Knowledge, Policy and Practice in Education and the Struggle for Social Justice

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Geoff Whitty: A Biographical Note

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Figure 16.1: Geoff Whitty
Iesha Small, Centre for Education and Youth.

To a greater degree than is usually the case, and from his earliest academic publications, Geoff foregrounded what he wrote with his own educational and career trajectory, showing how that had shaped his scholarship and research. His early experiences as a teacher (as a temporary teacher working in an economically deprived community in London prior to going to university, and later as a qualified secondary school teacher) would engender profound questions for him about
his own education as well as that which he was providing for others, questions rooted in a concern to pursue greater social justice and the role of education therein. While Geoff had a wide circle of friends stretching back to his school days and his time as a teacher, he acknowledged, really only in hindsight, that, beyond family life, he did not have many interests outside of his work. It is curious that he still referred to it as ‘work’. There were other demarcations that did not seem to apply to Geoff, with his academic work typically speaking simultaneously to education research, policy and practice, as well as being embodied in his later leadership roles.

As Geoff recalled in 2018, his own father, a primary school head teacher, had been dismissive of more theoretical research in education, which he regarded as being ‘out of touch with the realities of everyday classrooms’ (Whitty 2018). By contrast, Geoff’s research stressed sociological analysis as a way of engaging with policy and practice in education, and insisted that, far from being irrelevant, theory is essential for a full understanding of the life of the school and classroom (see, for example, Small 2017a). In this regard, Geoff was an important champion of the sociology of education as a field, as well as the other foundation disciplines of education. For him, it was the sociology of education that gave him the most useful framework for understanding the challenges he had experienced as a teacher, and it provided him with his primary academic and professional identity.

Geoff’s championing of these fields was inherent across his research and writing, but as he took on leadership roles within the higher education sector and the subject community the need to sustain the foundation disciplines, in an invariably inhospitable climate, would define his periods in office. This is not to say that he was uncritical of work in the sociology of education. His early writing revealed his frustration with the tendency for the field to pendulum from one extreme position to another. In later years he felt out of step with some contemporary strands, and he would lament the tendency to see ‘neoliberalism’ as a catch-all culprit for educational inequalities and what was lacking in the education system more generally (see, for example, Small 2017b). He was neither defeatist nor naive about the challenge of overcoming educational disadvantage, while the discipline of his efforts to apply theoretically informed educational research to live issues of education policy and practice to achieve change demanded more of each community (see, for example, Power 2019).

It was once said of Geoff that if you sliced him open it would say ‘Institute of Education’. He certainly had a long association with the
Institute (IOE) in London, beginning as a trainee teacher in the late 1960s and maintaining a foothold there in one way or another for the next 50 years. In 2000 he would take up the helm as Director of his (postgraduate) alma mater (at which point it was an independent college of the University of London, later merging with UCL in 2014). Geoff held the directorship for a decade, a post he described without hyperbole as ‘the best job in the world’.

In spite of his self-proclaimed shyness, Geoff was quick to take on leadership roles; while a student at the IOE his peers had predicted that he would one day run the place. Geoff would have many leadership roles before, during and after the IOE directorship. In all of them he demonstrated a wish to be at the centre of things and to build teams around the pursuit of social justice in and through education. His sense of fairness and purpose, duty perhaps, gave him his focus, determination and tenacity, and he demanded equal commitment from those around him. He was not one to ‘count his blessings’ or reflect on his achievements; instead he was always searching, always questioning. While that might not have led to the most comfortable existence, it meant that his was ‘a life well lived’.

Unsurprisingly to those who knew him, he remained as focused on his work and as active as ever until, in the last few weeks of his life, it became physically impossible. As reflected in this collection, for those still continuing with the task of shaping fairer and more inclusive education systems, Geoff’s legacy as one of the leading sociologists of education of his generation and his associated body of work offers an inspiring and valuable resource.

**Education**

Geoff was born in 1946 in Mortlake, Surrey, to Kathleen and Fred, who were themselves both teachers. As mentioned earlier, Fred was a primary school head teacher; Kathleen was a physical education teacher. It was a Methodist household. Geoff had one sibling, an elder brother, John ‘Larry’ Whitty, who he would follow to Cambridge and with whom he shared his socialist politics. Larry would later become General Secretary of the British Labour Party.

