

1 Introduction

How can we make sense of the influence of economics in education?

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Background

The world of economics is very pervasive, and in recent years there have been many changes in the world of education and schooling which have increased the influence of economics in education. This book explores some of the ways in which the field of education and schooling has become closely aligned with economic imperatives and interests. Some of the most significant changes come with the decision that turns the school into a competitive institution that depends on results for survival. This competition has been enabled by the introduction of national testing and assessments, national and international league tables, and the alignment of education to employment demands (West and Bailey, 2013). This means that nowadays education is more than something we take pleasure in and do for our own development. It is also an economic activity.

This book builds on the editors' interest and expertise in education. Discussion with colleagues and attendance at conferences have highlighted the pressuring demands on education, and degrees in education. In particular, the increasing influence of economic arguments, economic ideologies and government involvement in education have made apparent that there is a need to reflect and talk about economical influences and trends in education. Many staff members in education lack a background in economics. Similarly, students attending degrees in education are often not introduced to debates surrounding education from an economic perspective, and thus lack the knowledge to examine how education is intertwined with the needs of economic systems. The editors feel that it is timely to close this gap and to offer a book that engages and offers ways to explore critical debates around economics and how they take shape in education.

The editors have asked other educationists to join them in outlining and articulating their thoughts and their work on the topic. The final product, this book, articulates key debates and theoretical perspectives which can give both students and staff across several courses within the study of education a framework for discussing and analysing how economics impacts on the world of education. Furthermore, the book presents propositions of how aspects of economics are present within education and schooling, and how they may impact learning and teaching. These discussions are not only relevant within the study of education but also in a broader socio-political realm. We are all subject to market trends and demands and thus cannot escape the unforgiving pace of the different economic realities that dominate the world. Knowing more may empower us to act. As John Dewey, the famous American philosopher,

psychologist and educator maintained, 'We do not learn from experience ... we learn from reflecting on experience' (1933: 78).

Opening up education

Education is a very contested concept, with many competing views on what education is and what is supposed to be for; it is difficult to arrive at a definition (Carr, 2003). As a topic it provokes debate and discussions, and everyone has an opinion, sometimes a very strong opinion, on what education means and what its purpose ought to be. We all seem to know something about education and thus have something to say about education. This might be due to our ongoing participation in education: whether we choose to participate in education or whether we have to participate. For instance, as an individual you might have thought about attending university and you might have considered different courses before eventually making your final choice. However, if you have children and they are of school age, this is less of a choice, rather it is a compulsory activity. Everyone, at least in the Western context, needs to go to school or receive some sort of education, be this through home schooling or tutoring. Either way, education is an essential part of everyday life, and in current times it is very difficult not to be involved in some sort of educational process, either directly through our own experience or through the lives of others.

Another important distinction to make is that within education there are historical tensions which contribute to its ambiguity. On the one hand, there are philosophical questions regarding education and its meaning, and on the other hand there are more practical questions regarding how, as a society, we see education happening. For instance, we easily equate education to schooling, education as only occurring in schools and other educational institutions, although this does not need to be so. We could think about education as a lifelong process or something that happens in stages depending on our life circumstances, and not just during the traditional school cycle. This chapter argues that there are consequences to how we see education; the very initial steps as to how we define education alter any possible interpretation. For example, if we accept that education can only happen in schools, everything else associated with education is transformed to match the interpretive framework of the school as a social institution. The main relationships are centred around the teachers and the students, the parents and the school, the school and the community. Knowledge emerges as needing to be organised and delivered in the form of a curriculum. Learning becomes something that is confined to the sphere of the school and is quantifiable or measurable through assessments. Students and teachers are quickly categorised as 'good' or 'bad' depending on their adherence to these dynamics. Education becomes subservient to the main characteristics of schooling as a social institution. Schools are seen as places where we must go to learn and acquire knowledge and qualifications which are useful for the future, even if the future is increasingly uncertain.

