sub-atomic particles do not have a precise location until a scientist measures it, and the act of measurement itself determines its position. Werner Heisenberg's (Born and Heisenberg, 1925) indeterminacy principle is that if an electron's position is determined in this way, then its momentum at that point cannot also be known, and vice-versa. The more accurately one of these values is known, the less accurate is the other. This is not a function of experimental limitations, but of the nature of the electron. The ‘reality’ of physics only provides ‘answers’ when it is directly questioned.

The same seems true of the social sciences. In education, for example, policy makers want to know about how well reading is being taught, on the assumption that reading is capable of both definition and measurement. There is a common-sense notion of what ‘being able to read’ is, but there are many texts, in English, that many of us are unable to make sense of – we can ‘read’ the words, but cannot understand what the text means. But ‘teaching to read’ is something that governments increasingly expect to measure, and common-sense again expects that there is a best way to teach reading and to measure the success of this process. The UK (England) government (among others) has decided that ‘the most effective way to teach a child to read is a robust programme of systematic synthetic phonics’ (DFE, 2015, p. 4). A proxy for measuring progress in reading is thus to assess how well a child can attribute a phonic sound to a set of letters. Policy makers decided in 2012 to ‘introduce … a phonics screening check for pupils at [the age of 6]… The simple check asks pupils to read 40 words, of which 20 are pseudo-words. This allows teachers to identify those pupils with a genuine grasp of decoding, and those in need of further support’ (DFE, 2015, p.4). Thus to ‘measure’ something as complex as reading, a proxy is selected that is ‘not reading’, which is used to indicate a reading ability level. Teachers are required to teach a system of phonics (an analysis of which shows that the English language is full of exceptions to phonic ‘rules’: Berdiansky *et al*., 1969). Teachers must prepare children to be able to ‘say’ words that do not exist – which they do, as within two years of the introduction of this test the proportion able to do so rose from 58 per cent to 74 percent (DfE, 2015a). Merryn Hutchings (Chapter 3, 2020a) elaborates further on this. This is as classic an example of the taking of measurements causing the nature of what is being observed to shift as any indeterminacy principle in sub-atomic physics.

Policy makers – and researchers themselves – want research findings to be reproducible: conducting the same study, under similar conditions, should produce the same results. There is, however, a current concern that many scientific findings – in the non-social science area – are not replicable. A survey in 2015 of over 1500 scientists by the journal *Nature* found that 52 per cent thought that there were significant problems over reproducibility, and a further 38 per cent thought it an issue of a lesser order (Baker, 2016). Some 70 per cent had tried and failed to reproduce another scientist's experiments, and more than half failed to reproduce their own experiments. Education researchers in general have been castigated by David Hargreaves (1996) as producing findings that were non-cumulative, unsystematic and non-replicable: moreover, the research was not known of, or conducted by, practitioners, in contrast to medical research. ‘Replications, which are more necessary in the social than the natural sciences because of the importance of contextual and cultural variations, are astonishingly rare’ (Hargreaves, 1996, p. 2). His advocacy of Randomised Control Trials in educational research ignores the essential contingencies of educational/learning settings (Hammersley, 1997; **Koutsouris and Norwich, 2018**). Hargreaves contrasts educational research with medical research: ‘the spread of evidence-based medicine is rooting much medical research firmly in the day-to-day practices of doctors’ (Hargreaves, 1996, p. 3). Martyn Hammersley’s counter to this was to deny that teachers’ work could be compared to that of doctors: their work ‘is a matter of making judgements, rather than following rules’ (Hammersley, 1997, p. 147). And medical research itself suffers from the same issues as the other natural sciences: a recent study found that 47 out of 53 medical research papers focused on cancer research could not be reproduced (Begley and Ellis, 2012). Social science research in general ‘suffers’ from non-replicability, but, as has been shown, this is no more than in the natural sciences (Camerer *et al*., 2018; considered in greater detail in Chapter 2, Menter, 2020).