Geoff grew up in the outer suburbs of London. He won a Middlesex county scholarship to attend Latymer Upper School in Hammersmith, which was then a Direct Grant grammar school and among the most academically elite secondary schools in the country. His childhood and
schooling at Latymer are evoked powerfully in an obituary written on behalf of the Academy of Social Sciences by his school friend Richard Collins (Collins 2018). From there, Geoff won a scholarship place at St John’s College, Cambridge, to read history.

Perhaps far more defining for Geoff was the nine months he spent as a temporary teacher before going to university. This was at an inner-city primary school in west London, Belmont Primary School in Chiswick, which was then a disadvantaged working-class area, and saw significant immigration from the British Commonwealth, mainly the Caribbean, Indian subcontinent and Africa. This experience would expose Geoff to new communities and made him question some of his taken-for-granted assumptions, including those that had informed his own schooling at a selective grammar school. The task of teaching the traditional grammar school curriculum in this context highlighted to him how such a curriculum could so often seem to be meaningless to many pupils.

As Geoff noted of his own schooling:

For most of my career there in the late 1950s and early 1960s, I doubt if I ever asked myself, let alone anyone else, why I was studying the particular assortment of subjects presented to me or why the content of those subjects was constituted in the particular way it was . . . Only in my final term, when I read E.H. Carr’s *What is History?* did I even begin to glimpse the idea that school knowledge was a selection from a much vaster range of possible knowledge and that its content might be socially determined. (Whitty 1985: 1)

Carr’s book, itself only published in 1961, notably problematized the nature of historical knowledge. Geoff carried its lessons with him when he went up to Cambridge, commencing in 1965 (see McCulloch 2019). He was a reluctant student, and at the time would have preferred to go straight into teaching (he would spend his university vacations back at Belmont). He found his history course at Cambridge to be similarly lacking in intellectual stimulation, seeming to demand little more than regurgitating knowledge, and he would later criticize the course for not encouraging students to question the content of the curriculum they were following (Whitty 1985).

Whether or not as a result of the nature of his course of study, Geoff spent his three years as an undergraduate more interested in student politics and student activism than in his course, graduating with an upper second degree. This was the era of the anti-Vietnam War protests.
and Geoff was very active in those movements. He also got involved in the Fabian Society student group, and this is where he was exposed to the sociology of education for the first time. In asking questions about education and inequality, this work would chime with some of the questions that Geoff had already been asking in light of his experience as a temporary teacher. A lecture by Perry Anderson organized by the student left convinced him of the need to expose the social basis of knowledge to those who determined and were on the receiving end of the school curriculum.

**Teacher education and teaching career**

In 1968 Geoff commenced his teaching diploma at the IOE. In 2018 he recollected, with some amusement, how he was rejected by numerous teacher training courses, and how it took a behind-the-scenes political appeal instigated by his father to secure his place at the IOE: he would later have it confirmed that his student activism had counted against him (Whitty 2018).

He trained as a history and social studies teacher and in 1969 took up a teaching post at Lampton School in Hounslow, west London, and then a post at Thomas Bennet School in Crawley, West Sussex. But his interest in the questions raised by the sociology of education remained, and he soon found himself back at the IOE, this time as a master’s student. He would later describe this course as ‘the most rewarding academic experience that I had had to date’ (Whitty 1985: 2), and this effectively fomented his outlook into a firmly sociological framework.

It was during these postgraduate studies that Geoff was first alerted to the possibilities inherent in a sociological approach to the school curriculum, via the lectures of Basil Bernstein, Brian Davies and Michael Young. During his time at Cambridge the ‘political arithmetic tradition’ had been dominant within the sociology of education. By the time he arrived back at the IOE the ‘new sociology of education’ was in the ascendancy, with sociologists opening up to scrutiny prevailing assumptions about what was ‘worthwhile knowledge’. In particular, Bernstein would present the curriculum as just one of a number of possibilities showing how it served particular social functions.

Geoff was the archetypal idealistic new teacher of the 1960s and 1970s, ‘fired with an enthusiasm to change things’. This was the era of comprehensivization, and Geoff wanted to change the experience of schooling, but also ‘foster changes in consciousness that would
ultimately transform society’ (Whitty 1985: 2). Such was his idealism that he virtually abandoned his involvement in broader political activities to foster change through education. Increasingly, though, he saw his naivety. His postgraduate dissertation at the IOE warned sociologists not to romanticize the possibilities of radical change in and through the school curriculum alone and called for more attention to be paid to the relevant Marxist literature. Geoff was perhaps ahead of his time, as there followed a volte-face in the sociology of education to a more economically deterministic model. But this was a marked pendulum swing, towards the nihilistic position that everyday professional processes merely sustained broader structures of oppression. Alternation between extreme positions, within the sociology of education and in education policy, would be an ongoing source of frustration for Geoff.

