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Frontmatter
More information

Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices

In contemporary classrooms, it is crucial for teachers to have a thorough understanding of sociological issues in education. *Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices* addresses sociological theory, highlighting its relevance to policy, curriculum and practice for the pre-service teacher education student.

The book explores a range of sociological issues related to diversity, disadvantage, discrimination and marginalisation, contributing to the preparation of future teachers for work in a range of educational contexts. It seeks to dispel the traditional 'one-size-fits-all' notion of education, encouraging future teachers to think critically and reflexively in terms of creating a welcoming and equitable student environment through knowledge, inclusion and understanding.

Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices is an invaluable resource for primary, secondary and early childhood pre-service teacher education students as they prepare to navigate the diversity of the modern classroom. It is also an excellent resource for practitioners and researchers interested in issues of diversity and difference in education.

Tania Ferfolja is a Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Diversity at the University of Western Sydney.

Criss Jones Díaz is a Senior Lecturer in Diversity Studies and Language Education at the University of Western Sydney.

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Frontmatter
More information

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Frontmatter
More information

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Frontmatter
More information

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Frontmatter
More information

Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world.

– Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, 1993 Nobel Peace Prize laureate

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Frontmatter
More information

Foreword

The overarching message of *Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices* is that teachers *can* and *do* make a difference to the lives of young people, and through them, to the broader community. However, it is clear that this is most powerful and positive when they develop nuanced understandings of the complex socio-cultural contexts within which teaching and learning take place. This requires sophisticated understandings of educational sites as institutions where power circulates, where it is produced and contested and where certain ways of being in the world are made possible while others may be precluded. Therefore, education can be understood as producing particular subjects with specific needs, aspirations and desires that are inflected in complex ways by location, class, language background, belief systems, indigeneity, ethnicity, gender, sexuality, mobility, dis/ability, family structures and histories and other factors. These insights are just as relevant to the teaching and learning that occurs in informal or flexible sites of education, including volunteer and community locations, as they are in more familiar and formal sites such as schools and universities.

Classrooms, playgrounds and other diverse sites of learning are the everyday material spaces within which our diverse subjectivities come into collision, where we express and learn about difference and are shaped and influenced by others with their own constellations of differences. At worst, as Connell, Ashenden, Kessler and Dowsett pointed out in their groundbreaking sociological study of Australian schooling, *Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Division* (1982), they can be sites that actively produce and exacerbate disadvantage for many students, and that shore up social advantage for others. More productively, educational sites are where we learn to create community, and begin to understand and contribute to democracy.

Creating equitable educational spaces does not mean naively treating everyone the same, repeating normative practices and reproducing oppressive ways of thinking and behaving. Rather, promoting an equity agenda means that educators learn to recognise, to name and to disrupt oppressions, even where that means catching ourselves out in moments or habits of thinking that may be unjust to some of our students, their families or communities. It means developing pedagogical practices that are nuanced by complex understandings of cultural, social and linguistic diversity. It means that we must be committed to equitable outcomes for all children and young people. It means that we will assist our students to recognise, critique and challenge oppressions. It means reiterating education as a social justice project and reshaping its institutional structures to achieve this, from the minute details of our classroom and centre routines, through how we talk about

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Frontmatter
More information

children in staffrooms, through to school-wide policies. This is a career-long commitment, requiring ongoing critical reflexivity and awareness. There is no better place to start than in pre-service teacher education.

Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices provides the critical toolbox that beginning educators need to develop their understandings of the socio-cultural contexts of education. The principal tools are theoretical – sophisticated concepts and ways of thinking that can help us to think about education differently; that is, beyond the prejudices and habits of thought that we have formed through our own experiences. Although we may feel that schools and other educational settings are the most familiar places, where each of us has spent most of our childhood for at least 12 years, and where many of us are also involved as parents, what is certain is that the particular educational sites that each of us knows so intimately are not representative of all such sites. We cannot generalise from those schools or centres, or those students or teachers, to all schools, all centres, all students, all teachers. Nor is it fair to generalise about communities or sectors. Rather, we need conceptual tools, tools for critical thinking, that are versatile, useful and that we can take with us into any of the very particular educational sites where we may find ourselves throughout our careers. This book both provides these tools and, most importantly, in a range of case studies set in diverse educational sites, it shows us how they can be put to use.

