



Sociologie de l'école. Marie Duru-Bellat and Agnès Heriot-van Zanten. Paris: A. Colin, 1992. 233 pp.

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Sociologie de l'école provides an informative overview, with a French accent, of current thinking and research on schooling. The authors state at the outset that they want to propose a "sociology of the school" that is not synonymous with a "sociology of education." In order to correct for what they see as insufficient attention to wider social and cultural contexts of schools, particularly in French scholarship, the authors advocate a study of schooling and of schools as a "sociology of the school" that sees the school as a "social institution." Duru-Bellat and Henriot-van Zanten draw heavily from ethnomethodological approaches and adopt a focus on individual actors and on social practice in everyday situations that is highly influenced by British sociology.

The book is divided into two parts: part 1, "L'école dans la société" (The School in Society), addresses the social and political problems of creating equal educational opportunities in the centralized French state. The focus of this section is on the global, macrolevel of analysis in French society, reflecting the expertise of author Duru-Bellat in the area of economics and education. As is common in French educational statistics, social class background becomes the most important variable in such phenomena as educational career path or school-leaving age. This provides an interesting contrast to the predominance of educational statistics based on race and ethnicity, with very little attention to social class origins, within the United States. Part 1 looks at changing educational policies and institutional changes in France since the late 19th century and surveys educational inequalities at all levels of French education. The relationship between schooling and the job market is addressed, and the persistent relative lack of social mobility for upcoming generations in France is cited. The last chapter in part 1 takes up the problem of how to integrate macro and micro levels of analysis of educational processes. The tension between structural processes and individual action is placed at the center of this problem. The authors trace a change from a concern with the functions of education to a concern with the elucidation of educational processes in concrete situations. They trace approaches from Durkheim to early Bourdieu and Willis, to Boudon's emphasis on methodological individualism, and then to more recent writings by Bourdieu.

As is clear in part 2, "Contextes, acteurs et pratiques" (Contexts, Actors, and Practices), the authors and their French colleagues see themselves as part of a new generation of scholars who have embraced an ethnography of schooling concerned with the school as a "flesh and blood" (*en chair et en os*) entity situated in a local



context. It is through such an approach, they argue, that the connections between the local and the national levels may be understood. In this section the expertise of author Henriot-van Zanten, an ethnographer of French education, comes to the fore. The authors trace problems of both rural and urban education, as well as changing educational policies in each setting. They point out that in France the debate has shifted from whether schools are agents of liberation or social reproduction to that of whether or not schools are "open" or "closed" to opportunities. They discuss the creation of "zones of educational priority" created to target disadvantaged areas. Another topic addressed is that of the effects of institutional conditions upon the educational careers of students, especially given the increasing diversity of schooling arrangements in France. Such a question is of particular relevance in France, where the centralized educational system operated according to fairly uniform policies across the nation until quite recently. The final chapters of the book focus on the sociological study of educational content and knowledge, and on the social actors involved in schooling: teachers, parents, and students. Here, the authors briefly cover such topics as the social background of teachers, parent participation in education (at both local and national levels), and what one might call the "culture" of student life in France.

The authors stress "diversity" in their concluding remarks, but their meaning is different from that usually taken in the contemporary United States, where "diversity" generally refers to ethnic or racial diversity. Duru-Bellat and Henriot-van Zanten point to the increasing amount of choice and diversity in French educational institutions, which require increasing diversity both of educational strategies for parents and students, and of research approaches (micro and macro) to capture the new complexities that will arise.

This volume covers a lot of ground. As with many overviews of research and theory, the text suffers from lack of detailed discussion of some topics and often shifts focus too quickly. From an anthropological perspective, the concept of "culture" is not sufficiently addressed, and recent problems of immigration in France and elsewhere receive surprisingly little attention considering the scope of the book's aims. But for American and British readers who have a reading knowledge of French, this comparative view of what is happening in French studies of schooling should prove enlightening. The book is laid out in a straightforward manner and proceeds logically from chapter to chapter--again, making it attractive for nonnative speakers. We all need to educate ourselves more fully on other national traditions of scholarship in our field, and this book is an excellent place to start.



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