

BOOK REVIEWS

MISEDUCATION: INEQUALITY, EDUCATION AND THE WORKING CLASSES

Reviewed by M. L. White, University of East London

Author: Diane Reay

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Like a shared secret, Reay begins *Miseducation*: inequality, education and the working classes with a personal reflection, telling us that Brian Jackson and Dennis Marsden's 'Education and the Working Class' was one of the first sociology of education books that I read, and the first to have a lasting impact on me' (p. 1). Published in 1962, Jackson and Marsden could not have known how little would change in the intervening years and how much impact class inequalities would continue to have on educational outcomes. Today in a culture of audit, regulation and assessment and at a time when class is no longer a neatly defined concept, *Miseducation* is a timely call to action. Returning to many of the (sometimes unanswered) questions raised by Jackson and Marsden, Reay brings their seminal work up to date for the 21st Century and suggests what we might do to achieve a fairer education system for everyone. Covering a great deal of contested and challenging ground, Reay considers class identity, the inadequacies of social mobility, and offers an analysis of the effects of wider economic and social class relationships on working-class educational experiences. 'The convention in a book like this', Reay says, is to set out the problems and then to offer solutions. But our current situation defies any formulaic approach. What is needed is

a sea-change in hearts and minds, not just better policy in education.'

In many ways this book should be read as a deeply personal account of a classed educational experience. Reay introduces the book with a personal reflection and shares with the reader some of her 'wounds and resulting scars of class'. But this is not a memoir and Reay writes as a sociologist drawing on 20 years of research experience, over 500 interviews and offers statistical evidence to outline the inequalities and differences of experience and outcomes for different social classes.

In chapter 1, 'Why can't education compensate for society?', Reay draws on statistical data to consider the relationship between the economy and education. She looks back to the more optimistic period in which Jackson and Marsden were writing in order to compare and contrast two very different times in history before going on to outline why education cannot compensate for wider social and economic inequalities. In chapter 2, 'The history of class in education', Reay offers a concise historical overview of policy and practice in the UK education system. Starting with the introduction of state education in the 19th Century, Reay moves on to consider the tripartite and comprehensive periods before offering an analysis of a divided English

system in which increased diversity of schooling (free schools, academies and selective grant maintained schools funded by the state) undermines comprehensivisation and 'is hard to reconcile with the principle of social justice' (p. 47). In chapter 3, 'Working-class educational experiences', Reay offers us case studies to examine the working-class educational experience in a diversified educational landscape. Drawing on the lived experience of working-class students and their parents and Department for Education statistics, she presents an up-to-date snapshot of the social class attainment gap. In chapter 4, 'Class in the classroom', Reay considers the question 'how do the working classes experience a relative educational failure that has come to be seen as a "personal lack"?', and in chapter 5, 'Social mobility: a problematic solution', Reay shares experiences from educationally successful working-class students to present a version of social mobility that is very different to the students Jackson and Marsden wrote about. In chapter 6, 'The middle and upper classes: getting the "best" for your own child', Reay examines the experience of upper- and middle-class students and their families, looking both at educational practices and attitudes towards the working classes. In chapter 7, 'Class feeling: troubling the soul and preying on the psyche',

Reay focuses specifically on the emotional landscapes of class and describes how schools can become the source of all kinds of fantasies, fears, anxieties, hopes and dreams. In the final chapter, Reay considers what has changed since Jackson and Marsden and what has remained the same. She discusses why working-class students fare so much worse in education than the upper and middle classes and suggests policy changes (drawing on Freire, Dewey and hooks) that would benefit all children and young people.

Reay describes this book as 'part of a

process of thinking through class – both my own changed class position and also relationships between the class I am now ambivalently part of and the class I left' (p. 198). While thinking about class and education is undoubtedly complex, our identities are multiple and fluid and education is a deeply personal experience. This is an accessible and insightful book, rich in the detail of experience and analytical reflection. I recommend this book for teachers and teacher educators, for education students and those concerned with issues of class inequalities and educational policy within

the British education system.

The book is published by the British Sociological Association and Policy Press and is the first in their joint '21st Century Standpoints' book series edited by Professor Les Back (Goldsmiths, University of London), Professor Pamela Cox (University of Essex) and Professor Nasar Meer (University of Edinburgh). Future publications include *Snobbery* by David Morgan (July 2018), and *What's wrong with work?* by Lynne Pettinger (January 2019). ■

UNDERSTANDING THE DANISH FOREST SCHOOL APPROACH: EARLY YEARS EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

Reviewed by Graham Robertson, University of East London

This is another in the 'Understanding the... Approach' series, which seeks to provide academics and practitioners with knowledge and useful ideas concerning a range of relevant interesting topics. For those familiar with Knight's (2012) work on the Forest School movement this book will come as a welcome companion and addition to their library. For those who are new to this area or curious about the Forest School approach to education it is a very useful starting point.

The book is divided into seven clearly written and accessible chapters with many useful links and references, together with a handy glossary to explain some of the words used in the Danish education system.

Concentration is upon the early years curriculum. However, one can easily see

how the philosophical approach and activities described could be incorporated into learning for primary, secondary, adult or elderly clients or students.

Chapter 1 describes the geographical, historical, social and cultural influences which have influenced and moulded both the philosophy and pedagogy of introducing young children to the outdoors environment as an important part of their learning journey. Since 2004, 'nature and natural phenomenon' has been an integral part of the education experienced by Danish pre-schoolers and is influenced by the work of Froebel.

Chapter 2 gives the theoretical basis of the Forest School approach and is wide-ranging in connecting a number of well-known movers and shakers in education, taking a very holistic approach to learning

and development. Of particular interest is the mention given to the Hungarian psychologist Csikszentmihalyi with his concept of 'flow'.

Chapter 3 provides the reader with an interesting understanding of the Danish approach to education, with chapter 4 concentrating upon the learning environment, with some interesting sections on perceptions of what constitutes 'risky play' and 'accidents'. Thankfully the author explains that in Danish society there is not such an emphasis upon parents taking legal action against schools and teachers if accidents do happen, which must help to reduce stress and worry amongst practitioners.

Chapters 5 and 6 contain more detailed information on the Danish early years curriculum and in particular how it is

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organised and assessed. Two models of assessment are quoted: the SMTTE model and the 'seven-sided' model of assessment and evaluation, which make an interesting comparison to approaches used in other countries.

Finally, chapter 7 raises some relevant issues applicable to all education systems – not least, the expensive nature of the small schools which are favoured by Danish parents, and the pressure upon local government budgets.

As with Knight's (2012) 'Forest School for all' approach, the aim is to engage

and enthuse readers in the adventure and stimulation that the out of doors can achieve. Involvement in and experience of activities around horticulture, nature and the green environment has a long pedagogy in itself. Lewis (1996) reminds us that the relationship between people and nature is both a transforming and rewarding process. The experiences we have through our encounters with the natural environment can act as a soothing and healing process embodied in the Hebrew words *tikkun olam*: healing, repair and transformation of the world around us.

The therapeutic impact of the green environment upon well-being and cognitive development is very well documented (eg Kaplan & Kaplan 1989; Linden & Grut 2002; Simson & Straus 2003; Thoms 2003; Waite 2017). Mortlock (1984, 2001, 2009) describes experiences of the green environment as contributing to both inner strength and understanding of the self, spiritual awareness akin to awe and wonder, and the fostering of a deep appreciation of one's place in the world – surely an antidote to the high-technology-orientated stressful lives we are pressured to inhabit on a daily basis. ■

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