



# KNOWLEDGE, POLICY AND PRACTICE IN EDUCATION AND THE STRUGGLE FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

Essays inspired by the work of  
**Geoff Whitty**

**Edited by**

**Andrew Brown**

**Emma Wisby**

**UCLPRESS**

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

*To the memory of Geoff Whitty*

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*Essays Inspired by the Work of Geoff Whitty*

Edited by Andrew Brown and Emma Wisby

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# Pursuing Racial Justice within Higher Education: Is Conflict Inevitable?

Nicola Rollock

### Introduction

In his 2005 inaugural presidential address to the British Educational Research Association (later published in the *British Educational Research Journal*), Geoff Whitty interrogates the relationship between education research and the way in which it is variably taken up by policymakers and put into practice. He contends that the relationship is one marked by misunderstanding, conflict and the subjective priorities and interests of individual policymakers, hence the question posed in the title of his address: ‘Is conflict inevitable?’

In this paper, I take up Whitty’s provocations in relation to racial justice and higher education. Specifically, I am interested in the relationship and ensuing tensions between what might be conceptualized as *the diversity promise* – articulated and enacted by universities via policy documents and equality statements – and the stark realities revealed by the data and empirical research regarding, in this case, the experiences of racially minoritized faculty. Building on previous arguments, I contend that the cultural practices and norms of the institution, not only contribute to racial injustice but actively work against remedying it, leaving ambitions of racial diversity unfulfilled. I demonstrate this in two ways: first, I show how the formal procedures surrounding recruitment and progression and the workload management model work as structuring mechanisms to the disadvantage of racially minoritized faculty. Second, I argue that racial injustice operates beyond these formalized, officially sanctioned sites. Drawing on Peggy McIntosh’s

work on privilege I catalogue how the organizational culture of higher education is predicated on a series of normalized assumptions, behaviours and acts that serve to foreground whiteness, white comfort and white privilege as the norm. I contend that just as Whitty questions the presumption that research will automatically inform the direction, formation and enactment of policy – encouraging as he does education researchers to nonetheless maintain their ambitions unfettered solely by policy concerns – so too must this remain the case for racial justice research and those seeking to decolonize the higher education sector.

## Importing and legitimating injustice

In the spring of 2018 I accepted an invitation from the University of Denver, Colorado, to take part in an international symposium on race and higher education. My co-panellists included colleagues from Jamaica and South Africa as well as our Denver hosts. Despite the geographical distances between our respective countries, the marked similarities between our accounts – of the entrenched and continual barriers faced by academic and student communities of colour – was sobering. However, as is often the case when like-minded scholars of colour come together, we found strength and affirmation in the very act of our sharing. While this remained an uplifting and important aspect of the visit, this was usurped by what initially seemed to be an unrelated event. While I was in Denver, a news story broke that the Target Cooperation (one of the largest chains of department stores across the USA after Walmart) had agreed to settle, to the sum of \$3.74 million, a harassment case in which it was alleged to have discriminated against Black and Latino job applicants. The basis of the class action was that the chain had asked individuals to state whether or not they had a criminal record at the point of application. Target then used this information to exclude applicants from the next stage of the job selection process. The prosecution argued that Target Cooperation was thus importing into its procedures existing racial biases disproportionality known to persist within the criminal justice system to the detriment of Black and Latino candidates. Reporting on the story in the Bloomberg Law publication *Big Business Law*, journalist Patrick Dorrian (2018) wrote of Target's procedures:

That amounts to unlawful discrimination under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which prohibits bias based on a worker's race or national origin. . . . The Equal Employment Opportunity

Commission—the federal agency that enforces Title VII against private-sector employers—has long-held the view that employers may not use policies or practices that screen out individuals from hiring based on a criminal history where such policies significantly disadvantage applicants based on a trait protected under Title VII and don't assist the employer in accurately deciding whether the applicant 'is likely to be a responsible, reliable, or safe employee.'

As part of the settlement, Target Cooperation was required to give priority hiring opportunities to certain Black and Latino applicants, hire two organizational psychologists to help them to revise their existing hiring practices and were obligated to make a financial donation to non-profit organizations which support re-entry to work schemes for those with convictions.<sup>1</sup> And yet Target's corporate website describes the company as 'working toward a more equal society', a statement that might be considered questionable given the charge made against them.

Hearing about the case made me reflect on the way in which injustice is also casually imported into everyday decisions and policies within higher education in the UK even while, like Target, those same bodies advertise and proclaim their ambitions for equality and diversity. Even the most rudimentary search of news items over the last five years reveals a series of cases where UK faculty and students of colour have been subjected to racist name-calling, bullying, undermining and stereotyping even while they continue to be poorly represented at these same institutions (AdvanceHE 2018). This has led me to describe higher education as a 'hostile environment' for these groups (Rollock 2018).

In order to speak to my wider point about the tensions and conflict in advancing racial justice in higher education (Rollock 2013), I focus my attentions on two areas: recruitment and progression and the workload management model. My central thesis is that each reflects and entrenches inequality in UK universities.

## Recruitment and progression

My research into the career experiences and strategies of the UK's Black female professors reveals that the processes surrounding recruitment and progression are deeply problematic when it comes to safeguarding justice (Rollock 2019). For example, internal recruitment and promotions panels often only comprise of white colleagues yet when challenged on this, universities often respond that such panels must be occupied by those who hold certain roles or positions such as director of

research or the head of human resources. Given the paucity of people of colour in such roles (Adams 2018; AdvanceHE 2018; Solanke 2018), this has the effect of importing injustice and safeguarding whiteness, power and elitism. Indeed, even when some effort has been made to reflect ethnic diversity – perhaps by soliciting such representation from another university – the available pool of senior academics of colour is so small that it risks placing an undue burden on these individuals and leaves little room for the impartiality that such panels are quick to advertise themselves as promoting. Further, it is clear that simply seeking to increase racial diversity through existing recruitment practices is itself problematic given that at the most senior levels (notably professorial and university management), the appointment process often relies on a small body of executive search agencies who have been found to conduct searches for potential candidates among their existing networks and narrow pool of contacts (Manfredi *et al.* 2017). In order to disrupt this ‘proleptic assumption of an objective destiny’ (Bourdieu 1986: 110) institutions must act differently, for example, by commissioning recruitment firms with specialism in targeting under-represented groups or by providing an explicit brief to search agencies that nominated candidates must go beyond the conventional, unquestioned profile of their networks. Changing the profile of senior academics and of those who manage universities must be deemed as pivotal to the selection process as consideration of candidates’ experience, knowledge and qualifications.

However, while there has been what might be positioned as a relative proliferation of debate, notably within the private sector, concerning the representation and progression of employees of colour in recent years (McGregor-Smith 2017; Parker 2017) similar reflection in higher education has been scant. Promotion within universities still requires the approval of a line manager, head of department or equivalent, despite wider research evidence indicating that relationships between employees and their line managers vary considerably by ethnic group. This was one of the headline findings of research published by the diversity workplace charity Business in the Community (BiTC) who, in 2015 and 2016, reported the outcome of one of the largest known surveys of race in the workplace in the UK.<sup>2</sup> They found that Black Caribbean employees were least likely of all ethnic groups to believe that managers in their organizations treated ‘all people equally in regard to career progression’ (BiTC 2015: 10). In addition, they revealed that nearly half of respondents from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds and one-fifth of white respondents reported experiencing or witnessing racial harassment or bullying from managers during the

previous five years (BiTC 2015). These findings correspond with those reported by the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU)<sup>3</sup> in a study examining the role of gender in shaping the ‘experiences, expectations and perceptions of the workplace’ of academics in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and medicine (STEMM). ECU discovered that women from Black and minority ethnic backgrounds were more likely to report: a lack of support from their department, being given fewer training opportunities and being less likely to be encouraged or invited to apply for promotion compared with their white and male counterparts. Further, these women and their white female colleagues were more likely than their male peers to report having line managers who were unsupportive or obstructive to their progression (Aldercotte *et al.* 2017). Such findings are clearly concerning given the dearth of women and Black and minority ethnic groups working in STEMM (Campaign for Science and Engineering 2014). Reflecting on the persistence of the underrepresentation of Black and minority ethnic employees at senior levels, the authors of a report published by the think tank the Policy Exchange observe:

The problem is that high flying [Black and minority ethnic] individuals are not flying high enough, relative to their qualifications, skills and experience, and they should be in positions of greater responsibility and leadership. In some instances, this is the result of closed, insular cultures in which people would be slightly taken aback at the idea that the boss might be anything other than a middle class white man – knowing this, the white boss, in the end, picks a successor who is more or less familiar in appearance, manner, background, outlook and values. Elsewhere, the formal systems that sit behind hiring and promotion exercises can contain hidden biases that dilute the chances of minorities getting through. (Saggar *et al.* 2016: 16)

There are, of course, obvious connections between this assessment by Saggar *et al.* and Bourdieu’s theoretical work setting out the role of social capital in reproducing class inequalities and with arguments advanced by proponents of critical race theory regarding the subtlety and pervasiveness of racialized practices in maintaining a dominant white status quo (e.g. Delgado and Stefancic 2000; Tate 1997; Bell 1992; Crenshaw 1991). Given this propensity for inequity and the chances of existing practices to lead to what Delgado Bernal and Villalpando (2009: 170) describe as ‘*de facto* racial and gender segregation’, it is inarguably

problematic that many universities continue to rely uncritically on the same set of policies, practices and procedures even while publicly proclaiming a commitment to equality and diversity (Rollock, under review). And it is with this analysis in mind, that I turn now to one of the management tools of higher education: the workload management model.

## Workload management model

Workload models are a mechanism increasingly deployed by universities in the UK and elsewhere as a means to ‘categorise, measure and allocate work to academics at the department level in order to ensure transparency and equity’ (Hornibrook 2012: 30) with the ultimate aim being to efficiently capitalize on academic time and spread workload more fairly (Graham 2015; Burgess *et al.* 2003). Under the model, academic work is traditionally divided into three categories: teaching, research and administration/management, and each of these is allocated a certain number of hours across the year to a cumulative 1,650-hour benchmark. While Perks (2013) has lauded the benefits of the system to mete out parity and reduce potential overload among individual academics, I am interested in what might be regarded as the leakiness of the scheme and how this sits against a wider landscape of fairness and equity or what is commonly referred to as ‘equality and diversity’.

Writing about the effectiveness of these forms of measurement in Australia, Kenny and Fluck (2014: 956) argue that time-based models, such as the workload management system, are difficult to enforce for three principal reasons:

. . . first, they require processes that identify the range of tasks undertaken by academics and agreement on credible estimates of the time these activities will take; second, the non-routine aspects of academic work, such as teaching and research, are highly dependent on individual expertise, skills and experience, thus reaching agreement on what constitutes reasonable time estimates is highly contestable and a process that managers and academic staff may approach from fundamentally different perspectives; and thirdly, many academics find the allocation of time to tasks hard to reconcile with the traditional self-managed approach to their work.

Each of these three factors is subject to constant flux and presents the potential for contention given differences in interpretation and

understanding between and indeed among management and academics. By way of example, the University and College Union (UCU), the trade body which represents UK academics, contends that managers tend to underestimate the time it takes to complete a task and that where work plans are not comprehensive or fail to take account of the full, complex breadth of academic activity this can lead to the misguided belief that staff have capacity to take on further work (UCU 2009).

Hornibrook (2012) presents a further point of consideration in terms of the impact of what might be viewed as systems of taxonomy within universities. She insists that it is only those tasks which are formally counted and sanctioned by such models that accrue legitimacy thereby reducing the role and perceived validity of activities less susceptible to measurement, but nonetheless important to the operation of higher education institutions, such as collegiality and peer support. There is a further point that I would like to introduce here. In addition to differences in expertise, skills and experience impacting on the time it takes to complete tasks, the workload management model is deployed with the underlying assumption that irrespective of issues of marginality and representation all academics are the same. In other words, no attention is paid to the uneven pattern of bullying and subjugation that affects different groups of academics. The workload model is assumed to be neutral, yet this is far from the case:

Take the case of our current fascination with management systems and cost-cutting to make us all 'more efficient and productive'. These techniques are not neutral. Efficiency, bureaucratic management, economic models applied to everything—these are ethical constructs. Adopting them involves moral and political *choices*. Their institutionalization needs to be understood as an instance of cultural power relations. (Apple 2012: xxiii, emphasis in original)

The ability to ignore or overlook central issues of equality within the workload management model, as just one example of a management system, is, I argue, indicative of how cultural power relations are enacted. From this standpoint, we ought not to express surprise at research that shows that Black and minority ethnic academics are more likely to consider leaving the UK to work overseas when compared with their white counterparts (Bhopal *et al.* 2015); they face constraints and contradictions from different angles of a biased academic workplace. To

exemplify this point more fully, I turn to the subject of mentoring, an activity often unacknowledged in workload models.

Mentoring is typically described as a process where senior members of an organization commit to supporting and facilitating the careers of protégés (Balu and James 2017). As well as being associated with aspiring executives in the private sector and young people in schools, it is often used as a tool to support the career development and increased confidence of women and faculty of colour. With the academic arena, mentoring tends to be cited as an integral part of leadership programmes or schemes, such as Athena SWAN, focused on improving the representation and workplace experiences of these groups (ECU n.d.). While I have previously critiqued mentoring as an institutional go-to panacea to seemingly resolve any matter concerning under-represented groups (Rollock, under review), I am primarily interested, in a very Bourdieuan sense, in the value assigned to it within the university context. For example, in her study of the role of mentoring in women's career progression, Quinn (2012) found that despite the benefits to the individual and the institution mentoring tended to remain invisible in conventional workload measures. These findings were mirrored in a study by Levesley *et al.* (2015: 1) which sought to explore the 'practice, purpose, and impacts of research mentoring or coaching schemes' across UK universities:

In none of the [six] departments we visited was there a specific allocation of time within mentors' (or mentees') workload model, and, although some participants said that it was not uncommon for requirements of their job not to have an allocation, this did put pressure on mentors and mentees. (35)

While mentoring can form part of designated development programmes, it is also used in an informal capacity to support new or younger generations seeking to progress in the workplace. In such contexts, mentoring can extend from simply offering career advice to also providing emotional support. Further, while relatively unexplored in the UK, evidence indicates that faculty of colour tend to take up roles as advocates, role models or mentors to support students and early career researchers from similar backgrounds and to advise them about how to handle racial stereotyping and discrimination in the mainly white workplace (Ali 2009; Maylor 2009). This 'burden of representation' (a term widely attributed to the acclaimed author and activist James Baldwin<sup>4</sup>) on account of one's racial identity and experience of racism

comes *in addition* to the standard expectations traditionally placed upon academics yet is ignored in workload calculations, gains relatively little credit in promotion criteria and, ultimately, places an undue toil on academics of colour. Writing on this topic for the sector publication the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mariam B. Lam (2018) states:

Underrepresented faculty and staff members share the burden of diversity work in many visible and invisible forms: they often assume heavier workloads in teaching, advising, mentoring, and counseling [*sic*], and spend more time on outreach, recruitment, training and workshops, and other service work. While their institutions benefit from collective gains in student success, those who do this work find it exhausting to do more than their fair share, indefinitely.

Thus, my argument is that race and the consequences of racism and marginalization need to be better understood and addressed within the higher education context as part of a reconceptualization and redistribution of power and justice. To overlook group differences and assume neutrality in organizational processes and then deploy these same tools to assess and compare the achievements and work contributions of staff is to inscribe and legitimate inequality in a damning parallel of the way in which the Target Corporation imported inequalities to its recruitment process.

## **Power, comfort and white privilege**

The central thesis of this chapter has been to demonstrate how two key structuring functions of higher education act to shape and constrain the representation, progression and experiences of faculty of colour in higher education. There are, of course, a suite of additional processes, embedded in the rubric of the system, that act detrimentally – some subtly, others less so – on the day-to-day experiences of racially minoritized faculty (Maylor 2009; Delgado Bernal and Villalpando 2009; Rollock 2012). As Bernal Delgado and Villalpando (2009: 169) convincingly argue, these processes are predicated on an epistemology of ‘meritocracy, objectivity and individuality’ and, I would add, a studied avoidance of seriously engaging with race.

In this section, I seek to show how it is not simply that inequalities work to *disadvantage* faculty of colour but, crucially, that subtle acts of

privilege and power also work to *advantage* their white counterparts. In order to reflect the prevalence and nuance of these processes, I turn to the work of the white American scholar and activist Peggy McIntosh. In her widely referenced paper on white privilege, McIntosh (1997: 291) sets out a list of taken-for-granted privileges accrued upon her due to the colour of her skin, reflecting:

As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something that puts others at a disadvantage but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage. I think whites are carefully taught not to recognize white privilege, as males are taught not to recognise male privilege.

In his critique of McIntosh's work, Leonardo (2009) interrogates the extent to which we might reasonably claim that whites are genuinely and consistently ignorant of how race and racism operates. Asserting ignorance, he contends, actually serves to benefit whites by ultimately abrogating them of their role and responsibility in maintaining a racial order and the rules that structure this. While this is fundamental to our understanding the complex, pervasive and enduring nature of racism, it is McIntosh's list of privileges that I am specifically interested in here. Informed by this, I seek to present a similar list of privileges available to and embodied by white academics in higher education. Inspired by the use of composite accounts in critical race theory (Delgado 1989), the list has been compiled via observations from various research projects and the informal accounts of academics of colour shared with me during my professional career. As mentioned, the intention is to make visible the ways in which privilege, power and advantage saturate the everyday function of the academy and, conversely, how such privileges are not available to Black and minority ethnic academics:

### How white academics are privileged in higher education

1. You can pretty much guarantee that there will be academics who share the same racial identity as you at conferences and seminars.
2. It is unlikely that you will receive comments in the peer review process that – irrespective of the coded academic language – offend, subjugate or otherwise make invisible your experiences as a white academic and those who look like you.

3. You are unlikely to be told by publishers that your preference about how to refer to your own racial identity will be superseded by their publication or style guidelines.
4. You are unlikely to experience difficulties in finding stock photographs of people who look like you.
5. White female academics can be certain that events or initiatives labelled with the word 'gender' will speak directly to their experiences and seek to engage their needs.
6. If you are a white female academic or member of professional staff, you can style your hair without concern that it will attract undue attention and curiosity from others.
7. It is unlikely that your grant proposal about white people and their experiences will be judged by a panel comprised exclusively or mainly of people outside of your racial group and who have little or no knowledge of your racial group.
8. You can apply for funding confident in the knowledge that your racial group is disproportionately more likely to be successful than other racial groups.
9. It is unlikely that you will sit on a board or committee where you are the only white academic.
10. It is unlikely that you will be subjugated or patronized based on stereotypes and beliefs about your racial identity.
11. It is unlikely that you will be subjugated or patronized based on your racial identity by colleagues who profess a commitment to social justice.
12. Your commitment to other white people is unlikely to be called into question by those who do not share your racial identity.
13. It is unlikely that your expertise will be questioned because of the perception that white academics are not smart.
14. It is improbable that an invitation to the Christmas staff party or other staff event requires you to calculate how you will manage any possible inappropriate comments about race or your culture or to chat informally with a staff member who has been insulting about your race.
15. When carrying out fieldwork, you can almost be certain that respondents will not do a double take when they realize you are white.
16. When carrying out fieldwork in rural areas, you will not normally have to think about your safety because of the fact that you are white.

17. You can be sure to see people who look like you, the further up the career ladder you rise.
18. Your experiences of being white in higher education will not leave you demoralized and fatigued with concerns for your well-being.
19. You will not need to explicitly seek out racially specific networks and groups as a source of affirmation and solace.
20. Existing or prospective white students will not search you out because you are white and share their experiences of racial subjugation and ask for your help to navigate higher education as a white person.
21. You are unlikely to have to consider how to manage and best respond to racial harassment and abuse from members of the public when you engage in media activities.
22. You are unlikely to have to consider how to manage and best respond to racial harassment and abuse from colleagues.
23. You are unlikely to have to deal with the defensiveness, denial or avoidance of colleagues when you ask them to reflect on their role in a racist incident.
24. You are unlikely to encounter situations where you have shared your experiences as a white academic or research about white respondents, to be told that it is really about social class.
25. You can write about your social class/gender and carry out research on social class/gender without considering racial identity.
26. You are able to pursue a career in higher education without reflecting on being white and the implications of this to your progression.
27. You can be confident that institutional policies will largely benefit you.
28. You do not have doubts, based on the shared experiences of your racial group, about the trade union's capacity to manage incidents that affect those who look like you.
29. When talking about the benefits of trade union membership, you can do so without considering that the trade union might not provide the same support to all racial groups.
30. You do not need to worry about how you might best manage workplace stress in the context of wider evidence about the mental health of your racial group.
31. You can work in buildings without concerns about their colonial history and the connection of this to your family's past.

32. If you have the misfortune of engaging with your institution's complaints and grievance process, you can be confident that you will not receive poorer treatment because of your racial identity.
33. You do not need to be circumspect about which heroes or heroines you put up in your office or on your office door or the possibility that your choice may mean you are regarded as radical or militant.
34. You can choose to dress casually without concern that you will be taken less seriously or mistaken for a random member of the public in your institution.
35. You can apply for jobs confident in the knowledge that most of the people on the interview panel will look like you.
36. You are able to carry out research on race and gain credibility from your peers without ever giving thought to the types of privileges listed in this chapter or taking any specific action to address racial injustice.
37. By virtue of the aforementioned privileges, you have more head space and physical time to concentrate on and complete activities actually associated with your role and success as an academic.