Much empirical social science research has also been criticised for drawing subjects from a very narrow base: one estimate is that 80 per cent of the subjects of non-USA studies are drawn from psychology undergraduates in the capital city of a country (Arnett, 2008), which are then extrapolated to be representative of the country’s inhabitants in general (Rozin, 2001). Samuel Gosling *et al.* (2004) found that social science research articles purportedly representing the general population were based on samples in which 85 per cent were undergraduates, 71 per cent of the participants were female, and over 80 per cent were White. Joseph Henrich *et al.* (2010) characterise much social research as being based on ‘WEIRD’ population samples – Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic. Philippe Rochat (2010) points out that:

in academia, *a priori* claims of universality sell better than diversity, which complicates rather than simplifies matters. Universality claims get more attention because they are cleaner and sharper, encompassing control and predictive power … [with] greater impact and appeal. This tends to relegate diversity to noise rather than as a primary object of study. (Rochat, 2010, p. 107)

The social subject is, by definition, socially constructed, and its activities take place within the context of social interactions (Hammersley, 1997). The subjects of the processes of learning – students, teachers, school leaders and policy makers – are grouped and classified as having particular identity characteristics that are often regarded as essentialised and immutable. It can be argued that even what the individual might think to be an intrinsic and natural element of their identity is at least partially determined by social interaction (Foucault, 1977 [1975]; Brubaker, 2016). Social constructivism is based on the premise that we can only develop our sense of self-identity through social processes: all our identities are socially determined as we define ourselves in relationship to others, whether in a direct relationship or as the same as or different to the other. Others will also be simultaneously defining our identity in their terms, based on their perceptions and constructions of what they think – or assume – our identity to be, and this will not always correspond, and might even be the opposite of the identities we wish to assume.

Categories of nationality, citizenship and ethnicity are not fixed and predetermined, but dynamically constructed. Francesca Decimo and Alessandra Gribaldo (2017) have referred to:

the strain of categorization and the proliferation of boundaries … Census records, vital records, passports, identification documents, church records and medical research data establish and grant materiality to the categorisations that inform our identities: beyond sex and age, they designate citizenship, nationality, lineage, religion, ancestry, health, language, ethnicity and race. (Decimo and Gribaldo, 2017, p. 5)

Modern states require the classification of their populations: Benedict Anderson pointed to their need to distinguish between ‘peoples, regions, religions, languages’ in order to impose a ‘totalizing classificatory grid’ (Anderson, 1991, p. 184). A Foucauldian model of the surveillance of state is used by David Kertzer and Dominique Arel to explain how ‘the use of identity categories … creates a particular vision of social reality. All people are assigned to a single category, and are hence conceptualised as sharing, with a certain number of others, a common collective identity’ (Kertzer and Arel, 2002, p. 5; also Nicoll *et al.,* 2013)*.* Instead of situationally-determined complex social linkages, the reification process of identity categories creates neat boundaries between mutually exclusive groups (Kertzer, 2017). The process of enumeration and assignation through:

… body-counts create not only types and classes … but also homogeneous bodies, because number, by its nature, flattens idiosyncrasies and creates boundaries around these homogeneous bodies, since it performatively limits their extent … Statistics are to bodies and social types what maps are to territories: they flatten and enclose. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 133)

The presumption that everyone will easily fit into such groups becomes increasingly unlikely as migration patterns in Europe are creating new diversities: more people of mixed origins makes it increasingly difficult to use these identity categories (Vertovec, 2007).

These issues – of ontology, of measurement, of reproducibility and reliability, of sampling and categorisation – significantly impact on educational research directed towards developing policies of social justice and equity. It is critical to recognise and emphasise the pragmatic compromises necessary in conducting research in these areas:

* the very processes of both policy and research in education necessarily impact on and alter the processes and nature of teaching and learning;
* defining and analysing and educational activities require the measurement of proxies, that not only approximate but change the character of what is being observed;
* social interactions are so contextually created that they can never be reproduced; and
* classifying and characterising populations is no more than a heuristic device, and should be made contextually, at the time and in the context of the particular research activity.

## Determining the ‘public good’ in the context of social justice and equity

How does our understanding of social justice influence our construction of the public good? There must be questions about whether and to what extent state institutions – even those that profess to be liberal democracies – can be seen as necessarily the best agents to define the public good. States and their policy agents operate in what they see as the *state’s* best interests (or the best interest of the *individual policy maker’s* career or political affiliation), rather than necessarily in the public’s best interests, or even the best interests of the subset of the public that are citizens of that particular country. Governmental processes, particularly in democracies, operate on a relatively short-term basis, largely related to election cycles: they procrastinate and deflect concerns for longer term conceptions of the public good (as we continue to see in relation to the climate crisis). States distinguish between their citizens, in whose interest they ostensibly operate, and resident non-citizens – who are nevertheless part of ‘the public’. States see themselves as competing globally, operating to maximise their position – economically, politically, educationally – at the expense of other states (and their ‘publics’) in what is construed as a zero-sum game. And states (whether oligarchic, democratic or meritocratic) are essentially operated by self-perpetuating elites, who rationalise their best interests as being the same as the public’s best interests.

