Introduction to EDUCATION STUDIES
In the last 20 years or so Education Studies has developed rapidly as a distinctive subject in its own right. Beginning initially at undergraduate level, this expansion is now also taking place at Masters level and is characterised by an increasingly analytical approach to the study of education. Several discrete study areas requiring in-depth texts to support student learning have emerged.

*Introduction to Education Studies* (4th edition) is the core text in this series and gives students an important grounding in the study of education. It provides an overview of the subject and introduces the reader to fundamental theories and debates in the field. The series ‘Key Issues in Education Studies’ has evolved from this core text and, using the same critical approach, each volume outlines a significant area of study within the education studies field. Each of the books has been written by experts in their area and provides the detail and depth required by students as they progress further in the subject.

Taken as a whole, this series provides a comprehensive set of texts for the student of education. While of particular value to students of Education Studies, the series will also be instructive for those studying related areas such as Childhood Studies and Special Needs, as well as being of interest to students on initial teacher training courses and practitioners working in education.

We hope that this series provides you, the reader, with plentiful opportunities to explore further this exciting and significant area of study and we wish you well in your endeavours.

Steve Bartlett and Diana Burton
Series Editors

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PART 1

EDUCATION STUDIES – AN INTRODUCTION TO THE FIELD OF STUDY
CHAPTER 1
What is education studies?

Chapter overview

The first chapter will introduce you to the study of education. We examine the appeal of the subject for students and explain its rapid recent growth. While the significant contributions of the related disciplines of sociology, psychology, history and philosophy are discussed, we argue that it is the positioning of education as the central focus that provides education studies with its own identity.

Education studies: the subject

First encounters

As students of education studies, we have an interesting relationship with the subject since we are all products of education systems and thus have our own unique perspectives that are hewn from our different experiences. Education is, for most people, an integral part of our first 16–22 years of life and yet our understanding of it as a system or process, beyond experiencing it as more than a set of curriculum subjects and examinations, is often limited. The role we undertake as pupils is to experience rather than question the nature of the education system and its attendant processes. Education studies as a subject turns this on its head and asks us to question what education is, who it is for, who controls it and why; essentially, to think critically about every aspect of education and the societal and political structures it sits within.
Reader Reflection: Your own educational history

Think back over the time you have spent in education.

Were you ever encouraged to comment on your experiences?

Should pupils and students be involved in decisions concerning their education?

The journals and books you encounter from the beginning of your course generally assume a level of understanding and knowledge about educational issues which you are unlikely to have at this stage. Thus, while there are many texts suitable for the knowledgeable student, there are very few which may be used by the novice as an introduction to the field. This present book aims to introduce the study of education and to provide a starting point from which to progress. It outlines several major areas of education studies and the key issues therein. In the text we refer, wherever possible, to current literature which you should be able to access. We are also aware that to deal with the overarching questions and issues in such a short space can actually do them a disservice and cause distortion by oversimplification. We want therefore to emphasise that the purpose is to introduce the study of education, outline the theoretical arguments and encourage deeper exploration.

The development of education studies

In the past education(al) studies has been seen as very much part of the education/training of teachers (Burton and Bartlett, 2006a). The study was effectively invented during the period of expansion in education post-Second World War, which created a demand for more high-quality teachers. To meet this demand the teacher training courses at the colleges of education were lengthened and the Robbins Report (1963) declared an intention to develop teaching into an all-graduate profession. This heralded the creation of the new Bachelor of Education (BEd) degree, which comprised both theoretical and practical study of education. The content of these new BEd courses was largely created from a range of subjects already in existence at the validating universities. Thus the academic study of education came to be made up primarily of the sociology, psychology, philosophy and history of education: the so called ‘foundation disciplines’ (McCulloch, 2012).

Rather than becoming a unified subject these disciplines generally remained as discrete units and were taught separately. For many students they were presented
in isolation and did not sufficiently link with the other parts of their professional training courses to make them appear worthwhile. For such students their prime focus was on the subjects they were going to teach, the teaching practice itself and, particularly, aspects of classroom management and control. In an effort to make the theoretical and academic study of education more relevant to the needs of the student teachers, many BEd programmes began to create a more integrated approach. This involved the development of what became known as *curriculum, professional* or even *educational* studies (Lawn and Furlong, 2009). In hindsight this can be seen as a significant point in the development of a specialist study of education.