Since Connell et al.'s *Making the Difference: Schools, Families and Social Division*, which revolutionised the sociology of education in Australia during my postgraduate teacher training, the theoretical toolbox has been considerably expanded. Connell et al.'s book introduced the notion of 'socio-economic status' as a way of thinking about class and poverty in Australian society, and how it contributed to tiered systems of schooling in Australia and educational practices that instantiated 'deficit' discourses about particular groups of students, and their intellectual and educational potential. The reproduction theory that their book drew upon was the most powerful available at the time to investigate the social contexts of schooling, particularly in terms of class, but it also began to address issues of gender in education. More than 30 years later, we have developed more complex ways of thinking about the multiplicities of factors impacting on education, the intersections of categories of identity, and the fluidity of student and teacher subjectivities, and we have expanded our notions of educational sites worthy of analysis. Thus, *Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices* presents a very sophisticated and practical toolbox to draw from, filled with concise and powerful precision tools to help you pry open all sorts of taken-for-granted assumptions and practices in education.

Associate Professor Susanne Gannon
Equity Program Leader
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Reference

Connell, R. W., Ashenden, D., Kessler, S. & Dowsett, G. (1982). *Making the difference: Schools, families and social division*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

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Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-47746-9 - Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices
Edited by Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman
Frontmatter
More information

Contents

Foreword by Susanne Gannon *vi*
Preface *xiii*
Contributors *xv*
Acknowledgements *xx*

Chapter 1 The unseen half: Theories for educational practices 1
Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman

Introduction *1*
A metaphor in teaching: The 'unseen half' *2*
Theory equals value adding *4*
Poststructuralist theories *5*
Intersections of critical theoretical paradigms *8*
What does this mean for future teachers? Concepts of praxis, reflexivity and critical pedagogy *12*
Theory in practice: An overview of the chapters *14*
Conclusion *16*
Considerations *17*
Of interest *17*
References *17*

Part 1 Applying Poststructuralism(s) 21

Chapter 2 Pre-service teacher identities and the social construction of childhood 22
Son Truong

Introduction *22*
Background *24*
Key theoretical concepts *25*
Methodology *28*
Analysis and discussion *29*
Implications *34*
Considerations *35*

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-47746-9 - Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices
Edited by Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman
Frontmatter
More information

Of interest 35
References 36

Chapter 3 Regulating 'gender climate': Exploring the social construction of gender and sexuality in regional and rural Australian schools 39
Jacqueline Ullman

Introduction 40
Background 40
Key theoretical concepts 42
Methodology 45
Analysis and discussion 47
Implications 52
Considerations 53
Of interest 53
References 54

Chapter 4 Sexual diversities, policy approaches and the construction of the subject 58
Tania Ferfolja

Introduction 58
Background 59
Key theoretical concepts 62
Methodology 63
Analysis and discussion 64
Implications 69
Considerations 70
Of interest 71
References 71

Part 2 Intersecting Theories for Meaning: Postcolonialism, critical 'race' theory and cultural theory 75

Chapter 5 Destabilising privilege: Disrupting deficit thinking in white pre-service teachers on field experience in culturally diverse, high-poverty schools 76
Jo Lampert, Bruce Burnett and Kristie Morse

Introduction 76
Background 77
Key theoretical concepts 79
Methodology 81
Analysis and discussion 82
Implications 88
Considerations 89
Of interest 89
References 89

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-47746-9 - Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices
Edited by Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman
Frontmatter
More information