Neoliberalism is the ideology that so pervasively frames the action of the state in a way that it is often scarcely recognised as an ideology. It appears to be so firmly embedded that it appears a natural, neutral law, similar to evolution or gravity (**Štremfel, 2018)**. But it acts to define competition as the central characteristic of social relationships, and the market as a system for allocating values and priorities. Individuals are consumers, and we exercise our citizenship through making choices in the same way as we do through buying and selling. The market trumps planning, direction and control by the state, and the state forfeits its ability and right to make decisions to the market. Limiting competition is regarded as an affront to individual liberty: taxes and regulations are minimised. The market produces a natural hierarchy of winners and losers in a zero-sum game, so inequality is virtuous and consequential. The market rewards those who create wealth and supply the needs of the market: as Young predicted, the rich are convinced that it is their own merit that is being rewarded, and the poor blame themselves for their failure.

This line of argument would suggest that it is not structural unemployment that is responsible for young people not finding work, but their lack of effort to gain appropriate skills, or to stay in education for longer to gain such skills (Ross and Leathwood, 2013). The reason that a state’s Gross Domestic Product rises at a rate more or less than its competitors is, erroneously, held to be country’s comparative success in the mathematics, literacy and science scores of its young people in the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), so policy is directed (as shown above) at improving such scores through activities that may raise test results. The PISA ratings now ‘command significance far beyond that of a mere informative basis for decision-making’ (Bøyum, 2014, p. 857; see also Chapter 3, Hutchings, 2020a).

The original proponent of the theory that the market exercised an ‘invisible hand’ that governed economic relations is attributed to Adam Smith in his treatise *The Wealth of Nations* (1776). Much misquoted, Smith pointed to the need for ‘the market’ to be an area where everyone was equally able to make fully informed choices, an area where the state should minimise the likelihood of **‘**people of the same trade … meet[ing] together … in a conspiracy against the public, or in some contrivance to raise prices**’** (Smith, 1970 [1776], p.200), and one in which the state should be obliged to provide essential monopolies such as lighthouses, roads and canals. These were ignored in the neoliberal tract *The Road to Serfdom* (Hayek, 1944), which argued that government interference in the economy would crush individualism and inevitably lead to tyranny. Tony Judt (2011) pointed to Friedrich Hayek’s lack of reference to the need to maintain essential state services, at the expense of unfettered competition.

The consequence of the neoliberal ideology is that the public sphere – an arena of deliberation and the reasoned contestation of ideas – becomes a literal marketplace of individual preferences and self-interest. While the influence and vigour of the jurist or the legislator, the academic or the social reformer, came from humanistic values of justice, rights and public society, neoliberalism replaces these with the logic of the algorithm. ‘People in this country have had enough of experts,’ observed Michael Gove in June 2016, when he was England’s Minister of Justice (Mance, 2016).

The way in which states have embraced international competitive league tables of ‘educational performance’ illustrates how the education of individuals has been subsumed to the ‘efficiency’ of economic outcomes. Education has become increasingly seen as a competitive process, as instrumental reasons are used to justify educational policies and to drive both parental and national ambitions. In international competition, the development of scales and league tables that have followed the introduction of PISA has led to individual governments fretting about international rankings, asserting that these are closely related to eventual economic performance. Quantitative comparison has become the mode of governance: Sotiria Grek refers to this as ‘governing by numbers’ (2009, p. 23).

George Papadopoulos, responsible for the OECD’s educational work from the early 1970s to 1991, reviewed the Organisation’s early work in the field in *Education 1960*–*1990: The OECD Perspective* (1994). He noted that the OECD’s involvement in educational policy dated back to the 1960s, when educational quality and human resource development were core issues: by the early 1970s, its emphasis had shifted to ‘fairer distribution of educational opportunities and the social benefits’ (Papadopoulos, 1994, p. 106). Although the 1974 oil crisis meant that ‘social and equality considerations receded to the background, giving way to economic ones’ (p. 202), by the early 1980s, the OECD was aware of the ‘painful social consequences, which both sharpened disadvantage and extended it to new groups’ (p. 166). By the late 1980s, the OECD began – with pressure and financial support from the USA, to become involved in the collection of statistical time series of educational performance in member states, more aligned with economic imperatives. But, as Fazal Rizvi and Bob Lingard (2009) observed, Papadopoulos had not then realised the extent of this shift: equality and social cohesion through education ‘have been thoroughly rearticulated … becoming instruments of economic policy associated with a new vocabulary of the knowledge economy’ (2009, p. 437).