Of course, I do not suggest that this list is exhaustive or devoid of intersectional complexities. I recognize that being white and female and working class, for example, means that the cumulative set of privileges will vary but, crucially even with this, whiteness and the power and privileges of it remains.

In compiling this list my central aim is to draw attention to the business-as-usual nature of privilege and power which often remain uninterrogated and unexamined and indeed which are casually enjoyed by white scholars. I am also inviting a conceptualization of racism that, in line with the central thesis of critical race theory, extends beyond overt, crude acts but instead is subtly embedded in everyday practices:

Because racism is an ingrained feature of our landscape, it looks ordinary and natural to persons in the culture. Formal equal opportunity – rules and laws that insist on treating blacks and Whites (for example) alike – can thus remedy only the more extreme and shocking forms of injustice, the ones that do stand out. It can do little about the business-as-usual forms of racism that people of color confront every day. (Delgado and Stefancic 2000: xvi)

## Discussion

. . . we have to acknowledge that politics is substantially shaped by symbolic considerations that may have little to do with the real effects of policies, and that the focus sometimes has to be on what can be done, instead of on what might really make a difference. (Whitty 2006: 168)

In my keynote address to the 2017 British Educational Research Association conference, I refused to provide a list of tips to advance racial justice in higher education. This was not to be obstructive or unhelpful, rather that there have been many offers, in the form of report recommendations and research findings, detailing what can be done to improve racial justice in UK universities (e.g. Rollock 2019; Bhopal *et al.* 2015) and the workplace more broadly such as the aforementioned Parker and McGregor-Smith reviews. Given this, it is impossible not to come to the view that just as politics is shaped by what Whitty describes as ‘symbolic considerations’ so too is higher education and, I posit, this is evidenced in the way in which it chooses to engage with race. Indeed, I argue that it is only when the sector is pressured to take race and racism seriously, at the risk of otherwise financial or reputational loss, that institutional interests and those of racially minoritized groups and race activists might finally become more closely aligned.

## Notes

- 1 Carnella Times, Ervin Smith and The Fortune Society Inc. v. Target Corporation (2018), Memorandum of Law (Case 1:18-cv-02993, filed 5 April 2018), available at [http://www.naacpldf.org/files/case\\_issue/Target%20Settlement%20Memo%20of%20Law%20in%20Support.pdf](http://www.naacpldf.org/files/case_issue/Target%20Settlement%20Memo%20of%20Law%20in%20Support.pdf). Accessed 30 August 2018. See also MarketWatch 2018.
- 2 Involving over 24,000 respondents from across a range of sectors.
- 3 Now known as AdvanceHE following a merger, in 2018, between ECU, the Leadership Foundation for Higher Education and the Higher Education Academy.
- 4 As referenced by Henry Louis Gates Jr in an edited collection on James Baldwin’s life (Gates Jr 2007).

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'This book of essays is a moving and fitting tribute to the life and work of Geoff Whitty. Many of the chapters break new ground in their own right but together they offer an original reflection on Whitty's considerable contribution to our understanding of education policy and educational research.' – **Ian Menter, Emeritus Professor of Teacher Education, University of Oxford, BERA President 2013–15**

For 50 years, educator and sociologist Geoff Whitty resolutely pursued social justice through education, first as a classroom teacher and ultimately as the Director of the Institute of Education in London.

The essays in this volume – written by some of the most influential authors in the sociology of education and critical policy studies – take Whitty's work as the starting point from which to examine key contemporary issues in education and the challenges to social justice that they present. Set within three themes of knowledge, policy and practice in education, the chapters tackle the issues of defining and accessing 'legitimate' knowledge, the changing nature of education policy under neoliberalism and globalization, and the reshaping of teacher workplaces and professionalism – as well as attempts to realize more emancipatory practice. Whitty's scholarship on what constitutes quality and impact in educational research is also explored.

Together, the essays open a window on a life in the sociology of education, the scholarly community of which it was part, and the facets of education policy, practice and research that they continue to reveal and challenge in pursuit of social justice. They celebrate Whitty as one of the foremost sociologists of education of his generation, but also as a friend and colleague. And they highlight the continued relevance of his contribution to those seeking to promote fairer and more inclusive education systems.

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