

POWER AND EDUCATION

CONTEXTS OF OPPRESSION
AND OPPORTUNITY

Edited by
Antonia Kupfer



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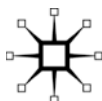
Power and Education

Contexts of Oppression and Opportunity

Edited by

Antonia Kupfer

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Introduction

Antonia Kupfer

Power has numerous, diverse, even opposing meanings. Classical approaches, such as Max Weber's, define it as coercion; that is, the imposition of one person's will over another's. In contrast, Hannah Arendt saw power as the ability to act. The meaning of education is similarly contested, comprehending knowledge acquisition, emancipation and liberation on the one hand and estrangement, obedience and suppression on the other. As a consequence, the study of the interrelationships between these processes must draw on different accounts of, and perspectives on, a variety of concepts and analyses. Nevertheless, all the analyses of concepts of power in this volume try to avoid the simple, uncritical notion of legitimate leadership directed toward 'best practices'. The authors propose a counterweight to mainstream education studies on school effectiveness, comparisons of attainment and performance, and institutional leadership. They cover both the broad critical spectrum and the contradictory empirical findings to start a debate on how power over education and power in education affect today's societies.

This introduction provides first an overview of the research literature on power and education followed by an outline of the new research presented in this anthology.

Earlier studies on power and education

Studies explicitly analysing power in relation to education can be classified under four themes: knowledge, social inequality, empowerment, and policy. More generally, in the classic *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), Bowles and Gintis assert a correspondence between the economic system and the way schools are organised and hierarchised to serve as feeders for the labour market. Another classical work at the opposite

pole from this Marxist view is Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1973), which conceives education as a possibility for liberation. It criticises 'banking' forms of education as oppressive in providing fixed content, and suggests replacing them with dialogues through which learners can decide what and how to learn. This volume presents and discusses three other classic theoretical works on the relationship between power and education by 1) Bourdieu/Passeron, 2) Gramsci and 3) Foucault (see Ball [2013] for an introduction to Foucault's work on power and education).

In the area of knowledge, Young's anthology *Knowledge and Control* (1971) initiated a major debate on 'what counts as educational knowledge' and how it is created, shifting the focus of analysis towards the social organisation of knowledge. Young aimed to establish a new sociology of education that would explore how and why teachers and pupils' statements persistently reflect dominant categories, and how those categories might be connected to the interests of influential groups, such as professional associations. Later, he began to enquire how knowledge could be differentiated as weak or powerful in terms of enabling people to participate in society, which he considers crucial for social justice. The way knowledge is created remains the determining factor, and he suggests that knowledge created within disciplines and by experts is more reliable, hence powerful, than other knowledge (Young 2008, 2014).

The anthology *Power and Ideology in Education* (1977) edited by Karabel and Halsey contains a contribution to the new sociological debate on knowledge transmission as cultural reproduction and as the mainstay of social hierarchies. Bernstein and Bourdieu address the power structures of societies and define the processes that affect what counts as knowledge, as well as who has access to it and how it is measured and certified.

In *Education and Power* (1982) Apple emphasises contradictions in the relationship. He examines the curriculum and the increasingly right-wing state influence that enforces a policy of commodification in education. Despite deteriorating economic and political conditions, however, he conceives education as an area of liberation, and stresses that neither the concept nor its actors are purely subordinate to any powerful structures or agents.

Shrinking social policies, declining wages and worsening employment conditions have characterised many northwestern countries since the 1980s. Neoliberal discourses came to dominate the universities and changed the subjects and conditions of research, which probably explains why, for a rather long time, the link between power and

education has been exempt from critical analysis. Only in 2012 did Moore et al.'s anthology *Knowledge, Power and Educational Reform* pick up the discussion of the 1970s, focusing on Bernstein applying his view to analyse knowledge structures, knowledge, identity and voice, and pedagogy.