With regard to education, this book will provide you with 'food for thought', enticing you to open up your ideas about education, to think critically and beyond your own experience and look at education as a system, and not just what your experience might have been like. Whilst drawing on experience is very important to understand things more deeply, to think about education more critically, we need to do more than that. We need to try and take a step back so that we are able to reflect meaningfully. Education is ubiquitous in our lives; in order to think more critically about it we need to make the familiar strange and apply a more sociological understanding. It is very difficult to think critically about something that over many years we

have learnt to accept unproblematically. Instead, this book invites you to develop what C.W. Mills (2000: 5) called a ‘sociological imagination’ within the context of education; a more reflective understanding which recognises the value of thinking about the intersections between personal biographies and history.

The sociological imagination shows us how what we regard as our experience can only be seen as part of a wider set of collective experiences. Pause for a moment and think briefly about your own educational experience. Was it a positive experience? Did you enjoy going to school? What kind of student were you? Would you call yourself an educated person? Why? The answers to these questions might ask that you think about your experience, but in the same way they are what they are because of the environment in which your education happened. For example, if your hairstyle clashes with the expected codes of conduct and behaviours set by your school, you immediately become a ‘problem student’ who does not comply with school policy. Some people might suggest that you change your hair in a way that conforms to the rules and regulations in your school, but the main issue, the need to conform, will not disappear as it arises from the environment in which you find yourself in. Simply, if the rules on hairstyles were not there, you would not be labelled a problem student at all. Recently, schools have been accused of passing unnecessary punishments to pupils because of hair and uniform transgressions, with some students becoming temporarily and permanently excluded, or put in isolation (Turner, 2018). We might ask questions around why students’ uniforms and hairstyles are so important in schools, that we are willing to disrupt a child’s education by sending them home if they do not abide by strict dress codes and rules.

Throughout this chapter and throughout the book the notion of education is presented as broad and wide-ranging, with some chapters posing critical questions about education as an extensive process beyond the school and others more focused on education in schools and other educational institutions. The aims of this chapter are to get you to think about education and to introduce a broader understanding of education, from only defining it through our personal experience, to considering how education is constantly influenced by societal changes, one of which includes the importance of maintaining an economic equilibrium or status quo. The chapter also provides a purposeful outline of the upcoming chapters, against the backdrop of economics as an added layer of understanding, a layer which is normally neglected when we think about education. Education, in present times, raises questions of cost, value for money, financial benefits and gains, investment, efforts to improve and secure certain outcomes, effectiveness and usefulness. The drive behind these factors is very often defined by what the economy demands at a particular time and within a particular economic system. These factors cannot be ignored and need to be addressed in order to understand how the purposes of education change with each wave of economic change.

This book is primarily written for students, teachers and academics who wish to learn more about education and how the pressing demands of the economy and economic processes seep into its nature and its purpose. Readers will be introduced to various critical stances on how economics co-opts educational processes and becomes a key driver for educational change. The book will use current examples, case studies and theories to explore and illustrate how the study of education could be diversified; that is if we are willing to engage with an analysis of education which encompasses the pressure from wider economic debates.

What is education?

As the key focus of this book is on education, it is important to outline what we mean by it. When trying to define education, the work of British philosopher R.S. Peters is important as he provides perhaps the most systematic framework for understanding education. As Peters' view is very extensive, we will focus on the three criteria which he has formulated; for a full discussion, see Peters' original works (1966; Peters, Woods and Dray, 1973). In his book *Ethics and Education*, Peters provides a 'synthetic sketch' (Beckett, 2011: 239) for the concept of education. Firstly, Peters places education above other important aspects of human learning; he purports education is something that 'is worthwhile to those who become committed to it' (1966: 45). That means education is not something to 'tick off' and 'pass through' but something to be enjoyed. In other words, if the learner does not see any purpose or value in the things he or she learns, then, according to Peters, this activity is not worthwhile and thus cannot count as educational. Secondly, 'education must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert' (45). This means that education does not, and cannot, consist of the mere acquisition of knowledge and skills. What counts is the transformation that happens. It also implies that individual needs to look beyond their own nose, into other fields and areas; to become educated they need to be able to see the wider world. Thirdly, education 'rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness on the part of the learner' (45). This implies that education is something people 'opt in' and thus the educational process and procedures need to be morally acceptable. This means, teachers cannot 'force' learners to participate in activities that cause harm. According to Peters, any process that does not satisfy these three criteria cannot be called education. Thus, Peters has argued against an instrumentalist view of education, one that sees education as a utilitarian tool to serve society, improve economic and industrial growth and, consequently, the contentment of the populace.

