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978-0-521-36685-4 - The Rise of the Modern Educational System: Structural Change and
Social Reproduction 1870-1920

Detlef K. Muller, Fritz Ringer and Brian Simon

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The rise of the modern educational system

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DETLEF K. MÜLLER

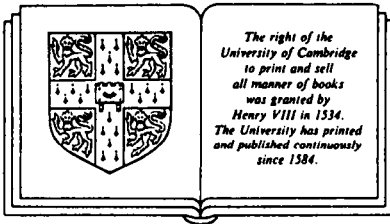
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FRITZ RINGER

University of Pittsburgh

BRIAN SIMON

University of Leicester



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Contributors

James Albisetti: Associate Professor, Honors Program and History Department, University of Kentucky. Author of *Secondary School Reform in Imperial Germany* (Princeton, 1983) and of articles on women's education in Imperial Germany.

Klaus Harney: Professor of Education, J. W. Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt. Author of *Die preussische Fortbildungsschule* (Weinheim, 1980) and of articles on adult and vocational education.

John Honey: Until 1985 Professor and Dean of the Faculty of Education, Leicester Polytechnic. Author of *Tom Brown's Universe: The Development of the Victorian Public School* (London, 1977) and of articles on the 'public' schools in England.

Roy Lowe: Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Education, University of Birmingham. Co-author of *The English School: Its Architecture and Organisation* (London, 1977) and author of articles on aspects of English education during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Detlef K. Müller: Professor of the Social History of Education at the Institut für Pädagogik, Ruhr-Universität Bochum. Director of the research project on 'Knowledge and Society in the Nineteenth Century'. Author of *Sozialstruktur und Schulsystem: Aspekte zum Strukturwandel des Schulwesens im 19. Jahrhundert* (Göttingen, 1977) and of articles on the social history of German secondary education.

David Reeder: Senior Lecturer in Education and Urban Studies, University of Leicester. Editor of *Urban Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London, 1977) and of *Educating our Masters* (Leicester, 1980). Author of

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articles on the history of education and, as an urban historian, on aspects of urban development in England in the nineteenth century.

Fritz Ringer: Mellon Professor of History at the University of Pittsburgh. Author of *The Decline of the German Mandarins: The German Academic Community, 1890–1933* (Cambridge, Mass., 1969), of *Education and Society in Modern Europe* (Bloomington and London, 1979) and of articles on French and German social and intellectual history.

Jürgen Schriever: Professor of Comparative Education, J. W. Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt. Author of *Die französischen Universitäten, 1945–1968* (Bad Heilbrunn, 1972) and of *Schulreform und Bildungspolitik in Frankreich* (Bad Heilbrunn, 1974). Co-editor of *Geschichte der Pädagogik und systematische Erziehungswissenschaft* (Stuttgart, 1975). Author of articles on theories and methods in comparative education, on the French educational system and on the history of educational thought.

Brian Simon: Emeritus Professor of Education, University of Leicester. Author of *The Two Nations and the Educational Structure, 1780–1870* (London, 1960), of *Education and the Labour Movement; 1870–1920* (London, 1965), of *The Politics of Educational Reform, 1920–1940* (London, 1974) and of other works on contemporary educational issues and psychology.

Hilary Steedman: Research Officer, National Institute of Economic and Social Research, London. Author of articles in *Comparative Education*, *Compare* and *European Journal of Education*.

Heinz-Elmar Tenorth: Professor of History and Philosophy of Education, J. W. Goethe-Universität, Frankfurt. Author of *Zur deutschen Bildungsgeschichte 1918 bis 1945* (Cologne and Vienna, 1985), and of articles on the history of teachers in Prussia and on the philosophy of education.

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Preface

The original discussion which finally led to the publication of this volume took place at an international seminar held in 1979 at the Ruhr-University Bochum. This was organised by Detlef Müller under the auspices of a wider Research Project on Knowledge and Society in the Nineteenth Century (Sonderforschungsbereich Wissen und Gesellschaft im 19. Jahrhundert), which was financed by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) of the Federal Republic of Germany. After papers were exchanged and fully discussed, two additional conferences were held at Leicester and at Bochum to complete plans for the present volume and to discuss further the major concepts and hypotheses.*

From the beginning we directed our attention to underlying similarities or patterns that could be detected amid the welter of specific national differences in the development of English, French and German secondary and higher education. In place of *ad hoc* descriptions of particular institutions, and of strictly national narratives, we favoured socio-historical and comparative approaches to educational *systems*. Indeed, we aimed at a systematic interpretation of structural change during what we came to regard as a decisive period in the history of European secondary and higher education. We agreed that this formative period extended from about 1870 to the First World War or shortly thereafter, although certain key processes in England in fact originated as early as the 1850s.

