

EDITOR'S NOTES

Social class is a major determining factor of accomplishment in most educational, employment, and social arenas—still one of the best predictors of who will achieve success, prosperity, and social status. Yet class is difficult both to define and discern. We can examine it empirically only through its consequences or outcomes. Thankfully, educational systems are so central to the functioning of advanced industrial societies that they provide fertile ground for the investigation and analysis of class.

Education closely influences personal and social development in the technical and economic spheres but also in the wider political arenas of emancipation and democracy. Education also affects how people experience social, cultural, and economic forces; and it shapes abilities and dispositions toward their transformation. Because of this, education has always represented a site of struggle between those with the power to define what constitutes legitimate knowledge and those excluded from such decision making.

These aspects of education are closely related to issues of social class. Ideas about class influence the goals and purposes of education, its forms and approaches, as well as where and when it takes place and who participates in it. Class not only affects these elements but also shapes how we think about them. At its most fundamental level, the goal of education—and particularly adult education—is usually to ameliorate the social disadvantages of learners' backgrounds; yet too often education serves only to further extend such differences. So it's ironic that, compared to the related analytic vectors of gender and race, class is so unexplored in North American adult education. Why do scholars acknowledge class so significantly less than its counterparts? Why is it so underrepresented in social and educational theory? Indeed, why does American society generally so abjure or ignore class? And what might adult educators do about it?

This sourcebook addresses these questions by exploring the role of class in various areas of adult education policy and practice. Its purpose is less to provide an exhaustive examination of all aspects of class than to introduce key themes, topics, trends, and approaches. Examining the operation of class in this way helps clarify how class informs the interrelated roles of structure and agency in our work as adult educators. It also explains how adult education practices produce, reproduce, and maintain the complex inequalities of social class across varied contexts. The goal is to help adult educators better appreciate how values and purposes are inherent in their educational work and how larger social structures and norms influence adult educators and their work. Thus, the sourcebook encourages readers to observe and comprehend the role of class in shaping their own conceptions about and practices of adult education. Because the focus is firmly on practice, this volume also encourages readers to explore how they

might increase their students' and colleagues' awareness and understanding of class and class analysis and how they might strengthen these aspects in their own teaching and research.

Because class is understood and appreciated differently around the world, the sourcebook tries to highlight such diversity in approach by deliberately involving authors from several different countries: Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, South Africa, Sweden, and the United States. As well as being able to provide an international perspective, the authors are all strong advocates for class analyses and practices that champion the less privileged. Each author is not only an experienced scholar and practitioner of adult education but also a committed social activist. So their chapters depart from the conventional academic practice of examining class through a dispassionate academic lens or viewing it from the standpoint of middle-class culture (which tends to regard the working class adversarially).

Each chapter assumes a slightly different focus in exploring how class shapes a specific area of adult education practice. In Chapter One I provide a historical overview of the development of the concept of class and its applicability to the study of adult education. The following two chapters deal with the macro and micro aspects of class and adult education. In Chapter Two Kjell Rubenson explores how social class has influenced the development of social policies about adult education in various countries. He argues that the present policy discourse on adult education is a result of weakening working-class interests. Then in Chapter Three, Lyn Tett explores learning and identity through the analytic lens of social class. Showing how assumptions about learner identity are often based on a deficit view of the working classes, she illustrates an alternative discourse that shows how to generate useful knowledge in a family literacy program.

The next three chapters all recognize that adult education activities have to take place in specific arenas and communities of practice. In Chapter Four Griff Foley examines the role of educational institutions in supporting working-class learning. In asserting that a distinctive working-class learning style exists, Foley analyzes the institutional educational experiences of working-class adults and shows how they can suggest approaches that are supportive, challenging, and class-conscious. In the following chapter on the pedagogical influences of social class, Janice Malcolm considers how class helps construct the identity and ultimately the teaching of certain groups of educators. She also explores ways of making class explicit within teacher education classrooms. In Chapter Six Shirley Walters examines how class influences the educational activities of social movements. Drawing on examples from her native South Africa, she illustrates how class, intertwined with other social categories, fundamentally shapes the organizational and educational practices of social movements.

Thinking about class draws attention to other forms of oppression. People's experiences of class also depend on their race and gender, so no meaning of class is completely independent of such factors. The next two

chapters explore the intersections and interweavings of class, gender, and race in greater detail. In Chapter Seven Mechthild Hart focuses on gender. She describes how women's labor is beneficial to global capitalism and thus how class and gender are inseparable, regardless of the specific national or cultural content in which women work. In Chapter Eight Shahrzad Mojab examines the dialectical relationship between class and race as it pertains to adult education epistemology, pedagogy, and practice. Finally, in Chapter Nine I summarize some of the key ideas about social class, discuss their continued relevance to the work of adult educators, and identify some further resources.

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