The second major area of research on the relationship between power and education focuses on social inequality, which is the major focus of the sociology of education. What is the relationship between social inequality and power? If power is seen as an instrument to secure privileges, and privileges are inextricably bound to inequitable contexts, then power and social inequality go hand-in-hand. Power is used to maintain social inequality, and socially unequal people have unequal range of, and access to power. Without going into the vast literature on social inequality and education, I will focus on studies that explicitly include power in their analysis. In *Culture and Power in the Classroom* (1991) Darder analyses the content of teaching that further marginalises social groups, such as Blacks and Latinos, who are already discriminated against, and the impact of this teaching content on the dominant culture. Focusing on bicultural education from a Freirean perspective, Darder proposes ways for teachers to act as 'transformative intellectuals' rather than imposing knowledge on pupils. Rosen and Farrokhzad pick up on this idea in their 2008 anthology on power, culture and education, applying a predominantly educationalist perspective, and focusing on pedagogy rather than sociology, to demonstrate how non-German citizens experience oppression in educational settings.

In the third area, empowerment, Bishop and Glynn demonstrate in *Culture Counts* (1999) that education *can* offer indigenous people possibilities. Their assertion is based on an analysis of Maoris' responses to dominant educational discourses in New Zealand. In the anthology *Popular Education, Power and Democracy* (2013), Laginder et al. see popular education as the achievement of social movements that work to create a form of education that is not only widely accessible but also serves the needs and interests of the people; both factors in promoting democracy and power sharing. The authors also analyse the power structures within popular education.

Closely related to empowerment is critical pedagogy, which can be seen as a form of resistance. In *Power, Crisis, and Education for Liberation* (2008), De Lissovoy builds on Freire and Fanon to propose new, oppositional subjects in education and society and outlines a concept of cultural hybridity organised against capital as an encompassing global logic.

Studies on policies also address power in relation to education. In *Power and Politics. Federal Higher Education Policy Making in the 1990s* (1997), Parsons looks at the power wielded by actors in US federal higher education policy in addressing problems based on societal structures and institutions. The analysis includes personal and social relationships in communities and the beliefs and values that guide policy actors' decisions.

Teacher education is closely connected to state-education policies. Popkewitz edited *Changing Patterns of Power: Social Regulation and Teacher Education Reform* (1993), which compares teacher education policies in eight countries. A study by Youdell (2009) examines school policies, and in the anthology edited by Stensaker and Harvey (2011), the authors focus on the massive recent changes in higher education, including increased accountability due to decreased public funding, which has forced universities to seek support elsewhere.

Last, but not least, power plays a huge role in the policies of the World Trade Organisation, and on the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS), which views education as a service. Robertson et al. (2002) note that as clearly identifiable actors with an increasingly globalised outlook created GATS policy, this might move education to the forefront of national political battles. Venger (2007) aims to shed light on some of the mechanisms of what he calls a black box: the process of establishing a global trade regime in education. Cossa (2008) focuses on the power dynamics in GATS negotiations between international regimes and local governments in southern Africa.

In concluding this brief overview of previous studies of power and education, I want to raise questions about the research gaps to which the studies in this anthology, to some degree, respond. Prior accounts of knowledge in relation to power started from the revelations that knowledge is socially constructed, and powerful people use it to influence others. Current studies hold that different types of knowledge are valuable in different contexts. However, the status of criteria to judge the quality of knowledge will always be disputed. Nevertheless, we can not avoid making judgements to the knowledge to be passed on to the next generation.

In the area of social inequality and power, studies so far have not drawn a clear distinction between the two. The socially privileged and the powerful are closely linked, but social inequality depends on power structures, which suggests that they differ. Here, Bourdieu and Passeron's account of symbolic violence as a hidden power that acts and influences through education, which is explained in the second chapter, is illuminating.

Earlier studies on empowerment showed that education could lead to emancipation and was not simply a means or a vehicle of oppression. However, they did not discuss how far that empowerment could go and how sustainable it might be. Does education enable only moments of realisation or a long-standing transformation? In this volume Cole's outline of the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela, which put educational change at the forefront, offers an insight into a societal change that goes beyond individual moments of empowerment.