Until the 1990s, only eleven states in Europe used national tests in compulsory education, six more began in the 1990s, and by 2009 only four states did *not* have standardised national test (Rey, 2010). PISA was introduced first in 2000, and while it has highlighted issues of inequity (for example, the association between social background and educational performance: see Hartsmar *et al.*, 2020; Chapter 13), its discourse of equity has been incorporated into economic rationality (d’Agnese, 2018a,b). Rizvi and Lingard (2009, p. 448) also suggest that equality has been relegated from being a moral value by the OECD to become a component of the development of human capital. Rizvi (2013) had described this as a shift from a social democratic to a market construction of equity. ‘Equity has become separated from traditional ideas of social justice and re-articulated as formal access to education and participation in markets’ (Bøyum, 2014, p. 857).

Steinar Bøyum analyses OECD policy documents in some depth, and concludes that it ’explicitly operates with a loose idea of equal opportunity, compatible with even a merely formal equality, but implicitly with a meritocratic variant of fair equality of opportunity’” (Bøyum, 2014, p. 865). He concludes that the OECD’s processes isolate educational justice from social justice in general: their ‘emphasis [is] on equality of opportunity as a means through which to achieve positions in the social hierarchy … [but there] is no discussion of the rightfulness of that social hierarchy itself’ (p. 867). This is not merely a European phenomenon: from Ontario, Gol Rezai-Rashtini (2017) and her colleagues report that PISA has led to:

… [the] redefinition of equity … made possible through neoliberal systems of accountability and performativity involving measurement and facticity (Sardoč, 2018). As a result of these strategies, equity policy in education has been concerned with outcome measurement and boys’ underachievement, while racial and class inequalities have become invisible. (Rezai-Rashti *et al.*, 2017, p. 160)

Ambitions to address educational inequity thus fit uneasily with other policy initiatives and ideologies. The European Union has set itself the target of maintaining (or improving) Europe’s comparative educational ranking. The Lisbon Council concluded that the target of becoming ‘the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ (European Union, 2000, para. 5) required Europe's education systems ‘adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment’ (para. 25). The Commission has developed these strategies, and recent documents stress that education should be seen in economic terms, designed to create a competitive economy (European Commission, 2007). Educational success is often positioned as key to employment: it becomes not just important to do well in education – other people have to do worse, if one is to gain employment in a competitive market.

There are similar competitive motivations in the way that individuals now view education. Many individual parents and students view education as a zero-sum game: there are inexorably winners and losers. It is not merely that if one child wins, another loses: the point is that the other child *must* lose in order for education to have been ‘successful’. The commodification of education, its location in a competitive market, and the dominant discourse of instrumentalism have turned education into a game that requires losers in order to be successful (Ball, 2003; Reay, 2006a).

Our broad conceptions of social justice and equity thus sit uneasily with the dominant policy ideology of the nature of ‘scientific investigation’ and of the neoliberal political orthodoxy of the use of the market to determine ‘public good’. The following section briefly describes how the authors of the chapters in this book worked together as educational researchers for social justice.

## The Institute for Policy Studies in Education

We have all worked together in a single research institute, based in London, that was very largely funded through research contracts with state, parastatals and charitable foundations with variable degrees of independence from state control. We have thus been working within and notionally for the ideological structures and systems that we criticise, operating to a degree to provide research ‘solutions’ that fit within the ideological mindsets of our funders. There is some utility in such sponsorship, in that the commissions we undertook, by virtue of their patron’s position, enabled us to readily access our research subjects. But undertaking such work has inherent disadvantages, in that the sponsor’s ideological constructions of the nature of the public good can constrain and pre-determine the direction of research and constrain the scope of its findings. Chris Duke points to the hazard of the ‘political practice of commissioning research to support a prepared policy rather than inform its policy’: mission-orientated research (such as we have described here) ‘in the highly politicized conditions of … a neoliberal era is problematic’ (Duke, 2016, p.20). The rhetoric of research-led policy is readily subverted into research that substantiates and validates particular policies, becoming what is policy-led research (Hayler and Williamson, 2016). Like Robin Alexander, our ‘stance is of both outsider and insider’ (2014, p. 352). We acknowledge that this might make our work vulnerable to criticisms of partisanship, or of being constrained to fit the commissioner’s needs, and address this in more detail below.