In 1974 Geoff published part of his postgraduate dissertation as a journal article (Whitty 1974) entitled ‘Sociology and the Problem of Radical Educational Change: Notes Towards a Reconceptualization of the New Sociology of Education’, and from there moved from school teaching into an academic career.

**University career**

Geoff’s first step into the higher education sector was as a part-time Postgraduate Certificate of Education social studies tutor at Goldsmiths College, from 1972–3. His first university post ‘proper’ was as a teacher educator (sociology and social studies) at the University of Bath, a post he held from 1973–80, and which later overlapped with his work as a part-time tutor in educational studies at the Open University, from 1975–82. It was also during this period that Geoff would spend time as a visiting professor at the University of Wisconsin–Madison School of Education (1979–80).

At this stage, Geoff was seen as a young firebrand, associated with the Marxist turn in the ‘new sociology of education’. With Denis Gleeson he published *Developments in Social Studies Teaching* (Gleeson and Whitty 1976) and *Sociology: The Choice at A Level* (Whitty and Gleeson 1976). Geoff would also publish two edited collections with his earlier tutor at the IOE, Michael Young: *Explorations in the Politics of School Knowledge* (Whitty and Young 1976) and *Society, State and Schooling: Readings on the Possibilities for Radical Education* (Young and Whitty 1977). These held on to the idea that sociological study of the curriculum would yield important insights into opportunities for radical
practice in education, seeking to provide a research-informed alternative both to ‘naive optimism’ and to ‘fatalistic pessimism’, a path that Geoff would endeavour to tread throughout his career.

In 1981 Geoff left Bath to take up the post of lecturer in urban education at King’s College London, which he held for three years. Even across these early posts in his academic career, Geoff was showing his leadership credentials, frequently serving as an elected member on senior committees, within the universities he worked in and the University of London, of which Goldsmiths and King’s were constituent parts. It was then that Geoff took what at the time was the unusual choice of moving to the then polytechnic sector – as Head of Department and later Dean of Education at Bristol Polytechnic (now the University of the West of England). There he helped to create what many considered to be the most successful education department in the polytechnic sector. This was at a time when the education faculty was having to shape a new identity for itself, having been incorporated into the polytechnic as one of the former colleges of education responsible for teacher training, but not yet having become a fully integral part of a multi-faculty institution.

During Geoff’s five years in office the faculty doubled in size and soon became the highest ranking former polytechnic education department in research terms – while also maintaining consistently high ratings from the national inspectorate for the quality of its teaching. This was an early example of Geoff’s leadership and strategic thinking, as well as his ability to attract and build high calibre teams in pursuit of a social justice agenda. Many of those who joined Geoff at Bristol, including Peter Aggleton, Len Barton, David Halpin, Ian Menter, Andrew Pollard and Marjorie Smith, would continue to work closely with Geoff long after they had all left Bristol, several of them later joining him at the IOE. It was during this time that Geoff became an increasingly national figure not only in his own area of scholarship, but also within the polytechnic sector and as a representative of that sector in wider arenas.

Despite having taken on more demanding leadership roles Geoff remained as prolific as ever in his scholarship. In 1985 he published *Sociology and School Knowledge: Curriculum Theory, Research and Politics* (Whitty 1985). This book he regarded as bringing together and developing his scholarship to date. It would be the first of three books to serve this function, the others being *Making Sense of Education Policy* (Whitty 2002) and *Research and Policy in Education* (Whitty et al. 2016). Geoff wanted *Sociology and School Knowledge* to be relevant to people developing radical approaches to educational policy and practice, and the book suggests how a sociology of the curriculum could develop closer
links with pedagogical and political practice. It would certainly play a significant part in enabling the new sociology of education to become institutionalized in British higher education.

*Sociology and School Knowledge* and the works it drew together, however, were conducted against an increasingly inhospitable climate. As McCulloch (2019) notes, in England, the hopes for curriculum reform that had grown in the 1960s now faded, to be replaced by economic and industrial problems that brought down the Conservative government in 1974 and resulted in a politically fraught minority Labour government, first under Harold Wilson and then James Callaghan. In this climate, education took the blame for both industrial underperformance and social conflict. In 1976 Callaghan instigated a ‘Great Debate’ on education that eventually led to reforms under a new Conservative government with Margaret Thatcher as prime minister in the 1980s.