Another question is prompted by the policy debate on the extent to which the state control of education is limited by emerging international organisations: Should education be subject to policy at all, or should it function autonomously according to its own intrinsic logic? This debate often takes place in the context of creating universities, and Hodgson demonstrates in her chapter how current policies scale down researchers' autonomy, increasingly changing knowledge into a commodity.

The current chapters

The first part of the volume comprises three chapters on theory. The first two mark the range of discourse on the relationship between power and education. At one pole stands Hannah Arendt's enthusiastic view of education as a second 'birth' urging people to appear, to relate to each other and to become powerful. At the other pole Bourdieu and Passeron argue that education is a concealed power that dominates people and maintains social hierarchies. The third chapter offers an intermediate view: Gramsci's conceptualisation of education as both a part of state hegemony and a possibility for social transformation, if workers and intellectuals become conscious and develop counter discourses.

In the first chapter, Wayne Veck offers insights into Hannah Arendt's little-known work in the area of education. Her famous distinction between power and violence informs her positive view. According to Arendt, power should not be mistaken for the violence that leads to suppression but stems from a union that enables people to act. Education leads to empowerment by preparing people to see the potential of human power. What makes Arendt's account so attractive and cheerful, alongside her optimistic view on education, is her poetic language: by *natality* she means that each child's birth brings potential renewal, or an actualisation of power to sustain a plural world.

In the second chapter, the tone changes completely, and the relationship between power and education weighs heavily. Antonia Kupfer

reconstructs an early text on symbolic violence by Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron, the seed of Bourdieu's examination and theorisation of power as concealed domination. He sees education as *the* social arena in which content is transmitted in a way that conceals its proximity to the privileged, the upper classes; the universal tacit acceptance of both form and content serving to maintain social hierarchies.

In the third chapter, Peter Mayo demonstrates that education can be both oppressive and empowering. He explains the two sides of Antonio Gramsci's concept of power: force and consent. Further, in Gramsci's concept of hegemony, the two always go together; no apparatus is *completely* repressive or *completely* ideological. Hegemony is seen as a dynamic process, with a force that is conditional rather than determined. Gramsci does not limit education to schools; he sees factory councils as educational agencies and explains how education can transform societies through workers' broader knowledge of production processes.

The second part of this volume explores knowledge in relation to power. Ben Williamson's chapter discusses the power of the software being used in schools as part of the newly introduced subject *learning to code* in the UK National Curriculum. He reveals how its pedagogies convey to young people a certain way of seeing, thinking and acting, using specific, not neutral content. In a short period, this new subject made its way from a grass-roots initiative into curricular policy, although Williamson illustrates how its original supporters have not formed a stable, coherent network; on the contrary, as learning to code is the product of a messy hybrid of intentions, ambitions and interests.

The fifth chapter by Naomi Hodgson focuses on research, the key to production of new knowledge. By applying the view of Michel Foucault, Hodgson shifts the perspective from conceptualising power as domination and suppression or liberation to understanding how it works and what it produces. In the so-called knowledge economy created by national and European policymakers, knowledge is constructed as a vital resource for competition, and research responds and adapts to present needs, producing short-term, measurable outputs. Hodgson's analysis demonstrates that the processes of power, or what Foucault calls *governmentality*, prevent education in the sense of *educere*, to draw out knowledge, an indeterminate, critical and potentially transformative process, but instead to education as imparting expertise to deliver fixed results.

The chapters in the third part of the anthology deal with power and education in relation to social inequality. Gabrielle Iverson focuses on gender by illustrating, with examples from her own empirical research,

how schools perpetuate a hierarchical valuing of men and women despite the abolition of formal barriers for women after long, hard political fights. Ivinson detects a 'ghosting of gender' in such educational institutions as science labs and theorises power with the help of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of territorialisation by invisible forces. Boys and girls are still treated differently in classrooms according to their prescribed gender roles, and how power in schools conveys and maintains social gender hierarchies becomes quite clear.