As a result of political and economic pressures in the 1970s and 1980s the theoretical study of education as part of teacher training courses fell into disrepute. Teacher education was criticised as being too removed from the classroom. It was perceived as largely ignoring the practical nature of teaching while also promoting progressive ideologies of education. It was from the 1980s onwards that the nature of teacher education changed drastically. With the emphasis becoming firmly placed on training, any traces of academic education studies were removed from Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes. However, shortly after the critical study of education disappeared from teacher training courses, new programmes called education studies began to develop in the rapidly expanding sector funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE). We suggest a number of reasons for the rapid growth of this subject and its popularity among the student population (Bartlett and Burton, 2006a).

The increase in student numbers entering higher education (HE) and the concomitant development of modular degree programmes, allowing more flexibility in the choice of subjects studied, meant that education studies came to be seen as an important partner for a number of combinations. Thus students combine education studies with sports science, English, drama, religious studies, geography and the like. It took on a special significance for students planning careers that involved working with people in a variety of contexts. Teaching is often the first that springs to mind but there are also personnel management, welfare and health services, retail, publishing and a range of others.

The recent trend for many students who intend to become teachers to take a first degree and then a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) rather than the traditional BEd has made education studies a more attractive part of that first degree. This changing landscape of teacher training has led to many schools of education seeking actively to diversify their portfolios, making education studies an obvious addition from an institutional point of view.
The nature of education studies

Whatever your eventual career decisions as an education studies student, you have chosen education as an academic area of study and will need to approach it in a critical fashion. You will be seeking answers to key questions such as: What is education and what are its purposes? How does learning take place and how far is achievement dependent upon natural ability or social factors such as income, life chances, gender and ethnicity? Your attention will also be drawn to educational policy and political issues surrounding education and to ways of researching these phenomena.

With the resurgence of the academic study of education and an increasing number of students with education studies in their degree title, the significance of the traditional disciplines from which it draws once again becomes apparent. Aspects of education are studied within various disciplines, specifically philosophy, psychology, sociology and history, as part of their particular interest in the human condition. However, education is also seen as a legitimate area of study in its own right by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) which considered that:

Essentially, education studies is concerned with understanding how people develop and learn throughout their lives, and the nature of knowledge and critical engagement with ways of knowing and understanding. It offers intellectually rigorous analysis of educational processes, systems and approaches, and their cultural, societal, political, historical and economic contexts. (QAA, 2015: 6)

Reader Reflection: The nature of education studies

Consider your experiences of education studies so far.

*How do they relate to the QAA view above of what the subject involves?*

This means that education is at the centre of the study and therefore draws on the other disciplines as appropriate in an eclectic manner. Thus, while psychology students will study aspects of education as appropriate, for instance, in relation to cognitive development, education studies students will study some aspects of psychological theory when looking at the process of learning within schools or colleges. It is interesting to consider the status relations between these older and
newer subjects, the longer-standing disciplines having a better developed theoretical base to consider as their own.

Davies and Hogarth (2004) were unable to identify a clear consensus about the nature of education studies, suggesting that there would be some value in exploring what might constitute its broad parameters.

Some features which, we would argue, characterise the subject are that:

- it is ‘young’ and developing
- it takes a critical, analytical and ‘resistant’ approach to the study of education
- it grapples with fundamental, contested concepts
- it explores a range of perspectives, not just those of teachers and schools
- it deals with multiple rather than singular explanations of phenomena.

Thus, the way in which education studies facilitates a critical engagement with educational phenomena contrasts sharply with the ‘technical-rational’ approach to teacher training described earlier. Even within non-teacher training programmes education studies is circumscribed to some extent by this pervasive culture since it must examine and describe extant education processes and systems in order to analyse them. However, the power to critique and rethink educational policies and processes is available to students of education studies in a way that is denied to ITT students. Education studies provides a set of analytical discourses that generate insights into educational phenomena as bodies of knowledge and societal conditions shift, develop and wane.

While the education studies benchmarks (QAA, 2015) provide a guide to those designing new courses, the structure and content of education studies programmes varies enormously. At the heart of each course, however, lies a critical analysis of key issues such as the nature of education, the content and development of curricula, teaching and learning, the relationship between ability, opportunity and success, and the policy issues impacting on all of these. It is a mistake to see education studies as essentially school-focused. This can happen due to its historical connection to teacher training but is certainly not the case as all aspects of education can be included. The subject has enormous scope from the development of young children, through learning in HE, to the workplace and the third age – a true study of lifelong learning.