We were established in early 2000 by the University of North London (now London Metropolitan University): the institution supported four members of staff with a small initial grant of £100,000 a year for five years: thereafter, we were expected to be largely self-supporting through attracting research grants and contracts. We put forward, to the University and to all our potential funders, our very explicit mission to research for social justice and equity in education. Our initial activities were principally a study of higher education and social class, looking particularly at the exclusion of working-class young people (Archer, Hutchings and Ross, 2003), an investigation of the teacher shortages in London (Hutchings *et al.*, 2000; Ross and Hutchings, 2003; Menter *et al*., 2002) that developed to include the need to recruit teachers from the ethnic minorities (Ross, 2002, 2012), a study of student progress of ‘non-traditional’ students in higher education (Leathwood and O’Connell, 2003) and the direction of a Socrates European Academic Network on Citizenship Education (Ross, 2000a).

We quickly expanded in numbers, recruiting both established scholars and young researchers, to create a team of, on average of 14, researchers between 2001 and 2011.[[1]](#footnote-2) Our recruitment criteria included a requirement to demonstrate a commitment to social justice in education, which proved to be a powerful incentive. We employed a wide range of ethnicities and speakers of different languages, using their experience to work with a wider range of communities and languages in our research. We worked collaboratively and flexibly in teams: overlapping projects, and a talented and multi-skilled team allowed resources to be grouped effectively and efficiently over the life of a project. We covered a wide range of inequalities, but notably did not research areas of special educational need or of people with disabilities, a matter of some regret, but one that reflected our staffing strengths. Over the 16 years, we carried out over 120 research projects, for the UK and Scottish governments, local governments, the European Commission, the OECD, The Economic and Social Research Council, and a wide range of NGOs, research foundations and other bodies. Our approach was both to respond to tenders and calls for research projects, and to suggest and lobby for particular research we thought important. We often worked collaboratively, with other University researchers and with commercial research organisations.

Clearly, we had to compromise in order to work with many of these institutions. Our preference for using largely qualitative methods in order to elucidate the contextual elements was sometimes less in demand than a requirement to use quantitative methods to illustrate the scale of an issue. For example, we used ethnic categories when necessary, always pointing to their uncertain and transitory definition: in order to address the educational needs of a particular group, we had to use such categories, as a necessary policy requirement to locate and map the scale of disadvantage, and to suggest ways that support might be offered to a group. We applied the current British Educational Research Association’s code of ethics (as well as the University’s). We were always able to have our findings published in full for the commissioning body, and to make them available publicly.

## This volume: structure and format

This book presents a series of chapters by different authors, all of whom have been associated with IPSE over the past two decades. Each describes particular aspects of one of their research endeavours, and reflects on how their processes attempted to support social justice, and what they think the term means. They also consider how their particular work, in its various ways, could be seen as being of benefit to the community: was it valuable or useful to civic society? How did they know this to be so?

The volume is presented a loose sequence, individual chapters being grouped together, so that they can, if the reader wishes, be taken in order; but equally, each can stand alone. There are three exceptions to this. Chapters 2 and 3 represent initial reviews, based around each author’s research works, that confront the two organising themes of the book in the context of the ontological challenge to question our own subjectivities and the ideological construction of the public good in teaching, learning and research.

Ian Menter (Chapter 2, 2020) begins with an overview of various recent discourses about the nature and purposes of educational research, considering:

* its fundamental nature as a *social science* enquiry, grounded in professional practices and the contingencies and contexts of social interaction, that make it largely non-replicable in the way that the physical sciences expect their findings to be capable of being repeated;
* its role in disseminating the practices of such social science to the community of practice of educators, through professional development based on such approaches; and
* the significant potential role of the educational research establishment in the UK in the debates over methodological approaches and desirable outcomes in terms of the public good: his work as President of first the Scottish Educational Research Association (2005–2007), and then the British Educational Research Association (2013–2015).