In the seventh chapter, Charlotte Chadderton analyses the effects of school surveillance mainly through CCTV cameras on pupils of different ethnic backgrounds. Since the 'war on terrorism', schools have invested huge sums in new surveillance technologies. While empirical data proving that surveillance prevents crime is lacking, there is evidence to support the fact that surveillance changes the behaviour of people who feel they are being observed. Chadderton argues that surveillance practices 'recognizing' Muslim, Arab or Middle Eastern pupils as non-citizens reinforce the ethnic dynamics in schools. This process can be interpreted as a shift from the more decentralised powers of governmentality towards the more overt power of sovereignty, which can suspend existing laws.

In the eighth chapter, Aina Tarabini analyses the power of teachers and other school staff to define reasons for the phenomenon of early school leavers, who constitute almost 25 percent of the population of 18–24 year olds in Spain. Her research found that the three reasons cited are not 'neutral' but packed with class and culturally-biased concepts of 'good' and 'bad' pupils and students. 'Lack of commitment' is premised on an individual's free choice rather than social, economic or individual school circumstances; 'family deficit' faults working-class families without considering the resources required for proper participation in schools; and finally a pathologisation of early school leavers is based on ideas of 'normality'.

The fourth part of this volume is dedicated to the area of empowerment, but in contrast to Arendt's universal concept of education enabling human power, the authors demonstrate clearly that this effect depends largely on social conditions. Sara C. Motta argues that pedagogical practices are central to emancipation; by unlearning the dominant social relationships, we may build a counter-hegemonic knowledge. She cites two examples – a landless rural workers' movement in Brazil that became one of the country's largest social movements and a feminist theatre collective in Colombia – to demonstrate how political and pedagogical practices can question and replace traditional suppressive forms

of colonial and patriarchal power, and remove their universally accepted superiority.

Mike Cole's tenth and final chapter ties into and expands Motta's findings by pointing to the Bolivarian Revolution in Venezuela. He claims it as an example of societal change in which a specific form of education shook off neoliberal ideas and enabled the masses to participate in political decisions and thus power, creating a much more democratic society.

As a whole, this collection equips us with theoretical perspectives and empirical analytical practices that will enable social scientists and educationists to question policies, to reveal the structures and social conditions that maintain hierarchies throughout and within education, and to name the conditions under which educational processes may lead to emancipation.

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Part I

Theories

1

Arendt, Power and Education

Wayne Veck

Introduction

In an interview with the novelist, Gunter Grass, in 1964, Hannah Arendt responded to a question prompting her recollections of being a child in a Jewish family in Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century with the following words:

You see, all Jewish children encountered anti-Semitism. And the souls of many children were poisoned by it. The difference with me lay in the fact that my mother always insisted that I not humble myself. One must defend oneself! When my teachers made anti-Semitic remarks – usually they were not directed at me but at my other classmates, particularly at the Eastern Jewesses – I was instructed to stand up immediately, to leave the class, go home, and leave the rest to school protocol. My mother would have written one of her many letters, and, with that, my involvement in the matter ended completely. I had a day off from school, and that was, of course, very nice. But if the remarks came at me from other children, I was not allowed to go home and tell. That did not count. One had to defend *oneself* against remarks from other children. (Original emphasis, Arendt cited in Young-Bruehl, 2004, pp. 11–12)

How might we begin to think about a school where hostility and cruelty are not only exchanged between the young but are given a voice by adults as they address children? What sort of questions might we venture to ask about these anti-Semitic teachers, the school they taught in and the society they lived in? We could immediately ask questions about how power operated in and upon this school.