However, Peters is not the only one who has thought deeply about what we might mean by education. Education Studies, as a discipline, explores educational issues and practices by drawing upon a range of theories and methods (Dufour and Curtis, 2011; Whitty and Furlong, 2017). Theorists and researchers in this area might ask why we educate and how. This is underscored by the belief that there is a need to question the nature and purposes of education in order to engage in a discussion about what education is. As Bartlett and Burton (2016) state, you need to turn the subject on its head to think critically about it. This leads them to define education as something that is broader than schooling. They might argue that education is '... essential for human development for both individuals and societies and has the potential to empower, change lives, bring about greater opportunities and enrich those who experience it' (Marshall, 2018: 1). Others go even a step further and argue that in order to accommodate the various 'language-games' and to utilise opportunities, we need definitions that are flexible and open-ended whilst yet being context-specific (Sewell and Newman, 2014).

Depending on the standpoint taken, we could say that people adopt a particular ideology. Ideologies refer to the system of beliefs and values that an individual or a group holds, although some argue that ideologies are something that we as subjects do. For example, Louis Althusser (1976) said that ideologies only exist because they are enacted and performed, and for Althusser education was the most effective institution to reproduce dominant ideology. Either way, it is undeniable that people have different ideas about what education is and what it should be for. Functionalists might argue that education is essential for the continuation of society (and the

state) while Liberalists see education as something that offers opportunities for individuals while also teaching us to live together respectfully. It is important to be aware of these different ideological stances because they underpin our views and approaches. In recent years, our belief of what education is (and should be) has increasingly been shaped by economic needs and ideologies, the revalence of neoliberal economics, and the importance of enabling a market which sees competition as the defining characteristics of human relations.

Education and economics

To explore how economic ideas have become embedded in understandings of education, this book presents a variety of perspectives which illuminate how economics insidiously defines the meaning and purpose of education and schooling. In the past we have argued that education as a subject and as a notion is always under some regime of fast-paced change. We have discussed elsewhere, through the notion of discourse (Foucault, 1987), how education is conceived of and appropriated for purposes other than the pure pursuit of knowledge, self-development or enlightenment (Bustillos and Abegglen, 2018). Discourses ‘govern the way that a topic can be meaningfully talked about and reasoned about. It also influences how ideas are put into practice and used to regulate the conduct of others’ (Hall, 1997: 44). This book has emerged from such thinking and such reflections. Chapter by chapter, new possibilities are explained to envisage how economics has imposed itself as the prism through which education, its purposes and nature are viewed. Some of the chapters in this book analyse historical and political contexts in which systems of education and schooling have emerged. Other chapters look at more recent events and provide explanations for how education is a plane marked by competition for funding, the deskilling of teachers, the view of students and families as customers, and education as a form of economic investment among others. In this book, the site of the school, perceptions of knowledge, the history of education and the experiences of students and teachers are used to point out and decode some of the discourses deriving from political and economic rhetoric which influence the world of education as a whole. Looking at these discourses is useful because they are a representative of the production of power and as such underscore developments in education both on a global as well as on a personal scale.

In recent years, neoliberal rhetoric and arguments have fuelled an economic-driven discourse about education. These discourses have become embedded in education and have produced coercive entanglements that make it impossible to talk about education without looking at neoliberal ideas and practices. The ways of talking about education as an economic activity have produced an educational reality which we all adhere to. For example, returning to the notion of discourse, there are economic maxims which have trickled down to educational institutions, such as providing good value for money and running cost-effectively. Schools are now asked to conform to the practicalities dictated by these discourses; this means discourses are not just ‘talk’, what people say about something, but they have ‘real’ consequences. They influence what we ‘do’, the actions we take, and through that form the world in which we live. In other words, ‘They constitute the “nature” of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and the emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern’ (Weedon, 1987: 108). Discourses of this sort are changing the nature of schooling, encouraging schools to think about what their pupils can do for them, rather than what the school can do for its pupils, transforming curricula to ‘twenty-first-century skills’. More than ever before, head teachers are ‘positioned as

managers accountable to the needs and wishes of clients' (Savage, 2017: 143). To add to these tensions, schools are being asked to respond to these pressures at times of economic hardship, years of economic austerity which have left schools very often with limited and depleted funding.