His epistemological analysis of what should count as educational knowledge and as social enquiry, is developed in Merryn Hutchings’ contribution (Chapter 3, 2020a). She discusses her research on the nature and consequences of widespread national testing programmes, considering who requires these to take place, their justification for doing so, and the use (and misuse) to which the results are put. In so doing she opens up the debate on what might be considered to be the public good, and who might determine this. She questions whether these processes of assessment and evaluation serve the public good, and interrogates the research on which such testing processes are based. Political and ethical issues are fundamental to this: who should control or direct such forays into educational practice, and with what justification? Laswell’s (1936) definition of politics, summarised in his title *Politics: Who Gets What, When, How,* encapsulates one of the main messages in her chapter. Her other argument is ethical: how do the outcomes of national assessments and gradings of individuals, and the production of league tables, impact on the well-being of learners, teachers and the institutions in which they both work? Does this serve the public good, or merely the good of politicians and a limited section of the public: a theme to which Hutchings returns in Chapter 7.

The following chapters are broadly grouped around research that addresses particular kinds of educational inequalities. The first of these, concerning socioeconomic disadvantage and the particularly English construction of social class, are considered in Chapters 4 to 7. Gender is examined in Chapters 8 to 10. Ethnicity and identity are the focus of Chapters 11 and 12. All of these factors, and more, intersect and create additional and often hidden further inequities, and some of these are considered in Chapter 13.

The chapters on researching class and socioeconomic inequity in education begin with Andrew McCallum’s examination of creativity and social justice in the English language curriculum (Chapter 4, 2020): this chapter is also an example of Menter’s point about professional development and educational research, in that McCallum carried out his research as part of a professional Doctorate programme in IPSE. Nathan Fretwell (Chapter 5, 2020) examines disenfranchised working-class pupils and a community intervention programme, that raises important issues around community needs and those of researchers. Sarah Minty (Chapter 6, 2020) describes research in Scottish higher education, and the differential impact of fees and maintenance costs on students from different socioeconomic backgrounds. Socioeconomic inequality is not merely a question of poorer people getting less, and the final contribution in this section, by Merryn Hutchings (Chapter 7, 2020b) examines how the strategies employed by some more affluent parents to in effect appropriate greater educational benefits for their children can lead to greater inequities: a vivid and worrying confirmation of Young’s fears about the effects of meritocracy discussed earlier in this chapter.

Gender inequities are examined in the contributions that follow. Jayne Osgood (Chapter 8, 2020) questions the policy reforms of the early years workforce – principally female and overwhelmingly working-class; deconstructing the apparently benign and well-intentioned underpinning concepts of professionalism as deeply problematic. Researching gender inequities in education Marie-Pierre Moreau (Chapter 9, 2020) then examines policy attempts to make the school teaching workforce more masculine in composition, and the policy implications for gender in this. Barbara Read and Carole Leathwood (Chapter 10, 2020) conclude this section by moving on to examine some responses to both the expansion in the proportion of women in the University workforce and in the undergraduate body.

The third area of social inequity that we focus on is around ethnicity and identity issues. Uvanney Maylor (Chapter 11, 2020) looks at the English curriculum reforms of 2007 under New Labour to address ethnic identities, and the subsequent reversals by the Coalition and Conservative governments that followed. Alistair Ross (Chapter 12, 2020a) carries this enquiry into continental Europe, examining how young Europeans define their political beliefs, and thus their construction of the public good.

All three of these areas of inequity intersect, and in combination both heighten and hide further inequities. Chapter 13, Hartsmar *et al*., 2020) reviews a 2009 study conducted across fourteen European states of educational policies that were designed to counter inequalities, highlighting the effects of intersectionality across these three areas and more.

The concluding chapter (Ross, Chapter 14, 2020b) falls outside this thematic arrangement, and is presented as a concluding review of the ways in which the chapters as a whole contribute to the debate on what is meant by the public good, and how this should be determined. One might apply the Latin legal term, *cui bono*, to such a discussion: who will benefit from a particular course of action? Who should benefit? And what are the consequences of such benefit to those who might not so benefit? That *cui bono* is used, in legal circles, in assessing the potential motivations in a crime is perhaps also of relevance here: educational policies have consequences, and many of the outcomes of may be to the detriment of particular groups, and may heighten social inequities.

This is the crux of the book that follows: social equity must be the ultimate public good in educational policy, and this is not necessarily achieved either through the processes of majoritarianism – the Jeremy Bentham’s ‘fundamental axiom’ – that ‘the greatest happiness of the greatest number … is the measure of right and wrong’ (1991 [1776], p. 393), nor through the problematic policies of ‘equality of opportunity’. Social justice must be for all, not the greatest number, and must be judged by the outcomes of policies, not simply by their intentions.

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