The Thatcher years provided a difficult climate for the sociology of education and inhibited the impact of work carried out in the 1970s. A more pressing frontier was created for those concerned with educational inequalities, as the discourse of choice, specialization and diversity displaced the aspiration for common and comprehensive schooling. As for many others working in the sociology of education, Geoff’s scholarship moved in a new direction, to policy sociology and policy studies in education. As Brian Davies commented of Geoff’s scholarship, ‘[Geoff] moved with some decorum, rather than any hint of “scramble” from being “new directions” first insider-critic to neo-Marxist curriculum analyst . . . to policy researcher and theorist’ (Davies 1994: 14). This shift was marked by Geoff’s move from Bristol back to Goldsmiths College, this time as Professor of Policy and Management in Education (1990–92), and then on to the IOE as Karl Mannheim Chair of Sociology of Education within its Department of Policy Studies.

The paradox of the inequities of equal treatment came through vividly in Geoff’s work in education policy studies, drawing out as it did the dynamics of and interdependencies between middle-class advantage and working-class disadvantage in education. Geoff’s key publications over this period include his evaluation of the Assisted Places Scheme with Tony Edwards and John Fitz (Edwards *et al.* 1989) and his analyses of choice policies with Tony Edwards and Sharon Gewirtz (see Whitty *et al.* 1993) and Sally Power and David Halpin (see Whitty *et al.* 1998). This work demonstrated the naivety of policy in its assumptions about the extent to which schooling could compensate for society and the potential of choice to overcome existing stratification when it came to the composition of schools’ pupil intakes and pupil outcomes. It
provided a powerful rejoinder, showing how marketization had further disadvantaged those least able to compete in the market. Geoff’s interest in teacher education also continued. This was the topic of his inaugural professorial lecture at Goldsmiths – *Next in Line for the Treatment?* – which explored the growing emphasis on school-based teacher education within national policy (Whitty 1991). Also at Goldsmiths, Geoff had been instrumental in establishing an innovative new research centre, the Health and Education Research Unit (HERU), and he now brought this to the IOE, initially acting as its director. It was via HERU that Geoff pursued another significant strand of scholarship, on educating about sex, sexuality and HIV, including the role of teacher education therein. Conducted in collaboration with Peter Aggleton, that work would support the design and roll-out of new approaches to sex education that both destigmatized HIV and HIV education and empowered young people to protect their health. To this day, it influences some of the taken-for-granted assumptions of international agencies such as the World Health Organization and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Just one publication to stem from this work was *Learning about AIDS: Scientific and Social Issues*, a collection that Geoff edited with Peter Aggleton, Kim Rivers and Ian Warwick (Aggleton et al. 1994).

### Institute of Education

Geoff’s return to the IOE in 1992 was as successor to his early mentor, Basil Bernstein, as the prestigious Karl Mannheim Chair of Sociology of Education. In 1998 he was also appointed Dean of Research at the IOE, and then two years later he was appointed as its director. Of his many leadership roles in higher education the most notable is his time as Director of the IOE, a post he held from 2000 to 2010. Despite the pressures of running an organization of the size and complexity of the IOE, especially for someone like Geoff who identified so closely with his work, Geoff maintained his illustrious academic career throughout. This was aided by the collaborative approach he had always taken to his research; he was similarly notable in his support for early career researchers, often publishing with them. His key publications during this phase of his career included the 1997 Karl Mannheim Memorial Lecture, *Social Theory and Education Policy: The Legacy of Karl Mannheim* (Whitty 1997). As Geoff noted in the lecture, Mannheim had been appointed by the then IOE director, Fred Clarke, on the grounds that ‘educational theory and educational policy that take no account of wider social forces
would be not only blind but positively harmful’ (149). Mannheim was never the detached critical observer, more a political and social strategist trying to understand so that others may be able to act. In that regard, Geoff was arguably a worthy successor.

There followed Geoff’s analysis of the changing nature of teacher education and teacher professionalism, *Teacher Education in Transition*, with John Furlong, Len Barton, Sheila Miles and Caroline Whiting (Furlong et al. 2000), the aforementioned second in his trilogy of books drawing together his recent work, this time using sociological perspectives to explore various aspects of education policy, *Making Sense of Education Policy* (Whitty 2002), and his study of the experience of Assisted Places Scheme holders in the private school system, *Education and the Middle Class*, with Sally Power, Tony Edwards and Valerie Wigfall (Power et al. 2003), which would win the Society for Educational Studies book prize.