However, this has not just remained an exclusive dynamic for schools and colleges but is extended to other sectors of education. In the United Kingdom higher education system, the significance of cost- effectiveness and value for money led to the introduction and increment of fees for students and a new form of higher education (HE) league table, produced by a national student feedback exercise, compiled by the National Student Survey (NSS), where students like customers rate and review their degree courses. The results of such surveys are very important to attract students and they organise institutions hierarchically, with those universities at the top of the market producing the best results. Whilst the survey could be seen as a genuine opportunity for students to give feedback, the survey also furthers the marketisation of higher education by lodging competition and pitting universities against each other. Interestingly, one of the most prestigious universities in the United Kingdom, Cambridge University, has been excluded from the NSS for two years in a row because of an ongoing student boycott of the survey; students' refusal to complete the survey makes its results invalid (Kiel, 2018). The boycott has been proposed by students and is supported by the Students' Union as a way to combat against the culture of education as a consumable product, and the government's approach to universities. This boycott has even been discussed in the House of Lords.

This book is arguing that current understandings and approaches to education are constructed through economic discourse. Market metaphors now dominate the world of education, and schooling has become an essential part of state policy and politics. The development of the 'knowledge economy' (see Powell and Snellman, 2004) has pushed this development even further. As Giroux (2012) states:

Since the 1970s, we have witnessed the forces of market fundamentalism strip education of its public values, critical content, and civic responsibilities as part of its broader goal of creating subjects wedded to consumerism, risk- free relationships, and the deconstruction of the social state.

This has enabled a discursive formation around 'education for the sake of the economy' (Bustillos and Abegglen, 2018). If we start asking questions as to how we got here, we are bound to find the escalating intervention in education by governments, the disempowering of teachers and educational professionals, the reconstruction of students and families as educational consumers, and the involvement of businesses and big companies with schools, all disguised as raising standards. Whilst it is debatable what exactly this means for learners, teachers, parents and educational institutions, it definitely changes the outlook of what we mean by education. The book is an invitation to think and ask different questions about education, to contemplate it in the light of economic contexts, but also to ponder about the potential of education, what it could be, and not just what it currently is. The question is where this might lead us in the future, respectively, which educational futures are going to be imaginable within this economic logic and how we can help ourselves and others think outside of it.

Thinking about educational futures, Ward (2013: xiii), points out that it is important '... to know what education is, but also what education could be, and might be'. Thus this book goes

beyond a mere discussion of economics in education and raises questions of the meaning and purpose of education on a broader level. As Arendt (1954) points out, this sort of questioning offers opportunities, particularly in a context where things seem to be in ‘crisis’. ‘A crisis forces us back to the questions themselves and requires from us either new or old answers, but in any case direct judgments’ (Arendt, 1954). This means, in order to avoid a catastrophe and resolve issues we need to make decisions: decisions about what we think of things and how to act. This involves taking risks (Biesta, 2016). These risks seem worth taking as education is about human beings, and hence the book strongly advocates an engagement with educational debates, especially those that surround education and economics. The outcomes of this engagement might not yet be known, but simply closing our eyes is not the solution. ‘... the acknowledgment that education isn’t a mechanism and shouldn’t be turned into one – matters’ (Biesta, 2016: 4).