We now turn to the interest education holds for a number of significant disciplines concerned with the study of people and society. The discussion will illustrate how the approaches and theories developed within these disciplines may be used by those students whose main concern is the study of education itself.
The traditional disciplines and education studies

Fundamental to any society, education and the processes it involves are of great interest to fields of study concerned with the human condition. In particular we refer in this book to philosophy, sociology, psychology and history.

Philosophy

Curtis (2011) suggests that philosophy and philosophers have been engaging with questions of education, learning and teaching for more than 3,000 years, since the beginning of formal thinking. The philosophy of education illuminates the ideas which underpin action and thought in education. The questions philosophers ask concern the nature and purposes of education, such as what makes an educated person, how knowledge is organised and what should be learned. They are primarily interested in the beliefs, morals and values which permeate education. These are very important questions which are at the heart of the whole process and therefore appear in every aspect of the study of education. They are key to discussions of the nature of curriculum which derives from different ideological positions on education and the structure of knowledge. Such questions are also apparent when analysing how beliefs are translated into policy or when looking at issues of individual development and progression.

Sociology

The sociology of education examines the wider social influences upon the individual in education and analyses the processes of socialisation. Sociologists ask questions about the influences of social class, ethnicity and gender upon achievement and these are seen in relation to various ideologies which shape education. Sociological analysis is concerned with power operating at different levels in society and how this influences outcomes. This explains the sociologist’s interest in the creation of education policy and its implementation (Whitty, 2012). To understand modern education systems it is vital to study the relationship between prevailing ideologies and the societal structures and values they shape through the process of education.

Psychology

The psychology of education is mainly concerned with how people learn and develop. As such it asks questions about our maturation, intelligence, personality and motivation, as well as about the learning process itself. It is interested in the relationship between nature and nurture and the way they interact to influence individual development and achievement. A psychological analysis also involves
philosophical issues of the nature of knowledge and understanding and shares an interest in sociological issues since the individual is seen to be part of wider social groups. An examination of pedagogy from a psychological perspective further reveals the link between psychological and sociological theory as well as the ideological perspectives which have influenced it.

History

The history of education may suggest causal explanations for changes which punctuate the political and social timelines of educational development. It helps us to understand the evolution of the educational system and structures to date. There are key dates and events within the development of the English education system that reflect the significant political and social issues of the time. While the scope of education has changed radically since the late nineteenth century, the pastoral, disciplinary and knowledge distribution functions of schools and other education establishments remain significant in modern Western societies. As Dufour (2011: 3) says, ‘To study the history of education in any country with a formal state education system involves engaging with and unlocking the particular interplay of social, cultural, economic and political forces at work at any given time’. Goodman and Grosvenor (2009) point to the importance of a historical dimension in developing contextual understanding and strategic vision in those concerned with education.

Relating the four disciplines to education studies

Each of these four disciplines brings its own specific perspective to the study of education and each is interested in particular aspects as they relate to their own concerns. It is also clear that their areas of interest overlap. It is interesting that these four disciplines were the ones included in the initial BEd teacher training degrees (Dearden et al., 2009; McCulloch, 2002; 2012). Others may have been incorporated. The economics of education, for instance, would look at the importance of education and training in the creation of a valuable, high skills labour force, or at the benefits of state education systems compared to the competitive provision of schooling in the light of economic theories of monopoly and market forces.

Reader Reflection: The contribution of other subjects to understanding education

How might other disciplines or subjects, such as geography or political science, be useful to draw on when studying education?
When education itself is the focus for the student, as in education studies, it is important to draw from these disciplines as appropriate. This eclectic view can provide a richer picture of the whole process and may produce new forms of knowledge and new ways of understanding.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have outlined how students first encounter education studies as a subject and the way in which critical engagement with the subject brings new understandings. We have seen how the study of education has developed, and we have outlined its key features as a subject and how its constituent elements might be described.

**Student activities**

1. Find the education studies benchmarks on the QAA website (www.qaa.ac.uk) and read through the statements. How useful do you find these in outlining the subject of education studies? How do your experiences of education studies relate to them?

**Recommended reading**

*Educational Futures: The Journal of the British Education Studies Association* (BESA). www.educationstudies.org.uk/journal. This is the online journal for BESA. It is free to access and also part of the BESA website, which is well worth education studies students becoming familiar with. The journal and website will introduce you to articles on the subject and also provide contacts within the field that you may wish to pursue.

Access the companion website to this book and find SAGE journal articles exploring this chapter topic in further detail: [https://study.sagepub.com/bartlettburton4e](https://study.sagepub.com/bartlettburton4e).