

# EQ211-15 Social Theory and Education

**22/23**

**Department**

Education Studies

**Level**

Undergraduate Level 2

**Module leader**

Paul Warmington

**Credit value**

15

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

100% coursework

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

---

## Description

### Introductory description

N/A

### Module aims

The BA (Hons) Education Studies aims to introduce its students to creative and forward-thinking approaches to understanding education, based on critical analysis. However, coverage of contemporary education research and debates often assumes a knowledge of critical social theory and concepts of social and cultural reproduction. This module enables students to explore the interplay between theories of society and education. Students will examine how major theorists have sought to analyse the role that educational institutions play within complex societies. The module will focus on the historical development of a range of dynamic and flexible approaches to understanding social and cultural reproduction in education.

### Outline syllabus

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

WEEK ONE: Why do 'social theory'? This session begins by exploring what we mean by social theory and considering how social theory can help us understand relationships between education

and wider society. We shall think about what it means to view the world through a 'sociological imagination'. This requires considering some fundamental 'sociological' questions. For example: What is society? What is culture? What is the 'sociological imagination' (a phrase coined by US sociologist, C. Wright Mills)? What does it mean to describe education as a 'social institution'? What does it mean to think 'critically' about education and society? Such questions will enable us, in this module, to think about the 'functions' and effects of education in complex societies, about how education relates to economy, class and culture, and how our identities are constructed by different forms of education.

**WEEK TWO: Consensus or conflict?** In studying education, we often come across references to 'socialisation', the 'education system' and the 'functions' of education. Where do these ideas come from? What do they imply about the relationship between education and wider society? In this session we shall compare structural functionalism and conflict theory. We shall look at some early approaches to the sociology of education, including Durkheim (1890s, 1910s) and Talcott Parsons (1950s, 1960s). We shall explore how understandings of schooling (and class, race and gender) are shaped in important ways by whether we see society as being built upon consensus or conflict between its constituent parts.

**WEEK THREE: Marxist educational theory, social reproduction** This week's session examines the emergence in the 1970s of Marxist theories of education and their break with liberal and functionalist analyses of education and society. We shall consider Althusser's view of education as an 'ideological state apparatus', an agent of social and cultural reproduction in capitalism. We shall explore the subsequent influence of Marxist educational theory as a way of explaining educational identities and inequalities, particularly Bowles and Gintis' 'correspondence' theory of relationships between education and work. Are such theories still meaningful today? How might they help us understand why one of the most common human experiences is to be born poor and remain poor?

**WEEK 4: Neo-Marxism, cultural studies, feminism** In this week's session we shall look at how in the 1970s, 80s and 90s social theorists developed more flexible and dynamic understandings of social reproduction in education, drawing on the ideas of Marx and Gramsci, but also on feminism, cultural studies and post-colonialism. How do young people in the education system understand their own lived experiences, beyond just being 'parts' in the capitalist system? How might theorists and researchers understand issues of agency and identity? How can we understand racialised and gendered experiences of education? In this session we explore 'cultural' analyses of education.

**WEEK 5: Bourdieu, cultural capital, symbolic violence** In this session we shall explore some of the ideas developed by one of the most influential social theorists in contemporary education research: Pierre Bourdieu. Educational researchers frequently refer to concepts such as 'cultural capital' and 'habitus'. Even policy-makers who have little interest in theory talk about 'social capital'. We shall consider how Bourdieu developed these concepts as a way of analysing social class, culture and educational inequalities and why Bourdieu's ideas have become so influential.

**WEEK 6: Foucault and Education** In this session we shall explore some of the ideas developed by another social theorist whose influence on education studies in recent decades has been extensive. Michel Foucault is associated with a sometimes bewildering array of ideas but in education his appeal has most often been his theories about power, knowledge, institutions and identities. Foucault suggested new ways of looking at education as an institution. Schools and universities (like other social institutions, such as prisons and hospitals) develop ways of creating organisation and authority by encouraging us to think of certain ideas and behaviours as 'normal' and beyond questioning and by suggesting 'ideal' or 'valid' ways of being teachers or students,

being 'well behaved' or 'knowledgeable'. Foucault encouraged us to ask questions about how schooling is organised and about the 'hidden' history behind the aspects of schooling we take for granted.

**WEEK 7: Critical theories of race and education** In this week's session we shall look at how critical movements such as post-colonialism, cultural studies and Critical Race Theory have shaped the study of race, racism and education. With origins in the work of pioneering social theorists such as WEB Dubois and Frantz Fanon, scholars in this field have been critical of theories of race and racism. They are also 'race-critical' of theory, interrogating the unexamined cultural assumptions present in social theory and the absence of 'black' perspectives. What does it mean to describe race as a social construct? How are racialised identities and worldviews reproduced in education?

**WEEK 8: Gender Theory & Higher Education** This week's session focuses on gender theory, particularly in relation to higher education. The session takes a workshop-style format in parts, which aims to build on and challenge ideas that you already have about what it is to analyse gender, and how gender affects our lives. The session includes an in-depth discussion of how gender is conceptualized and theorized, and the serious implications of this conceptual work for the way that education research is designed and conducted. The key objective of the session is to unpick and work through assumptions about gender, and therefore to involve you in the live process of theory-making.