Summary and chapter outlines

This chapter has introduced you to a more comprehensive understanding of education and has argued that schools are no longer independent from wider economic realities and government projects. In fact, the chapter implicitly presents education as an essential part of any political sphere and, intrinsically, an economic activity. Year on year, politicians have a lot to say about education, schools are inherently there to serve the public good, but in the last decades education has become the ‘best economic policy’ (Tony Blair, 2005, cited in Walford, 2013: 7). These extracts in public debate have allowed for a re-imagining of education as a plane where economics is becoming not only increasingly present but also a dominant force. The role of the school in society is changing, yet, it is not changing in a vacuum; instead, it is changing within the shaky realm of everyday economics and politics. Some, like critical pedagogist Henry Giroux (2011: 51), describe these refashioning of schools as ‘an attack on education’, where ‘institutions no longer are designed to benefit all members of the community’, but instead are ‘designed to serve the narrow interests of individual consumers and national economic policies’. Others might regard this as progress and inevitable in a world where everything needs to translate to economic benefits.

The following chapters continue the debate about education and economics, and introduce readers to the many ways in which the tradition of schooling is being rewritten, not just by changes to educational and social policy but by the idea that education is an economic activity. They offer rigorous analysis of how economics, including its ideological and theoretical stances, is continuously used to define and shape the nature and the purposes of education.

The second chapter presents a historical account of the main influences behind the teaching of economics. It deals with key concepts such as microeconomics, macroeconomics, neoclassical economics and homo economicus. This is an important chapter as it explains key concepts and terms which readers of this book are not expected to know or handle already. The chapter sets the scene and explains some of the language which readers will see in later chapters. It also argues that the teaching and understanding of economics is still too dominated by neoclassical economics which creates a ‘perfect rationality’ characterised by optimising, self-interest and equilibrium. Neoclassical economics is discussed as offering an interesting yet limited representation of human behaviour. Part of the chapter carefully explains how the psychological turn of the twentieth century influenced economics creating another branch of the discipline, called behavioural economics. The chapter gently introduces the reader to basic

ideas and definitions in economics, whilst also developing educational implications resulting from how economics is taught in schools and universities.

The third chapter addresses the major historical developments that led to the creation of a formal education system in England and Wales. The developments are carefully explained to denote the increased commitment by governments, to fund and monitor an education system centred around the school as a new social institution. The chapter critically argues what role the formation of the school played in shaping societal beliefs around childhood. An important layer of analysis in the chapter also suggests that the education of children was planned to reflect the economic interests of the time. Focusing on how childhood has been historically linked to the dynamics of school and the pureness of nature, the third chapter uses current examples to problematise the ecological crisis facing us all and the role of the school in educating children about the change needed.

Chapter 4 is the first in a series of chapters which show how neoliberalism underpins the world of education in different ways. It particularly addresses ways in which neoliberal economics coerces education to serve economic needs, and in this process teachers lose power and authority, and knowledge must be useful to have any value at all. The chapter pays close attention to the discourses around utility as a way to redefine what is useful knowledge in schools, but the chapter critically unpicks how the usefulness we currently attribute to knowledge is dictated by economic needs. An important argument in this chapter is how educational values of pedagogy, trust in teachers and vocational expertise are being replaced and reinterpreted by the introduction of neoliberal values. These neoliberal values transform the world of education and everyone in it, stripping back the educational experience of many, in order to meet the needs of a growing educational market in which competitiveness and performance thrive.

The fifth chapter continues to use the prevalence of neoliberal values in education to offer a critique of how they impact on individuals. Offering critical commentary on recent policy and educational changes in the United Kingdom, Chapter 5 opens up different ways to examine the effects of neoliberal values in schools. The chapter isolates the notion of choice to unravel an analysis of how individuals are made increasingly responsible for their educational futures. Using a Foucauldian conceptual framework, the chapter carefully illustrates how the introduction of choice and other educational policies creates an environment which is designed to favour a new type of educated subject. The chapter harnesses current changes in educational policy and a Foucauldian theoretical stance to offer a critical account of how the values of neoliberal economics seep into the world of education and schooling.

Other impacts of economic values in education are explored in the sixth chapter. In Chapter 6, Human Capital Theory (HCT) is used to shed light on how there is a tendency to think about human beings as investments. Education is also discussed as one of the main ways in which an individual acquires human capital in a world where education success is exchanged for jobs, better pay or to compete in the global employment market. The chapter offers clear definitions of the theoretical stance and a useful historical context to introduce readers to this critical perspective. The chapter narrates how our engagement with education is normally thought about on very economic terms, with education seen as a valuable investment which should allow us to secure certain benefits.