Chapter 6 The perceptions that shape us: Strengthening Indigenous young people's cultural identity in flexi school settings 93
Marnee Shay

Introduction *93*
Background *94*
Key theoretical concepts *96*
Methodology *98*
Analysis and discussion *99*
Implications *102*
Considerations *104*
Of interest *104*
References *105*

Chapter 7 Silences in growing up bi/multilingual in multicultural globalised societies: Educators', families' and children's views of negotiating languages, identity and difference in childhood 110
Criss Jones Díaz

Introduction *110*
Background *111*
Key theoretical concepts *113*
Methodology *116*
Analysis and discussion *117*
Implications *124*
Considerations *124*
Of interest *125*
References *125*

Chapter 8 'Disaffected' youth: Intersections of class and ethnicity 129
Mohamed Moustakim

Introduction *129*
Background *131*
Key theoretical concepts *132*
Methodology *135*
Analysis and discussion *136*
Implications *139*
Considerations *142*
Of interest *142*
References *142*

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-47746-9 - Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices
Edited by Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman
Frontmatter
More information

Part 3 Using Critical Theory 145

Chapter 9 Culture, hybridity and globalisation: Rethinking multicultural education in schools 146
Megan Watkins

Introduction *146*
Background *148*
Key theoretical concepts *151*
Methodology *153*
Analysis and discussion *154*
Implications *158*
Considerations *159*
Of interest *159*
References *160*

Chapter 10 Social class and the classroom: A reflection on the role of schooling and mothering in the production and reproduction of disadvantage and privilege 163
Kate Huppatz

Introduction *163*
Background *164*
Key theoretical concepts *167*
Methodology *169*
Analysis and discussion *170*
Implications *177*
Considerations *177*
Of interest *178*
References *178*

Chapter 11 Digital literacies: Understanding the literate practices of refugee kids in an after-school media club 180
Karen Dooley

Introduction *181*
Background *182*
Key theoretical concepts *184*
Methodology *186*
Analysis and discussion *188*
Implications *191*
Considerations *192*
Of interest *193*
References *193*

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-47746-9 - Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices
Edited by Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman
Frontmatter
More information

Chapter 12 Reflections on language and literacy: Recognising what young people know and can do 196
Jacqueline D'warte

Introduction *196*
Background *197*
Key theoretical concepts *199*
Methodology *203*
Analysis and discussion *205*
Implications *209*
Considerations *210*
Of interest *211*
References *211*

Chapter 13 Final ruminations on the 'unseen half' 214
Jacqueline Ullman, Criss Jones Díaz and Tania Ferfolja

Making the 'unseen' seen *214*
Theoretical perspectives for reflective and reflexive practice *217*
Protective qualities of theory *218*
Considerations *220*
Of interest *221*
References *221*

Index *223*

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CAMBRIDGE

Cambridge University Press
978-1-107-47746-9 - Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices
Edited by Tania Ferfolja, Criss Jones Díaz and Jacqueline Ullman
Frontmatter
More information

Preface

The dynamic nature of school populations, impacted by globalisation and constant socio-cultural change, has implications for educational policy, pedagogy, classroom practices, early childhood settings and school-community relations. Thus, to work as an equitable educator with today's children and youth, one requires a sociological understanding of schooling from early childhood through to secondary completion. It is critical that educators see how education intersects with a range of diverse subjectivities; the power relations inherent in these intersections; and the inequities that are apparent – including the visible and invisible, the voiced and silenced.

Thus, pre-service educators require knowledge about a range of sociological theoretical concepts to critically unpack the complexities of education in relation to the lives of young people, their families and communities. Such knowledge should be fostered during the pre-service stages of an educator's career to provide a foundation from which to appreciate more deeply their potential impact on future generations. Additionally, the changing expectations of educators, as reflected in the Australian context, demand a greater focus on the teacher–researcher nexus. This has been institutionally inscribed through recent changes to the Australian Qualifications Framework at Level 9, which calls for teacher education courses to produce graduates capable of researching and applying theory to their work. This enhances the imperative for pre-service educators to embrace theoretical understandings during their pre-service teacher education to develop the capacity to use this knowledge to analyse and critique praxis.

