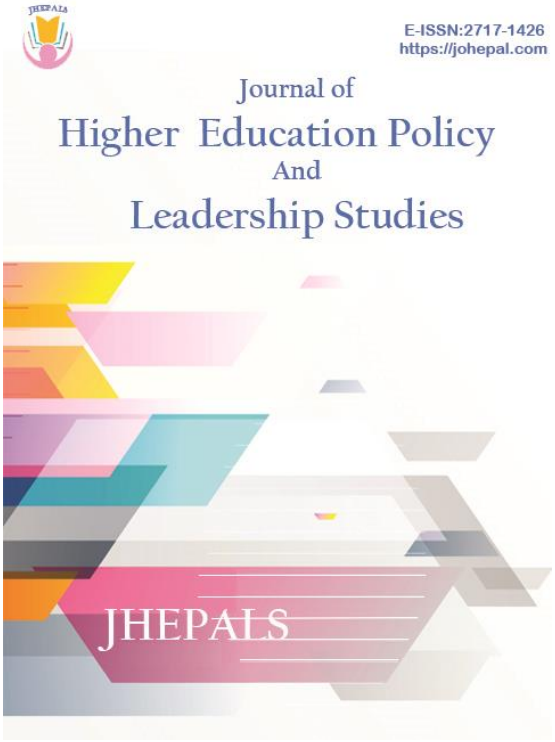
Journal of
Higher Education Policy
And
Leadership Studies

JHEPALS (E-ISSN: 2717-1426)

https://johepal.com



Book Review: **The Working Class: Poverty, Education and Alternative Voices**

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Book Review Received **2021/04/21**

Book Review Accepted **2021/06/25**

Published Online **2021/07/04**

Cite book review as:

Challen, C. (2021). [Review of the book *The Working class: Poverty, education and alternative voices*, by I. Gilbert]. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Leadership Studies*, *2*(2), 104-107. DOI: https://dx.doi.org/10.52547/johepal.2.2.104

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[DOI: 10.52547/johepal.2.2.104]

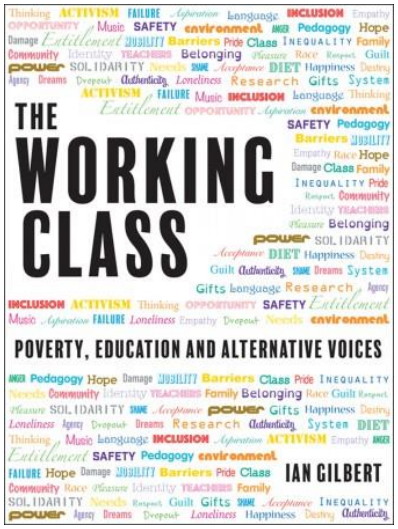
Book Review

The Working Class: Poverty, Education and Alternative Voices

Journal of Higher Education Policy And Leadership Studies (JHEPALS)

E-ISSN: 2717-1426
Volume: 2 Issue: 2
pp. 104-107
DOI:
10.52547/johepal.2.2.104

Author: Ian Gilbert
Publisher: Independent Thinking Press
Country of Publication: UK
Year of Publication: 2018
ISBN: 978-178135278-6
Pages: X-544



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Keywords: Class; Social Mobility; Cultural; Innovative; Global; Curriculum

Confronting and closing the gap of social/class division is one of the greatest challenges that we face as a society today. The need to remove barriers and systemic inequalities in education by providing a fair and innovative curriculum for all, is essential and key to closing this gap as well as truly resulting in social mobility. More importantly a creative approach needs to be utilised such that it enhances not just subject but subjective holistic development to enable all to have a voice and further enhance individual talents of lower socio-economic classes. In particular allowing students from different socio-economic backgrounds and cultures to have a safe conducive space to express their own opinions allows them to develop deep critical thinking skills. This can be good preparation to ensure

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the "disadvantaged" can have the opportunity not only to make successful applications but thrive at HE respecting and valuing other cultures and backgrounds.