In Chapter 7, the relationship between education and employment laid out in the previous chapter is problematised further. In this chapter, the conflation between education and employment is explored to highlight emerging issues of inequality in the world of work. This chapter delves into the notion of the Precariat and the rise of precarious work as a way to problematise the role of education and schooling in reproducing unequal employment realities. The Precariat is defined and used to draw educational implications throughout the chapter, raising critical questions about the role of schools in reproducing a workforce facing precarious futures. The chapter also seeks to emphasise the ways employment relations occur in the gig economy, a particular climate affecting the world of work and enabling precarious conditions of employment. These points are used to argue that the purpose of education is reduced to that of an edu-factory, where the production of qualifications, led by market trends, overlooks more traditional values. Although the chapter refers to UK contexts, the applicability of its critical points are global and can be used to analyse other educational contexts.

Chapter 8 offers critical exploration of how the university as an institution has undergone profound change, and has now come under pressure to renew itself to meet economic demands. The chapter has three main sections, the mediaeval origins of the university, the modern university and the postmodern university, which unpack the development of the institution and the current exposure to changes in the educational markets facing universities. The chapter pays close attention to recent changes in the United Kingdom in relation to tuition fees, student funding and the markets in which degrees are created. In critically discussing these changes, the chapter is arguing that higher education has become another economic commodity, turning it into an integral part of political agendas, and incrementally monitored by governments. Further reflections around what happens to knowledge in market relations and the effects of increasing scrutiny on universities are also considered.

The association of neoliberal economics and progress is critiqued in Chapter 9. It argues that an important impact of a neoliberal education is that it is reductionist and Eurocentric. Chapter 9 problematises the development discourse and how it impacts on the projects of schooling in non-Western societies. As part of its analysis, the chapter uses Foucauldian theory to raise critical questions on how Eurocentric knowledge is being replicated in developing countries, legitimised by schools created to mirror the West. These are important arguments, particularly as education has had a long history of being an instrument of colonisation, and recolonisation in developing countries (Brock-Utne, 2002). Engaging in a critique of the belief that any type of education is progress, the chapter also draws on critical pedagogy as a way to decolonise education. The final chapter, Chapter 10, provides concluding remarks to the book and highlights the importance of criticality when thinking about education. The chapter also contains questions for reflection that encourage readers to explore the topic further. The future of education is uncertain and hence the chapter argues for all readers to engage with education – with an open and inquisitive attitude.

Please note that each of these chapters reflects its author's, or authors', own view(s). Although not all of them agree with each other, they all have a critical, analytical outlook on education and address economics or economic questions of some sort. It is therefore not necessary to read the chapters in the order they are presented, although we, as the editors, have tried to put them in a meaningful sequence, presenting those chapters giving historical insights and addressing more general questions first, and those providing concrete case studies and examples later.

Each chapter also poses questions which we recommend readers follow up on, to learn more about particular aspects of a topic or argument.

Conclusion

As explained in this chapter, this book is actively encouraging you as a reader to pose questions about the nature of education and the organisation of important institutions, such as the school. The chapters are a compilation of possible challenges to the dominant views on education. Throughout the book, accepted views on education are outlined and very often questioned to contest hegemonic judgements that prevent us from thinking differently. In the case of education and economics, this book outlines some of the new political rationalities based on ‘truths’ associated with the economy, the market, human capital and an entrepreneurial vision of the individual (Foucault, 2008: 215). On a more inherent level, this book also seeks to broaden readers’ perspectives on what education could be for, and what it should be for.

To conclude this first chapter, we would like to point out that this book is part of an Education Studies series. These books address philosophical, sociological, historical, psychological and social issues in education both on a national and international level. These discussions are equally relevant within the study of education, particularly at a time when within education courses the influences of other disciplines are being made more apparent and pressures on justifying educational outcomes are mounting. We therefore recommend that readers explore educational issues beyond this book and join the debate about education because: education is something that concerns us all.

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