

W. Hutmacher – D. Cochrane – N. Bottani (eds.): *In Pursuit of Equity in Education: Using International Indicators to Compare Equity Policies*

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In Pursuit of Equity in Education addresses the issue of inequality and inequity in access to education, with a particular emphasis on the role of educational policies. It does so by providing an overview of the main theoretical approaches to the issue and an inventory of existing indicators on which the research, political debates and policies have been centred, and by proposing an internationally comparable system of quantitative indicators. These indicators should permit a "comparison, measuring and monitoring of the relative educational inequalities across diverse education systems, each with its own historical, cultural, institutional and political background" (p 16).

Why is it that there is such an interest in examining equity in access to education? Why have inequality and equity in education become the focal issues in the most developed countries, where a rapid expansion of average educational attainment has been experienced over the past decades and in many of whose societies there has been a significant trend towards equality in education, measured as the dispersion of years of schooling, and where statistics also show that previously disadvantaged social groups (women, lower classes) have experienced the largest gains in the course of the expansion? The answer is obvious: these by all means positive developments did not bring about equality of educational attainment among relevant social groups, particularly among social classes and various ethnic groups. On the other hand, in an open and 'meritocratic' society, success in education contributes significantly to intergenerational mobility and occupational career. Higher education still leads to higher incomes and a higher standard of living, reduces the risk of unemploy-

ment, and implies a longer life expectancy. All in all, higher education has become a primary tool for life-success and this trend will continue as the knowledge-based economy takes its hold.

The volume consists of four parts and a total of fifteen chapters written by twenty-one authors from different countries (most of the authors belong to the INES /International Education Indicators Project/ working group). The first part is an overview of the main theoretical approaches and conceptual issues, as perceived by sociologists, political philosophers and educational researchers. The second part proposes and justifies an equity indicator system and introduces the current positions and results of OECD and UNESCO. The third part of the book compares the equity of educational systems in an international context, while the fourth part presents several examples of work with the internationally comparable system of equity indicators in educational policies.

First of all, the volume clarifies the semantic difference between the terms *equity* and *equality* (Introduction and Chapter 7). Not every inequality in education is by definition inequitable: it can be due to differences in intelligence, individual effort, achieved school results and knowledge, which are certainly factors that considerably predetermine our further educational career and open different doors. While the terms *equality* and *inequality* establish a state of equivalence or difference, often described in social sciences using Bourdieu's concept of capital (its forms and mutual conversion), i.e. the issue of 'objective' advantage or disadvantage, the concepts of *equity* and *inequity* have a more ethical or moral quality, aiming at verifying the fair distribution of these advantages or disadvantages. The question we are dealing with is thus which of the inequalities are unfair and why they are perceived as such.

Part I: Theoretical approaches and conceptual issues

Benadussi (Chapter 1) gives an overview of the most significant sociological theories (with their research lines) dealing with inequality in approaches to education, beginning in the 1960s (e.g. Floud and Halsey, Coleman, Bourdieu and Passeron, Boudon, Jenks, Husén etc.). He suggests that it is a major social problem, since social differences have such a momentous effect on the outcome of the formal educational process. He concludes that although no theory has proved itself to be the single right one, the empirical research, including the most recent international comparisons of trends, has proved that equalisation in education is a possible, though difficult to achieve, goal. Benadussi, using Bourdieu's concept of capital, developed an explanatory model as a framework for concepts of educational equity, which is suitable for serving as the basis for relevant statistical indicators and measures.

Demeuse, Crahay and Monseur (Chapter 2) show the difficulty of the co-existence in modern societies of such concepts as liberty, equality, responsibility, effectiveness (absolute and relative) and efficiency. According to the authors, it is effectiveness that occupies the central place in the problem of equity. They also claim that there can be no effectiveness without equity, which means that practices which are shown as ineffective (such as the homogeneous grouping of students) must be changed, obviously with regard to the objectives of the system.

Meuret (Chapter 3) argues that educational inequalities must be considered as avoidable, in order to be considered inequitable. But how do we know which inequalities are still tolerable and according to which criterion we can consider equality to be equitable? Meuret gives an account of what existing theories of justice say about educational inequality and draws on new developments in political philosophy since John Rawls. He

also demonstrates the principles of equity used in existing educational systems and formulates a type of quantitative indicators that allows us to measure equity from the point of view of different interpretations of social justice.

Cochrane (Chapter 4) describes the situation and problems of education in the US. He mainly points to the process of segregation, based on race, ethnicity and poverty, which in American history was also applied to schools. The basic question thus reads: can schools teach and students learn beyond expectations set by parental backgrounds? The answer is that both are possible, as numerous research studies have shown. The question, though, remains as to what mechanisms would be the most effective in the removal of the initial disadvantages of certain children, which still requires further experimental research (summer and after-school programmes, class-size reduction, socio-economic mix in schools etc.).