This book, based squarely on the research of its contributors, provides an accessible theoretical and research-based reader for upper-level and postgraduate pre-service educators. Each chapter reports upon current, topical research in the sociology of education. Through explanation and analysis, key theoretical concepts are applied to critically interrogate, inform and challenge many taken-for-granted knowledges and practices in education. The chapters are generally grounded in the Australian context; however, some chapters are linked to international research demonstrating widespread relevance of the issue under discussion. Wherever possible, the implications of the theory and research are made relevant to early childhood, primary and secondary contexts; as a result, the book resonates with a variety of audiences.

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Frontmatter
More information

For ease of use, while each chapter can stand alone as a discrete research paper, they all follow a similar format, enabling the reader to focus on a particular area and/or move within and between chapters for comparison and contrast. Consequently, the book may be used according to the reader's requirements and does not necessarily need to be read from front to back. Readers who are seeking greater theoretical understandings, however, should read Chapter 1 first, as it provides a useful explanation of key theoretical concepts in the sociology of education.

Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices addresses important issues while aiming to enable readers to become more comfortable with using theory to frame, enhance and extend their comprehension of key social and cultural phenomena impacting on classrooms and teacher practices. We hope you enjoy the book.

Tania Ferfolja
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Frontmatter
More information

Contributors

About the editors

Tania Ferfolja is a Senior Lecturer in Social and Cultural Diversity in the School of Education and a Senior Researcher in the Centre for Educational Research at the University of Western Sydney. She is also one of the founding members of the Australia Forum on Sexualities, Education and Health. Tania is an experienced pre-service teacher educator who is passionate about equity issues and the need to create change for more sustainable and equitable futures; as a result, her teaching focuses on the areas of in/equity, discrimination, social justice and critical social and cultural inclusion in education. She has recently received both university and national teaching awards for this work.

Tania's teaching is complemented by her research interests, which, most recently, have focused on gender and sexually diverse subjectivities in education, policy issues and curriculum development, and the education of pre-service teachers for marginalised communities. Tania has presented at numerous local and international conferences, including American Education Research Association and World Education Research Association meetings. She is on the editorial board for several journals and is regularly invited to undertake peer reviews of articles. She also has had papers and chapters published in many highly esteemed academic journals and books. Tania is the lead author of *Crossing Borders: African Refugees, Teachers and Schools* (2011) and co-editor of *'From Here to Diversity': The Social Impact of Lesbian and Gay Issues in Education in Australia and New Zealand* (2002).

Criss Jones Díaz has been a teacher educator for over 20 years. Prior to her work as a senior lecturer at the University of Western Sydney, she taught English as an additional language in Central America and the Caribbean, where she learned Spanish as a second language. Her professional background is in education and community contexts, where she has actively promoted equity and social justice for children and families from diverse social and cultural backgrounds. She

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Frontmatter
More information

continues to collaborate with educators in prior-to-school and school settings, providing professional development on bi/multilingualism, languages learning, literacy learning and diversity and difference. She also works closely with the NSW Department of Education and Communities (DEC), providing professional development to Community Language and EAL teachers. She is the Principal and Treasurer of a not-for-profit Community Language Spanish School, affiliated with the DEC (NSW), which offers Latin American Spanish to primary-aged children in the Inner West of Sydney.