It is possible to think of schools as sites where we cannot avoid observing power at work (see, for example, Giroux, 1992; and Apple, 1993), as *fields* where force or violence (symbolic or otherwise) are present and where social and actual capital are reproduced (see Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Thomson & Holdsworth, 2003; Gibbs & Garnett, 2007; Mills, 2008; Azaola, 2012), and as organisations where identities are governed, created and conducted in and through disciplinary practices (see Foucault, 1977; 1982; 2003). But this chapter attempts to advance an account of the relation between power and education that is quite distinct from those accounts offered by critical theorists, Bourdieu, Foucault and the multitude of educationalists they have influenced. Indeed, this account rejects entirely the idea that what Arendt experienced as a young student might in any way be illuminated by thinking of the school as either an object or a site of power. Divided into three sections, the chapter considers Arendt's insights into education, power and political life to distinguish the many ways educational practices descend into forms of violence from the kind of education that might prepare young people for what Arendt (1998, p. 241) names 'the potentialities of human power'. The first section engages with this distinction between power and violence in relation to Arendt's (1993a) concept of natality, the fact that each child by virtue of being born has the potential to sustain and renew a world that is already established. In the second section, Arendt's view of authority in education is examined in relation to violence and power. The final section considers the connections Arendt illuminates between power, plurality and consent, to advance a view of education as a site where young people are *prepared* to act with others and thus to actualise power in a plural world.

Power, violence and natality

The English political theorist, Thomas Hobbes, famously contended that 'during the time men live without a common Power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre; and such a warre as is of every man against every man' (1985, p. 185). In this condition, Hobbes (1985, p. 189) insisted, each individual will 'use his own power, as he will himself for the preservation of his own Nature'. Two aspects of power are assumed here. First, there is the idea that power can be amassed, owned and used by rulers to subdue their subjects. Second, power is presented as a resource that individuals can call upon whenever they are in peril. The concept of power advanced by Arendt suggests that Hobbes was wrong on both accounts. In the first, he has

failed to distinguish power from violence and in the second, power from individual strength. So while Hobbes's account of sovereign rule and its degradation into a war of all against all might have much to tell us about how violence acts on and through individuals, it can, from Arendt's perspective, tell us nothing whatsoever about power.

Let us consider Arendt's distinctions in detail. First and foremost, power, unlike violence, which always relies on tools and implements to undo what has been established, and unlike 'strength, which is the gift and the possession of every man in his isolation against all other men' (Arendt, 2006a, p. 166), depends only upon the existence of plurality of men and women. Indeed, Arendt (1998, p. 200) insists that power 'exists only in its actualization' and that it is actualised only where men and women act and speak to each other and witness words and deeds, only, that is, in the *public realm* (Arendt, 1969; 1970). In fact, it is Arendt's view that power not only arises in the public realm but serves also to generate and sustain it (Allen, 2002; Gordon, 2001; Parekh, 1981; Penta, 1996). This is significant, for where violence effectively destroys, power is essentially creative (Arendt, 1946; 1969; 1970; 2006a). Arendt evokes the image of a table to illustrate the plurality that characterises the public realm or the polis, which 'is not the city-state in its physical location' but is rather 'the organisation of people as it arises out of acting and speaking, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be' (Arendt, 1998, p. 198). The table is an equally apt image for Arendt's concept of power. As people gathered around a table share a space with others but retain a distinct place within it, so in the *polis* persons are united by a power that 'relates and separates men at the same time' (Arendt, 1998, p. 52). Wherever 'people are with others and neither for nor against them – that is, in sheer human togetherness' (Arendt, 1998, p. 180), it is power that sustains the distance between them and it is power, at the same time, that ensures they act together in and for a 'common world' (Arendt, 1993a; 1998). When we are for ourselves and for those people we identify as being of our kind and against those we designate Other, our relationship to our fellows is characterised by force or violence. When we are *with* others, in the absence of all fear of falling behind and all zeal for getting ahead of them, power, in Arendt's (1970, p. 52) phrase 'springs up'.

It is precisely because she conceived the public realm as the space where persons are 'oriented to reaching agreement and not primary to their respective individual successes', that Habermas (1977, p. 6) is able to write: