From the outset, and in our initial discussions with Geoff Whitty in formulating the proposal for this book, we have aspired to produce a collection of papers which both addresses foundational and emergent issues in the sociological study of education policy and draws out the enduring influence that Whitty’s work has had on the evolution of the field. In the development of Whitty’s work over a period of more than 40 years, while there have been a number of recurring themes and distinctive contributions to knowledge and practice, there has never been any attempt to draw these together as a particular ‘school’ of thought or overarching position. Whitty’s influence has been more subtle, and contextually sensitive, than any such attempt to define a field would allow, and as a consequence, has enabled colleagues and the members of the wider scholarly and research community to engage with and be inspired by his work, without being dominated or constrained by it. This also allowed Whitty to enhance and maintain his academic influence while assuming a succession of education leadership positions, culminating in a decade as Director of the Institute of Education, University of London (now the UCL Institute of Education). In doing so, Whitty’s academic career exemplifies the manner in which a productive and creative dialogue can be achieved between research and practice, and between scholarship and leadership, particularly important at a time when a more sharply drawn division of labour between these domains is evident. In mapping out the structure of the book, and drawing out key themes from the constituent chapters, we hope that the importance, and distinctiveness, of this achievement will become clear. In the closing section of the book, we adopt a more personal tone to provide a brief
biography, which we hope will further reinforce an appreciation of the depth and breadth of Geoff Whitty’s influence, and the manner in which the interweaving of rigorous academic work with sustained educational leadership and active engagement with policymakers and key stakeholders in education makes his contribution so profound.

The organization of the collection into three parts, focusing respectively on knowledge, policy and practice, both reflects the development of Whitty’s academic contribution and represents key themes in the critical study of education policy and the pursuit of social justice. As will be clear, these themes overlap and intertwine, and indeed Whitty latterly returned to the consideration of knowledge in education and the struggle for equity which formed the focus of his earliest work in the sociology of education.

**Knowledge**

The question of ‘whose knowledge?’ is prioritized and valued in an education system is a fundamental issue in the sociology of education, and correspondingly has provided a fruitful focus for research and scholarship in the critical scrutiny of education policy. In the opening chapter to this section, Michael W. Apple directly addresses the contested nature of the content of the curriculum and how this is taught and assessed. How do we determine who has access to what, and who are ‘we’ anyway in presuming to determine or influence such things? As Apple recognizes, these questions sit at the heart of Whitty’s early work in the sociology of education (see, for instance, Whitty and Young 1976), and lay the foundations for the approach that he was to develop over the coming years. Apple stresses the importance of maintaining engagement with contesting ‘official knowledge’ and the key role of alliances in doing this. His chapter not only reinforces the influence of Whitty’s work on the sociology of school knowledge, but also, through the examples he provides, the need to pay close attention to context and the forces that shape the possibility for change, also characteristic of Whitty’s policy-related writing.

The importance of personal relations and the intertwining of trajectories in the development of a field, and the shaping of the work of the people and groups of which fields are composed, is illustrated by Peter Aggleton’s account of his work with Whitty. This also provides a further example of the power of alliances and collaboration in areas of contestation and struggle. The principal context addressed here is the response
of health education to the advent of HIV and AIDS. Aggleton’s sensitive and nuanced account brings to the fore the necessity of being able to move between levels of practice, for instance between the personal and the institutional and between lived experience and policy, in order to affect change, and the facility that Whitty had to create the conditions for this both personally and intellectually. The chapter provides insight into both the development of an important body of work, and the place of personal care in enabling critical work like this to grow and thrive.

Yan Fei presents a very different context for the exploration of the relationship between knowledge, policy and inequity, and exemplifies another form of collaboration. The question of ‘whose knowledge?’ operates at two distinct levels in this consideration of the representation of ethnic minority groups in Chinese school history textbooks: the content of the history curriculum and its texts, and the forms of theory that are brought into play in analysing the constitution of the curriculum and the effects that subsequent representations have on the advancement of students from ethnic minority backgrounds. Here, the form of theory and analysis advocated by Whitty and others in understanding the relationship between power and knowledge in schooling is recontextualized, scrutinized and deployed in a necessarily (given the context and objectives of the study) detailed analysis. Whitty’s role in supervising this work, and in subsequent collaboration (see Yan and Whitty 2016), represents a rekindling of interest in an earlier strand of his work in a context of increasing importance internationally, and illustrates in yet another way the interaction of decisions about legitimate knowledge and the reproduction of inequalities. The focus on history textbooks is apposite, and represents another return, albeit within a sociological frame, to Whitty’s intellectual roots as an historian.

Another shift in direction of analytic gaze is evident in Deborah Youdell and Martin R. Lindley’s sociological analysis of the relationship between the sociology of education and emerging knowledge in the biological sciences. The area of contestation here is what is seen as the historical refutation of biology within sociology and the impact this has on the capacity of the sociology of education to engage productively with new biological knowledges and the development of biosocial education. While this is not an issue that Whitty specifically addressed, the direction and form of their analysis is clearly in line with the manner in which he raises critical questions about school knowledge, and they state, ‘As Whitty notes in relation to school knowledge, it is not simply a matter of which/whose knowledge; it is a matter of what is done with it, how it interacts with other knowledges, practices and institutions’ (Chapter 4, p. 70).
Their analysis reinforces the assertion, which lies at the core of Whitty’s work on knowledge and schooling, that identification of what constitutes ‘powerful knowledge’ is not sufficient in the struggle for social justice. We have to engage with what is done with this knowledge, and what can be imagined, said and enacted as a consequence. This leads to a call to form counter-hegemonic alliances across disciplines, that holds open the possibility of exploration of a productive, and challenging, interaction between the social and biological in a radical sociology of education, able to address pressing contemporary issues, such as classroom stress and the effects of high-stakes testing regimes that impact on the potential of schooling to enhance social justice.

In closing the first part, Michael Young takes us back to the beginnings of Whitty’s engagement with knowledge and schooling, initially as a student and subsequently as a collaborator and interlocutor in the growth and passage to maturity of the ‘new sociology of education’, and beyond. The account provides insight into both a personal and an intellectual journey and reinforces key components of Whitty’s distinctive contribution to the field, underpinned by the ability to maintain a sustained, rigorous and principled intellectual engagement while taking on a succession of demanding education leadership roles. The reflective and autobiographical aspects of Young’s account provide personal detail and texture to the emergence of the core ideas that have influenced and shaped the contributions to this section, and which carry over into work that more directly addresses education and social policy.

Policy

It is not possible, of course, to draw a firm line between the concerns with knowledge explored in the first part and the analysis of policy that becomes a more explicit focus for the chapters in this part. Indeed, a key characteristic of Whitty’s work and his contribution to the field is the imperative to contextualize our analysis and to move rigorously and meaningfully between levels of analysis. The caution not to presume from our research and debate that what can be argued, imagined or desired can be non-problematically realized in practice is constantly asserted and reinforced; as educators engaged in the struggle for social justice, we are implored not to drift into ‘naive possibilitarianism’. Whitty also recognized that both the academic field and that of policy and practice are fundamentally dynamic and fragmented, and that this further reinforces the need to be able to constantly assess and reassess
what can be achieved in actively pursuing social justice in and through education, and, as a consequence, the forms of alliance that need to be formed. As Power (2019) notes, Whitty is notable among policy sociologists, and particularly those in the field of education, for seeking to engage in dialogue with policymakers and other key stakeholders.

Exploration of the consequences of the fragmentation of the English education system for understanding the relationship between schooling and the state, and for forms of policy analysis in the future, is a key focus for Stephen J. Ball and Richard Bowe. Apparent instability and incoherence in reform, leading to a ‘fuzzy patchwork’ (Chapter 6, p. 98) of provision, presents a challenge to critical policy analysis. As Ball and Bowe note, in his policy analysis Whitty has addressed the fragmenting effects of neoliberal economic, social and educational policies on school systems (Whitty et al. 1998), the education of teachers (Furlong et al. 2000) and the teaching profession more broadly (Whitty 2006a). Ball and Bowe explore the reverberation of neoliberal policies through schooling from the systemic level to the identities and lived experiences of teachers; they propose a new form of policy analysis to address the reach and splintering effects of these calculative and commodified forms of policymaking and implementation.

The movement between levels in the scrutiny of policy and its effects is exemplified by David Gillborn’s analysis of race and racism in education policy. He cites as inspiration for this approach Whitty’s call for forms of analysis that are able to hold both macro and micro processes and effects in view simultaneously (Whitty’s, 1997, infamous ‘vulture’s eye view’). Gillborn presents an analysis of interviews with politicians which provides insight into the personal (micro-level) aspects that underlie the formation of (macro-level) policy development and illustrates how policies can become racialized and aspirations for racial equity undermined in the interaction between these levels. This reinforces Whitty’s insistence that policy analysis is able not only to provide insight into macro and micro levels, but also how these interact in the formation of policy.

The ability of the form of policy analysis that Whitty advocated to reveal and explore disjunctions between stated policy aspirations and what is achieved in practice is also provided by Tony Edwards and Sally Power, who examine how, in public and policy rhetoric, private schooling has been repositioned (from inequitable education for the elite, to providing broader public benefit) and consider the extent to which the claims made are warranted. Whitty participated in this research (see, for instance, Power et al. 2006; Power et al. 2003; Edwards et al. 1989) and
key themes in his approach to policy research and analysis are evident, for instance in the rigorous tracing of the provenance of a discourse which brings together both policy analysis and scrutiny of the positions and practices of individuals implicated in the production of policy. Nicola Rollock, likewise, with respect to racial justice and higher education, takes up the disjunction between the stated commitment to enhanced diversity in universities and what, from the analysis of empirical data, has been achieved in practice. Understanding how particular groups are advantaged and others disadvantaged, both systemically and within specific institutions, requires critical scrutiny of policy and the operation of privilege, and the impact of this on the day-to-day experiences and longer-term trajectories of racially minoritized academics. The analysis provided by Rollock offers a further example of the need to move between levels of analysis in understanding enduring inequities in education and how these relate to the formulation and implementation of policies. It furthermore poses the question about the extent to which race and racism are taken seriously by higher education, and what can and should be done to ensure that pressure is brought to bear to move beyond what is seen as immediately institutionally possible to take action which addresses in practice the inequities faced by racially minoritized groups.

The starting point for Rollock’s chapter is reflection on the question posed by Whitty in his 2005 presidential address to the British Educational Research Association (BERA) regarding the extent to which there is a necessary conflict between the outcomes of educational research and the contingent and personal priorities of policymakers (Whitty 2006b). Bob Lingard focuses on Whitty’s work in the field of policy sociology in education, which he sees as arising from Whitty’s own attempt to resolve pragmatically the demands of education leadership and the desire to remain research-active. Lingard identifies a number of key features of Whitty’s position with respect to research and policy/practice, as expressed in his BERA address. These include the insistence on providing support for a wide range of forms of research, and of acknowledgement of the complexity of relations within and between the activities of research and policymaking. Asking ‘what works’ is not enough: there has to be mutual appreciation that research must be more than purely instrumental, and that the dynamics and politics of policymaking, which change over time and from context to context, have to be recognized. In his exploration of the complexity of this relationship, Lingard brings into play consideration of contemporary fast policymaking and, with an increasing emphasis on data in policymaking, digital governance, as well as the era of ‘post-truth’ and the rise of the affective
in policymaking – the latter an issue that Whitty had only begun to touch upon in his closing work (e.g. Wisby and Whitty 2019).

The chapters in this part have all taken as given that education policy in the period covered by Whitty’s policy sociology work has been fundamentally shaped by prevailing neoliberal ideology. In the closing chapter, Hugh Lauder explores the place of evidence in policymaking, starting with the premise that in England the neoliberal paradigm in education is on its last legs. Lauder scrutinizes the assumptions underlying three major policy initiatives in education (relating to the market view of education, school effectiveness and the economic rationale for education) and finds a problematic, and degenerating, relationship between research and policy, leading him to conclude that the neoliberal policymaking architecture, in the face, for instance, of crises such as the failure to recruit and retain teachers, is ready to be dismantled. He proposes in its place a process of incremental policymaking and change, subject to continuous scrutiny and research. Lauder recognizes, however, that Whitty would be quick to point out the pragmatic challenge of making such a change, which lies beyond the reach of educational research.

Practice

In the latter stages of his academic work, Whitty became increasingly interested in critical engagement with practice in education; a return to the commitment to making a difference to education and its capacity to enhance social justice. While this has always been a core concern, such an engagement has commonly been mediated by other factors, for instance by analysis of the formulation and implementation of policy or by an exploration of the nature and social distribution of knowledge. In the final part of this collection, practice becomes a primary focus, though clearly a concern with knowledge and policy is never totally absent. The chapters address, in turn, improving professional practice in schooling (Gore), the working lives of educators (Gewirtz and Cribb), equity in higher education (Burke) and the academic field of education (Furlong).

Jennifer Gore explores some of the tensions inherent in attempts to improve the professional practice of teachers, in particular the paradoxically disempowering effects for some of the initiatives that claim to enhance teacher agency. As she points out, this articulates Whitty’s enduring concerns for teacher professionalism and social justice, and dialogue with Whitty about the ways in which initiatives designed to improve teaching can in fact impede change and growth provides
the impetus for her chapter. The approach proposed, and explored in practice, by Gore is fundamentally sociologically informed, for instance in the attention paid to power relations and the impact of the day-to-day working conditions of teachers.

The shifts that have occurred in the conditions in which teaching takes place in schooling and higher education is the focus of the analysis of the prospects for social justice in contemporary education provided by Sharon Gewirtz and Alan Cribb. They argue that the rise to dominance of a transactional conception of teaching has severely limited teacher agency and potential for creativity, with a corresponding negative impact on the potential for social change through education. In proposing a more expansive notion of teaching, they note that Whitty’s influence as a teacher and academic exemplifies this, in that it extends far beyond his academic publications and formal leadership positions in education, and reaches beyond intellectual impact to encompass the principles that underpinned his commitment to the achievement of social justice. They counterpose this transactional model with a relational ideal type and explore the ways in which the space for more relational forms of practice are being squeezed, highlighting, for instance, the quantification of performance and other features of contemporary policy critically considered in the previous part of this collection.

In seeking to address, in practice, the limits being placed on teacher autonomy and creativity, Gewirtz and Cribb invoke Whitty’s desire to create a more democratic form of teacher professionalism (Whitty 2002), which is consistent with the approach to professional development proposed by Gore. Penny Jane Burke takes this a step further in describing how, in a centre founded by Whitty, a form of practice, or more precisely praxis, has been developed which builds on sociological critique and direct engagement with the exigencies of practice in higher education. As co-directors of the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education (CEEHE) at the University of Newcastle, Australia, Whitty and Burke created the conditions for the development of a unique approach to bringing theory, research and practice together to enhance equity in higher education. Fundamental to this is the reframing of dominant discourses and the production of a community of engaged practitioners within and beyond the university with a strong ethical commitment to social justice, characteristic of Whitty’s analytic work. Burke outlines the relational basis of the ‘pedagogical methodology’ approach developed and provides examples of how this is realized in practice in a number of innovative CEEHE initiatives. The chapter provides an apposite example of both the influence of Whitty’s work on our understanding of the
relationship between educational policy and practice and the pursuit of social justice and an indication of how this can inform transformative practice.

In the final chapter, John Furlong brings us back to consider specifically the field of practice, the study of education, which constituted the context for all aspects of Whitty's work, and in which all the chapters in this collection have their roots. The principal focus of the chapter is the work they did together on 'knowledge traditions' in the study of education, which gave rise to a jointly edited collection (Whitty and Furlong 2017). In a sense this can be seen as a return to a concern for different ways of understanding what counts as knowledge, and how this relates to context and impacts on practice. The analysis exhibits many of the characteristics of Whitty's work, and his contribution to the sociology of education, and education more broadly. This includes recognition of the need to attend to context (in this case, both national contexts, and within this, institutional contexts), an acknowledgement of fragmentation and contestation, movement between levels of analysis, the need for an awareness of what is possible in a given set of circumstances, strongly framed principles and a strong commitment to social justice. It is fitting that this last piece of work leaves us not with one dominant form of knowledge, but a multiplicity of forms each of which has a dynamic relationship with its macro and micro contexts, providing the impetus for dialogue and contestations, and giving rise to the form of complex configuration within which, intellectually and practically, Whitty thrived.

In this introduction to the collection we have attempted to give a sense of some key themes in the critical sociology of educational policy and how these are represented in the constituent chapters. We have also aimed to illustrate how Geoff Whitty has influenced the development of the field across the phases of his academic career. The three sections of the book provide broad, and porous, divisions, and as will be clear, themes from Whitty's work, both intellectually and in his education leadership roles, are woven into the work presented across the collection. We also hope that readers get some sense of Geoff Whitty as a person, particularly from the chapters by those of us who have worked closely with him. Given that biography is explicitly present in and intricately entwined with his academic writing, we felt that it was apposite to close the collection with a short biographical section, which we hope will enrich the personal accounts that readers will find in several of the constituent chapters.
References