Her PhD investigated the complex articulation between languages, identity, power and education in bilingual children and families from Latin American Australian backgrounds. In 2009, she was awarded the Beth Southwell Research Award for outstanding thesis by the NSW Institute for Educational Research. Her research and publication interests are primarily in critical and cultural studies, with an emphasis on languages, literacies and identity negotiation in contexts of diversity and difference. She has recently served as Chief Investigator in the UTS/DOCs ARC study investigating early literacy in informal settings in Pacific, Indigenous and culturally and linguistically diverse communities. She has co-authored and co-edited texts entitled *One Childhood, Many Languages: Guidelines for Early Childhood Education in Australia* (1995), and *Literacies in Childhood: Changing Views, Challenging Practice* (2nd edition, 2007). She is also co-author of *Diversity and Difference in Childhood: Implications for Educators, Children and Community Services, Policy and Practice* (2nd edition, 2015 forthcoming).

Jacqueline Ullman is a Lecturer in Adolescent Development, Behaviour and Wellbeing in the School of Education and a Senior Researcher in the Centre for Educational Research at the University of Western Sydney. Her commitment to addressing inequities in the school setting began through her work as a secondary school teacher in a New York City public school. Since then, Jackie has earned degrees in sociology and education (MA), research methods (MEd) and a PhD in educational psychology, providing her the opportunity to investigate school climate, curricular and institutional marginalisation, self-concept, belonging and pedagogies of equity. She has served as a primary investigator on a number of funded research projects in these areas, with particular interest in the experiences of same-sex attracted and gender diverse young people. Jackie brings this work back to the classroom as a pre-service teacher educator, where she lectures on social justice, critical pedagogy, classroom climate and the intersection of theory and teaching practice.

Jackie is a founding member of the Australia Forum on Sexuality, Education and Health, an associate editor of the *Journal of LGBT Youth* and a regular peer reviewer for a number of journals in education. Further, she is a member of the Queer Studies and Stress and Coping special interest groups of the American Educational Research Association, where she has presented regularly. Jackie has published widely, including journal articles in *Sex Education*, *Teaching Education* and the *Journal of Youth Studies*. *Understanding Sociological Theory for Educational Practices* is Jackie's first co-edited book.

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Frontmatter
More information

About the contributors

Bruce Burnett has a background originally in primary education and is currently teaching and researching in the area of sociology of education with a particular interest in Work Integrated Learning and targeted teacher education placements in the low SES schooling sector. Bruce has co-authored three books and his significant achievements include a competitive Japanese Ministry of Education, Visiting Foreign Professorship of Education and UNESCO commissions to research and write case studies of Blended Learning in Australia. Bruce has been a Co-Lead Researcher on the Australian Council of Deans of Education/More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative research project in 2012. In addition to designing and implementing the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS) program, Bruce Burnett and Associate Professor Jo Lampert are currently Lead Researchers on a national DEEWR-funded research project targeting strategies employed by schools to address Indigenous disadvantage (Focus School Next Steps Initiative Case Studies).

Karen Dooley is an Associate Professor in the School of Curriculum at Queensland University of Technology. She teaches primary English Curriculum in the undergraduate program, second language literacy in the Masters program and supervises research students on topics related to language, literacy and diversity. In her own research, Karen is interested in literacy education in high-diversity, high-poverty contexts. Her recent studies have focused on pedagogies for digital and print literacy, within the classroom and in after-school settings, and in kindergartens and primary schools. Her previous research looked at literacy pedagogy for young people of refugee background in high schools.

Jacqueline D'warte is a Senior Lecturer in the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney. As a qualitative researcher, Jacqueline explores connections between language and learning and how these influence teacher expectations, teacher practice, and educational equity in culturally and linguistically diverse educational settings. Jacqueline's most recent research involves students in being ethnographers of their own language and literacy practices. In this research, young people explore how they use, change, invent and reinvent language and literacy practices in new and interesting ways. Jacqueline is strongly committed to supporting teachers and students in recognising and building on the rich linguistic and cultural diversity that exists in their twenty-first-century classrooms.