Part II: Equity indicators: a framework, a rationale and current perspectives

Meuret (Chapter 5) puts forward a systematic approach to the issue of educational inequalities and inequities, taking into account the input, process and output of educational systems, as well as the specific socio-economic situation in the given country. Meuret tries to propose a system of indicators permitting a comparison of educational systems with respect to their equity, using nine principles; e.g. among the categories pertaining to individuals, the most important are those from which individuals cannot escape.

Orfield (Chapter 6) presents the role of race and poverty indicators in American education. He maintains that the addition of data and indicators about poverty and race to education statistics has substantially enriched ongoing debates about educational inequalities and their possible solutions (school de-segregation, bilingual education for immigrants). He further remarks that the condi-

tions that relate to class are often treated as impacts of race, which is why it is essential to be able to look at the ways in which ethnicity and poverty interact. However, for the data to have real impact, they must be made public in a form people can understand.

Healy and Istance (Chapter 7) list the indicators that show the level of inequality and inequity of various educational systems. They maintain that the measures that demonstrate, in precise terms, the distribution of education and learning in any country, and that show whether progress is being made or not, are surprisingly sparse. They quote, for example, the results of the following surveys: TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey) and PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment), and also refer to one of the most important regular reports, *Education at a Glance*, published by the OECD.

Cavicchioni and Motivans (Chapter 8) describe the worldwide process of asserting human rights and the fight against poverty, with a special emphasis on less developed countries. They underline that every child's right to education is provided for in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which became internationally binding more than fifty years ago. The signatory states committed themselves to providing children with a certain level of education, and in this context it became clear that educational inequalities are a problem relevant to the educational systems of all countries in the world.

Part III: International comparisons on equity issues

As Hutmacher stresses in his introduction, until recently the stock of 'human capital' was measured through the distribution of educational attainment levels among the adult population, but nowadays it is accomplished through the direct measurement of skills and competencies. Comparative surveys of the latter nature are used in Part III

for the analysis of the inequality of educational opportunity – particularly TIMSS (Chapters 9 and 11), IALS (Chapter 12) and other OECD surveys (Chapter 10). At the time of writing, results from the first PISA survey were not yet available, but as the survey includes an internationally comparable measure of students' socio-economic family background, it will certainly be a great source of information on equity issues.

Vandenberghe et al. (Chapter 9) ask the question of whether or not there is an effectiveness-equity trade-off. In their empirical analysis, the multidimensional concept of equity is represented by two dimensions – socio-economic (SES) family background and gender. They use results from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS 1995) database and conclude that there might be no effectiveness-equity trade-off. Some countries or regions succeed in ensuring a relatively high achievement level on average, without showing a high sensitivity of achievement relative to SES. By contrast, other countries display poor results with regard to both criteria (p. 250). Further, they document the existence of a growing gender gap, especially in science.

Vandenberghe (Chapter 11) also uses TIMSS data to point out the importance of social interactions at the school and classroom level ('peer effects') as determinants of achievement. Empirical evidence from TIMSS 1995 reveals the importance of peer effects, but also suggests that their intensity may be subject-dependent. In this context, the author distinguishes two contradictory approaches: on the one hand, segregating skill-grouping practices ('tracking' in the US or 'streaming' in the UK), and, on the other hand, de-segregated classrooms (also called 'mixing' or 'whole-class instruction'). The role of peer effects from these points of view calls for further analysis.

In their comparative analysis based on the data from the IALS surveys from 1994 and 1996, Noël and de Broucker (Chapter 12) emphasise intergenerational inequalities in

three dimensions: (1) inter-familial inequality; (2) inequality between the sexes, and (3) inter-cohort inequalities. In their study, the notion of cultural capital is reduced by constraint of the data on parents' education.

Peter Evans (Chapter 10), in his paper called *Equity Indicators Based on the Provision of Supplemental Resources for Disabled and Disadvantaged Students*, presents OECD international comparative data from studies relating to the education of students with special needs (those physically disabled, but also those disadvantaged by other factors, such as social, ethnic or cultural origin) in terms of overall resources provided, place of education – i.e. special schools, special classes in regular schools, or regular classes in regular schools – and gender.

Part IV: National policies and the use of indicators

While in Part III examples are given of the indicators used for an international comparison with regard to the problem of equity, Part IV emphasises mainly policies that intend to make education systems more equitable. Chapters 13 and 14 introduce national policies implemented in Sweden and in Flanders, and the last chapter presents a system of indicators that can be used by policy makers. Sweden and Belgium are countries that show both high effectiveness and low socio-economic inequality levels, which is why their national policies are introduced in this part of the book.