The New Labour years that would overlap substantially with Geoff’s time as IOE director offered a mixed bag in terms of the concerns of sociological research in education and the relationship between research and policy. Prime Minister Tony Blair’s proclamation of ‘Education, education, education’ brought prominence and investment to education. And there were flagship policies that appeared to recognize the link between educational performance and wider social structures and inequalities (for instance, increased early years investment and, later on, the Every Child Matters initiative). Nevertheless, the broad policy settlement of the Thatcher years, of competition and choice, went unchallenged, while the ‘what works’ agenda began to shape policy on research funding yet more strongly. Geoff’s work with his collaborating authors would retain an important role in signalling the limitations of marketization, as well as of the ‘prescribed professionalism’ of ‘deliverology’ (as promoted, for instance, by Barber, Kihn and Moffit 2010). Geoff’s work on marketization and the sociology of the curriculum in particular would return to prominence under the subsequent Conservative–Liberal Democrat coalition government that came to power in 2010 and its emphasis on academization and a knowledge-led curriculum for all. Geoff himself recounted these policy turns and the relationship with his own ‘life with the sociology of education’ in Whitty (2012).

Alongside the major research studies and publications outlined, Geoff’s leadership of the IOE was sowing the seeds of its ‘number one’ ranking from 2014 in the annual Quacquarelli Symonds World University Rankings for Education. By the end of his directorship the IOE was unique among faculties of education in its size and reach, and unparalleled in
its work with education systems at home and overseas. In 2007 the IOE gained the power to award its own degrees (having previously awarded University of London degrees), and in 2008 produced an outstanding performance in the national assessment of universities’ research activity, the then Research Assessment Exercise. By this time the IOE was the largest and most esteemed provider of postgraduate initial teacher education nationally, accounted for nearly a third of all UK research funding in education, and was one of the top four universities for receipt of social science research funding. Geoff put his own stamp on the organization through his investment in its research intensity, the stronger foregrounding, through its investments and branding, of its work beyond education (especially children and families, health and well-being, and international development), as well as his support for the foundation disciplines of education.

Geoff would also personally embody the more public and policy-engaged organization that he wanted the IOE to be. With the General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland he developed innovative new teacher standards that supported a more holistic model of teacher professionalism (see GTCNI 2005). Later he would help lay the groundwork for the introduction of Teach First in England and serve as a sounding board for those who worked on the transformative London Challenge programme. His review of school councils for the government (Whitty and Wisby 2007) would help schools harness the benefits of vehicles for pupil voice, while, as chair of the Bristol Education Partnership Board, he would help build improvement in Bristol’s school system. He would serve as specialist advisor to successive House of Commons select committees on education (2005–12), one outcome of which was New Labour’s rewriting of national school admissions policy in order to facilitate fairer access for children of all backgrounds. He would later serve on the board of the Office for Standards in Education, Children’s Services and Skills, the national inspectorate for schools, colleges, children’s services and teacher education. Always international as well as collaborative in his outlook, Geoff was during this time instrumental in establishing the International Network of Educational Institutes, a global think tank created to bring a global perspective to issues in education, and the World Education Research Association, an alliance of major associations dedicated to advancing education research.

The decade of Geoff’s directorship saw him as active as ever in national bodies, including the British Council, Economic and Social Research Council, General Teaching Council for England, Universities Council for the Education of Teachers and Universities UK. He continued
to serve on numerous journal editorial boards at this time, including: *International Studies in Sociology of Education, Review of Research in Education, International Journal of Inclusive Education, Education Journal, American Educational Research Journal* and *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*. He was also awarded many accolades: chartered fellow of the College of Teachers (2001); academician of the Academy of Social Sciences (2002); the presidency of both the College of Teachers and the British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2005–07); the College of Teachers Lady Plowden Medal (2009); fellowship of the Society for Educational Studies (2012); and an honorary degree from the University of the West of England (2001). In addition he was awarded a DLit(Ed) (by examination) from the University of London (2002).