Kate Huppatz is a Senior Lecturer in Sociology in the School of Social Sciences and Psychology at the University of Western Sydney. Her research explores gender and social class practices, inequalities and relationships, and her recent projects have examined the relations between gender, social class, occupations and mothering. Kate's publications include the books *The Good Mother: Contemporary Motherhoods in Australia* (with Susan Goodwin, 2010) and *Gender Capital at Work: Intersections*

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Frontmatter
More information

of Femininity, Masculinity, Class and Occupation (2012). She is currently working on two more books, including an edited collection titled *Identity and Belonging* (with Mary Hawkins and Amie Matthews, 2015 forthcoming) and a sole-authored monograph titled *Gender, Work and Social Theory*. Kate is Book Review Editor for the *Journal of Sociology* and is a member of the Institute for Culture and Society and the Sexualities and Genders Research Network.

Jo Lampert is co-director of the National Exceptional Teachers for Disadvantaged Schools (NETDS) program at Queensland University of Technology. Jo has a long history of teaching, publication and research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and equity. Along with Bruce Burnett, Jo co-led the Australian Council of Deans of Education/More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative research project in 2012, and she is currently co-leading research on a national DEEWR-funded research project targeting strategies employed by schools to address Indigenous disadvantage (Focus School Next Steps Initiative Case Studies). Lampert and Burnett's co-edited book *Teacher Education for High Poverty Schools* will be published by Springer Press in 2015.

Kristie Morse graduated with a Bachelor of Education in 2013. She is now employed as a teacher in a low socio-economic status primary school in Brisbane, Australia.

Mohamed Moustakim is currently a Lecturer in Education at the University of Western Sydney. His career in education began as a teacher in North Africa in the early 1980s and he was subsequently a youth worker in London for several years. Prior to joining the University of Western Sydney, Mohamed taught in Youth and Community and Education Studies programs at a number of universities in the United Kingdom. Equity and diversity issues in education, alongside designations of 'at-risk' youth and alternative forms of schooling, have been central to his teaching and his research interests, which are focused around identifying the barriers that prevent young people from marginalised groups from making successful transitions in education.

Marnee Shay is a descendant from Wagiman country, Northern Territory (maternal), and White Australian lineage with strong Scottish ancestry (paternal). Marnee has lived and worked around south-east Queensland most of her life and is strongly connected to community on Kabi Kabi country (Sunshine Coast), where she has lived on and off for the past 20 years. Marnee has a diverse professional background as a youth worker and teacher and is an experienced educator in multiple 'flexi school' settings. Marnee is currently an Associate Lecturer and PhD candidate at Queensland University of Technology. Her research interests centre on challenging dominant discourses that surround Indigenous education policy and practices and 'flexi schooling' contexts.

Son Truong is a Lecturer in Health and Physical Education (HPE) in the School of Education, and a member of the Sustainability Research Team in the Centre

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Frontmatter
More information

for Educational Research, at the University of Western Sydney. He has extensive experience working with young people in diverse educational settings in majority and minority world contexts. He has managed and provided curriculum consultation on projects focusing on child health and wellbeing, as well as community and international service-learning. In particular, over the past 10 years Son has led tertiary student service-learning and cross-cultural pre-service teacher placements in Asia. His research interests converge around issues of children's wellbeing, play, and environments, as well as participatory methodologies.

Megan Watkins is Associate Professor in the School of Education and a member of the Institute for Culture and Society at the University of Western Sydney. Her research interests lie in the cultural analysis of education and the formation of human subjectivities. In particular, her work engages with issues of pedagogy, embodiment, discipline and affect and the interrelation of these to human agency. These interests mesh with her exploration of the impact of cultural diversity on education and the ways in which different cultural practices can engender divergent habits and dispositions to learning. Her recent publications include *Discipline and Learn: Bodies, Pedagogy and Writing* (2011) and *Disposed to Learn: Schooling, Ethnicity and the Scholarly Habitus* (2013).

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Frontmatter
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