At the turn of the 1980s and the 1990s, the Swedish school system was decentralised, which always brings about certain risks – not only that of increased cultural particularisation of individual schools, but also that of greater inequality in resources and in the quality of learning conditions in different schools. Wildt-Persson and Rosengren (Chapter 13) confirm that it is still the state's responsibility to guarantee the equity of education. Among other policies, they refer to the idea of 'equivalence in schools', which

was recently introduced by the Swedish Education Act. The concept of equivalence is divided into three aspects: (1) equal access (prerequisites), (2) equivalent education (process), and (3) the equal value of education (results). Equivalent education with respect to the learning process does not require that educations be 'identical', but of 'equal worth', which essentially means having 'equal effects'. Their paper underlines the importance that the government has attached to national and local follow-up and evaluation.

Dewitt and Van Petegem (Chapter 14) describe three major equity policies pursued in Flanders in the past three decades: educational priority policy for immigrant children, the democratisation of secondary education, and opening up higher education to the masses. However, they remark that these policies, focusing on education as such, should be accompanied by the broader concern of policy-makers in other fields, such as the economy and welfare.

Douglas Cochrane (Chapter 15) describes persisting inequalities between different metropolitan areas in the United States. He argues that the residential neighbourhood in which students live should be studied as an environment that influences educational outcomes. Therefore, he proposes a set of geographic and demographic indicators for studying disparities in educational resources internationally, as well as in the United States.

If the educational system of a given country hinders equal opportunities in attaining education, it also hinders equal opportunities in attaining a higher social status as a potential reward for the individual's effort. The problem of unequal and inequitable approaches to education is a crucial one, and it leads not only to an inefficient use of human resources, and thereby to the reduced competitiveness of the economy, but also to unfair social and cultural inequalities, challenging the legitimacy of the social system as such.

There are many important messages in this volume, which should not be overlooked by those who are responsible for educational systems and policies in their countries, and in this capacity, as educational policy-makers and/or leaders, they should take the issue of equity in education seriously. One message, however, is to be particularly emphasised here: equity in education has again become one of the most important and sensitive issues in almost all advanced countries, even though – in the course of the past several decades – they had achieved significant progress in reducing inequality in access to higher education. Most of the post-communist countries are still delayed in taking this challenge seriously, though educational inequality in these countries is higher than in most of the advanced countries, and, as some analyses have indicated, it tends to be growing rather than diminishing. Therefore, in these countries, this volume should become one of the basic textbooks in the sociology of education and educational policy, with the great hope that the new generation of policy makers will be more perceptive to the issue of inequality and equity in education than their predecessors.

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Linda Woodhead – Paul Fletcher – Hiroko Kawanami – David Smith (eds.): *Religions in the Modern World. Traditions and Transformations*

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Broadly speaking, the scientific study of religions in Central Europe (not only post-communist) has usually oscillated between two main perspectives. It has centred either on the historical study of religions, i.e. the study of the development of their theologies and their attitudes toward the state and society, or on a comparative study of different reli-

gious practices (in the sense of the German *Religionswissenschaft*). Both these perspectives have rich historical roots, but they now seem quite old-fashioned. Nowadays, this situation has unfortunately led to the conviction that the study of religions “cannot be concerned with [for example] modern Western esotericism” (Hugo Stamm: *Achtung Esoterik. Zwischen Spiritualität und Verführung*. Zürich – München 2000: Pendo Verlag, p. 35–36), which is certainly one important manifestation of modern ‘unofficial’ piety. If this were true, one must ask why governments and NGOs have paid for the study when there are no up-to-date results to be had from it?

I am convinced that our undergraduates will be able to be successful in the public or business spheres only if we are able to teach them about contemporary issues and not just historical ones. Of course, the majority of religious traditions have important historical roots, and their sources and resources sometimes lie deep in the past. But while these foundations are of consequence, they teach us quite little about the modern and contemporary metamorphoses of religions. Therefore, for future civil servants or business agents, knowledge about the foundations of Christianity or any other religions is much less useful than knowledge of their contemporary social and political impact in different countries or social groups. As a leading American sociologist of religions and culture, and one of the contributors to the *Religions in the Modern World. Traditions and Transformations*, Peter L. Berger has stressed that scholars “should pay less attention to Iranian mullahs, and more to Harvard professors and to ordinary people in London or Paris” (p. 294). And the very same is true for the above-mentioned overemphasis on history. This is why one must strongly welcome this book, edited by four Lancaster scholars, as it is primarily concerned with – unlike the vast majority of other *prolegomena* to religious studies – the contemporary state of religions. Broadly speaking, it focuses on the sociology of religions, a subject which was