We also agreed that the structural changes that took place in education

* The editors wish to express their gratitude to the DFG, to the University of Bochum, to the Sonderforschungsbereich and to the Social Science Research Council in England for support under the SSRC-DFG exchange scheme, which assisted in the planning of the international seminar. Thanks are due also to Ingrid Bickmann and Gisa Schaefer for the typing of the manuscript, and to Helma Aschenbach and Roy Lowe for help with proofreading.

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during this period were not shaped by anything like the objective 'needs' of industrial-technical economies. Instead, the three national systems of education that emerged resembled each other primarily *in their social effects*, and this despite apparent dissimilarities in specific institutional forms. Thus the role played by the state and by centralised public administration differed markedly in English, French and German education, and yet the institutional patterns that emerged were not nearly as dissimilar as has sometimes been thought. In all three nations the processes we studied resulted in hierarchical systems of education that tended to reproduce and to fortify the class and status structures of society.

How this end result came about is not easy to say in a few words. There were important *interactions* between the educational system and the occupational system, and between established educational traditions and institutions on the one hand, and new social pressures on the other. But far from being mere effects of altered conditions outside the educational system, the dynamics of change within that system had a logic and force of their own. In this sense the structural transformation of secondary education during this period was a relatively autonomous, and indeed partly causal, element within the larger process of social change. As in that larger process, moreover, outcomes in education were often partly or wholly inconsistent with the intentions of at least some of the agents who helped to bring them about, and this increased our dissatisfaction with purely intentional accounts of educational change.

On the other hand, we were also agreed on the need for detailed empirical and *historical* work. We therefore continually checked and rechecked our interpretive concepts and hypotheses against our own historical knowledge and against that of expert colleagues who participated fruitfully in our discussions, though not all of them ultimately became contributors to this volume. Among the concepts and hypotheses we discussed, the model of 'systematisation' was initially proposed by Detlef Müller. The notion of 'segmentation' was introduced by Fritz Ringer, while Hilary Steedman offered the concept of 'defining institutions'. Brian Simon sought, within a Marxist framework of analysis, to develop a coherent alternative to the sort of simplification that would make the educational system a mere adjunct of the economy.

The Introduction that follows is intended to present an initial survey of the main analytical issues to be addressed and debated. Then, in Part I of the book, each of the three editors presents his own preferred analytical scheme. In Chapter 1 Detlef Müller describes the process of systematisation and illustrates it with a summary account of structural change in German secondary education between 1870 and 1920. In Chapter 2 Fritz Ringer writes about the concept of segmentation and applies it primarily to the history of French secondary education from the 1860s to the end of the First

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World War. In Chapter 3 Brian Simon focuses on England, especially secondary education after 1850, and considers the analytical relevance of 'systematisation', of 'segmentation', and of other promising approaches to the social history of English education. He also thereby introduces Part II of the book, which is entirely devoted to the English system, again with a predominant emphasis on secondary education.

The decision to devote the central Part II of the volume to England owed something to the strength of the 'English delegation' at our conferences, as well as to related practical issues. But we also came to the conclusion that it was wise to concentrate our efforts on a single national case, in particular its secondary school system, for this has been particularly important in its impact on twentieth-century social structures. It seemed to us particularly interesting and suggestive, moreover, that analytical models derived from the study of Continental systems proved largely applicable to the English experience.

Part II appropriately begins with Hilary Steedman's account of systematisation in the history of the endowed grammar schools (Chapter 4). David Reeder then discusses the reconstruction of secondary education in England from 1869 to 1920 (Chapter 5), and John Honey analyses the culture of the English 'public' schools in 'The Sinews of Society' (Chapter 6). Finally, Roy Lowe offers an account of structural change in English higher education (Chapter 7), which was of course closely related to parallel processes at the secondary level. The fact that secondary education for women is not included in Part II reflects our sense that the codification of systematic structures in this field did not take place until after the systematisation of boys' secondary education.

The concluding Part III of the book is intended to preserve and convey key portions of the very lively debates that took place at our conferences. Thus James Albisetti defends the view that the stated intentions and proposals of major participants in the education debates of the late nineteenth century should be taken seriously, while also highlighting a series of remarkable parallels between the French and German versions of these debates (Chapter 8). Klaus Harney and Jürgen Schriewer then undertake an even broader critique of the main comparative and analytical approaches presented in this volume (Chapter 9). James Albisetti and Elmar Tenorth more specifically assess the concepts of systematisation and of segmentation, respectively (Chapters 10 and 11), and Detlef Müller and Fritz Ringer then offer separate rejoinders and concluding comments.

It is worth noting in this connection that our conferences and the work on this volume gradually brought its editors, as well as some of its other contributors, closer together in their views than they had been at the outset. Nevertheless, important differences in approach and interpretation certainly remain. This book is therefore offered not as a single, co-ordinated

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and completed theory of change in education during our period, but as an attempt to stimulate scholarly discussion and perhaps to raise somewhat the level of debate in the field.

January 1986

**Detlef K. Müller
Fritz Ringer
Brian Simon**