‘Retirement’

Following his retirement as director of the IOE Geoff remained active as director emeritus and also went on to posts at the Universities of Bath, Bath Spa, and Newcastle, Australia. He would also spend time at Teachers College, Columbia University, and continue to serve as a visiting professor at the Universities of Birmingham and Bedfordshire, an honorary professor at Beijing Normal University and the University of Wisconsin–Madison, and as an honorary research fellow at Oxford University. In his valedictory interview on standing down as IOE director Geoff made a commitment to review the research evidence on ways of narrowing the social class achievement and participation gap. The former he pursued in collaboration with Jake Anders (Whitty and Anders 2014). Class differences in access to higher education was a relatively new area of research for Geoff, and with Annette Hayton and Sarah Tang he drew together analysis of participation and access trends with the literature on social and cultural capital (Whitty et al. 2015). In 2014, as Global Innovation Chair at the University of Newcastle, Australia, a university known for its combining of academic reputation and inclusivity, Geoff would establish the Centre of Excellence for Equity in Higher Education. In line with Geoff’s earlier work, the purpose of the centre was to bring equity practice and research together to support inclusion. Penny Jane Burke was appointed as co-director in 2015 and is now director of the centre. Geoff’s engagement with matters of teacher education also continued. He was closely involved in the BERA and Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce (RSA) enquiry and report *Research and the Teaching Profession: Building*
the Capacity for a Self-Improving Education System (BERA–RSA 2014). At Bath Spa he helped to initiate the ‘Diversity in Teacher Education’ (DiTE) research project, which sought to understand the contemporary changes to initial teacher education in England, and which was in effect a successor to his earlier project with Furlong et al. (2000), known as the ‘Modes of Teacher Education’ project. The findings of the DiTE project, documenting a burgeoning of new routes into teaching, were published in 2019 (Sorensen 2019) and are accompanied by a foreword written by Geoff.

In 2016 Geoff published Research and Policy in Education: Evidence, Ideology and Impact (Whitty et al. 2016). This book, the third in the trilogy, brought together Geoff’s scholarship from the final 15 years of his career, covering his work on inequalities in education (schooling and higher education) and his work on the relationship between education research and education policy. This period had involved Geoff much more in generic issues in education policy research, but he was repeatedly drawn back to sociological perspectives. Research and Policy in Education reaffirmed his roots in the sociological tradition and reasserted what he saw as its importance for understanding and confronting education policy dilemmas. The book takes these perspectives and applies them to teacher education, policy borrowing, the socio-economic attainment gap and access to higher education. It also returns to Geoff’s advocacy of the need to maintain a ‘broad church’ of educational research. As he commented in the aforementioned 1997 Karl Mannheim lecture:

> however implicated universities may now have become in the instrumental rationality of the state, if they are not to be the places to explore the relationship between education and the wider social order, it is difficult to see where that work will be done on a sustained and systematic basis. (Whitty 1997: 154)

This was also the theme of his 2005 BERA presidential address (Whitty 2006), which challenged the creeping and misleadingly simplistic ‘what works’ agenda of the time and the demand that educational research offer immediate relevance to current policy and practice concerns. In the intervening decade this drift in education research policy and funding would continue and indeed strengthen with, for example, the advent of the impact agenda in research funding policy and the arrival of the Education Endowment Foundation, requiring the case to be made once again for a broad church (Whitty and Wisby 2016). In what would be Geoff’s final book, Knowledge and the Study of Education (Whitty
and Furlong 2017), researched and written with John Furlong, Geoff explored education as a discipline and how this manifested itself around the world.

In this later phase of his career, Geoff’s contribution would continue to be recognized in numerous plaudits: a CBE for services to teacher education (2011), fellowship of the American Educational Research Association (2015) and the BERA John Nisbet Fellowship (2017), as well as honorary degrees from the Hong Kong Institute of Education (2012), UCL (2016) and University of Newcastle, Australia (2018). By now his work had been translated into numerous other languages, among them Finnish, French, German, Japanese, Korean, Mandarin, Portuguese and Spanish. In 2014 two of Geoff’s co-authored publications, *The State and Private Education* (Edwards et al. 1989), and *Teacher Education in Transition* (Furlong et al. 2000), featured in BERA’s 40@40, which recognized influential studies in the field of education research. Further demonstrating the continued salience and relevance of Geoff’s early work, and in many ways a poignant coming full circle, 2017 saw Routledge reissue Geoff’s 1985 book *Sociology and School Knowledge*, in print and as an e-book.

A review of Geoff’s academic and institutional career demonstrates the significance of his work and his standing as one of the foremost sociologists of education of his generation. It also helps to explain his ongoing frustration at just how much education policy (and education research) remained stubbornly decontextualized and his wish to see the sociological imagination exercised more liberally in institutional and political life (Whitty, 1997, Whitty, 2016). Geoff himself did not take much comfort in the notion that, by way of the ‘double hermeneutic’, the ‘findings’ of the social sciences might enter constitutively into the world of policy and practice that they describe (Whitty 1997: 158). But perhaps he should have, just for a moment, allowed himself the satisfaction of recognizing the impact of his own contribution.

**References**