**WEEK 9: The political economy of education** This session draws together some of the key themes of the module by exploring the political economy of education. Political economy involves studying relationships between individuals, society, markets and the state, using theories and methods drawn from sociology, history, political science, economics – and, in our case education policy scholarship. This takes us back to the module's concern with the relationship between education and the other institutions around which complex societies are structured. Sociologists such as John Marsh, Pauline Lipman and Stephen Ball have drawn upon a range of theory, from Marx to Foucault, in order to analyse how education policy is influenced by global economic and political shifts.

**WEEK 10: Revision** This session comprises a review of the module's major themes and theoretical sources. The session focuses on how to draw together the ideas covered in the module for the final assignment/ exam. Students are encouraged to reflect on their learning over the course of the module and how they understand social theory, education and society.

## **Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Students can demonstrate knowledge and critical understanding of well-established theories of society and education that focus on power, knowledge, inequality and identity
- Students can demonstrate the ability to apply underlying concepts and theoretical principles in the study of social and cultural reproduction in education
- Students can demonstrate knowledge of the main methods of enquiry in examining social theories of education, and can critically evaluate diverse approaches to theorising the social purposes and effects of education
- Students can demonstrate an understanding of the limits of their knowledge and how this influences analyses and interpretations based on that knowledge

## **Indicative reading list**

Avis, J. (2009) *Education, Policy and Social Justice: Learning and Skills* (London: Continuum).

Ball, S. (1990) *Foucault and Education: disciplines and knowledge* (Abingdon: Routledge).

Ball, S. (ed.) (2003) *Routledge Falmer Reader in Sociology of Education* (London: Routledge).

Ball, S. *The Education Debate* (Bristol: Policy Press).

Barker, M. and Scheele, J. (2016) *Queer: a graphic theory* (London: Icon/ Faber).

Benn, M. (2011) *School Wars: the battle for Britain's education* (London: Verso)

Blacker, D. (2013) *The Falling Rate of Learning and the Neoliberal Endgame* (Alresford, Hants: Zero).

Boronski, T. and Hassan, N. (2015) *Sociology of Education* (London: Routledge).

Bowles, S. and Gintis, H. (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (New York: Basic Books).

Butler, J. (2006) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (Abingdon: Routledge).

Delgado, R. and Stefancic, J. (2001) *Critical Race Theory: an introduction* (New York: New York University Press).

Dixson, A. & Rousseau, C. (eds) (2006) *Critical Race Theory in Education: All God's Children Got a Song*, New York, Routledge.

Flint, J. and Peim, M. (2012) *Rethinking the Education Improvement Agenda: a critical philosophical approach* (London: Continuum). Gillborn, D. 2008. *Racism and education: Coincidence or conspiracy?* (Abingdon: Routledge).

Grenfell, M. and James, D. (1998) *Bourdieu and Education: acts of practical theory* (London: Routledge).

Leonardo, Z. (2009) *Race, Whiteness, and Education* (London: Routledge).

Lipman, P. (2011) *The New Political Economy of Urban Education: neoliberalism, race and the right to the city* (London: Routledge). Marsh, J. (2011) *Class Dismissed: why we cannot teach our way out of inequality* (New York: Monthly Review Press).

Moore, R. (2004) *Education and society: issues and explanations in the sociology of education* (Cambridge: Polity).

Morrow, R. and Torres, C. (1995) *Social Theory and Education: A critique of theories of social and cultural reproduction* (New York: SUNY).

Murphy, M. (2013) *Social Theory and Education Research: understanding Foucault, Habermas, Bourdieu and Derrida* (London: Routledge).

Reay, D. (2017) *Miseducation: inequality, education and the working classes* (Bristol: Policy Press).

Scruton, R. (2015) *Fools, Frauds and Firebrands: thinkers of the new left* (London: Bloomsbury).

Skelton, C. and Francis, B. (2008) *Feminism and 'The Schooling Scandal'* (Abingdon: Routledge).

Warmington, P. (2015) *Black British Intellectuals and Education: multiculturalism's hidden history* (London: Routledge).

Warmington, P. (2015) *Dystopian Social Theory and Education*, *Educational Theory*, 65, 265-281.

Willis, P. (2000) *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs* (Farnham: Ashgate).

[View reading list on Talis Aspire](#)

## **Interdisciplinary**

This module draws heavily on the discipline of sociology

## Subject specific skills

Students should demonstrate a critical understanding of -

- the underlying values, theories and concepts relevant to education
- the diversity of learners and the complexities of the education process
- the complexity of the interaction between learning and local and global contexts, and the extent to which participants (including learners and teachers) can influence the learning process
- the societal and organisational structures and purposes of educational systems, and the possible implications for learners and the learning process
- theories, practice and research in the area of education

## Transferable skills

- Active listening
- Analysis and decision making
- Cognitive flexibility
- Communication skills
- Complex problem solving
- Critical thinking
- Interpersonal and communication
- Judgement and decision making
- Reasoning

---

## Study

### Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	10 sessions of 3 hours (20%)
Private study	120 hours (80%)
Total	150 hours

### Private study description

Independent study hours include background reading, completing reading/other tasks in preparation for timetabled teaching sessions, undertaking research using the library resources, follow-up reading work, working on individual and group projects, the completion of formative and summative assignments, revision.

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

---

## Assessment

You must pass all assessment components to pass the module.

### Assessment group A

	<b>Weighting</b>	<b>Study time</b>
Essay 3,000-word essay.	100%	

### Feedback on assessment

Assignment feedback as standard.

---

## Availability

### Courses

This module is Optional for:

- Year 2 of UEQA-X35B Undergraduate Education Studies