More importantly this review is timely as post-Covid the number of University admissions are decreasing resulting in greater competition for places which will indirectly affect those from lower socio-economic backgrounds. If more was done by Government to support schools financially to try and ensure all children were exposed to the arts theatre, drama music books poetry and other cultural/metropolitan activities then the gap between social divides would gradually reduce. This in turn would then support greater and more effective social mobility.

So, how can we develop an educational structure and curriculum foundation from nursery, primary and secondary that will support the idea that education should *"impact in social justice and empowering communities, families and generations of children towards building a better and fairer world for all to thrive and succeed"*.

The publication of *"The Working Class"* in 2018 seeks to give an overview of strategies and a range of provisions from a wide range of established educators. They discuss how these can be successfully used in a clear understandable, readable and accessible way.

This is a big book with 46 chapters whose titles are single words, specifically chosen to reflect themes/feelings that relate to "working class" as well as attempting to diminish thoughts that this "status" implies failure or "stigma". Some powerful examples include; failure, inclusion, aspiration, hope, belonging, solidarity and acceptance. Each of these creates strong images and emotions that all human beings regardless of background feel, need and want. In many ways it stirs the hierarchy of needs by Maslow including feeling loved, warmth, food and financial security (McCleod, 2020). The question is how do we consistently enable this in curriculums, pedagogy and learning environments.

In fact, the underlying theme of this epic book is that "poverty is multifaceted" and engagement through Meta-cognitive awareness and growth mindset is linked to both emotional and social experiences through different *"forms of capital"*. I discuss this at length in my opinion piece Challen (2020) which in many ways relates to this book and what it wants to achieve-social justice and social mobility.

It is a book that you will want to consider deeply, reread, consistently refer to and take time to digest, process and reflect on. This is not just political, but if you are an educator who wants to make change for *"social justice"* and drive "real social mobility" it provides proven effective and innovative solutions. Most important of all they are achievable and able to be done with or without some preparation or planning.

Each of the chapters provides personal experiences that the author has used constructively in their own professional practice to ensure that "children who face additional challenges due to growing up in poverty" are able to engage and contribute positively in the long term. Further in some examples the student feedback is positive and powerful in an impactual and in some cases life-changing manner. Surely this is the sole purpose of education as a means of implementing change towards a positive, fair, inclusive and just society.

In some there are poems and rhymes which is an excellent alternative interactive and accessible way of expression through repetitive-- language. In some cultures' "rap/beat" is a norm and can be a great form of engagement where English is a second language. Karl

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Nova (2017) gives great examples in his book rhythm and poetry, showing how you can blend music and literacy while simultaneously allowing socio-cultural voice.

The first chapter aptly titled *"Failure"* is a powerful and poignant account that reflects the general feeling that both educators and young people feel about the education system. Moreover, it also strongly highlights the "real" lack of social justice opportunities for all. This is followed by chapters on a variety of themes discussing the need for conceptualisation and relevance of the curriculum. Additionally, the use of arts in the form of drama, film, dance and music are also discussed in a number of chapters all effective ways of building self-expression, confidence and social skills. The importance of the community is discussed by Will Ryan and how that resulted in a sense of belonging. This is key for effective social mobility not only for a person to personally strive but academically as well. It's not only the ability of top Universities to facilitate those from "disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds" to study there but how they proactively support these students so they have a true sense of belonging and fitting in culturally, personally financially and academically only with this in place can they strive to achieve. It is important to note that this also needs to be done with empathy equality and diversity tactics so that students from "poorer" backgrounds do not feel "bullied" or "stigmatised such that their mental health becomes a problem and this can and does directly impact on their ability to perform academically.

Further, and more relevant is how curriculum and teaching can be successfully adapted to ensure that social, cultural skills were enriched within this context. This ensured better engagement, questioning and achievement. It also developed a holistic/cultural creative and innovative background which children from lower socio-economic backgrounds can lack.

Chapter 13 entitled Anger in many ways a common theme seen in children who come from challenging families. It is so often dismissed by "time out" isolation booths but Jamie Thrasivoulou's strong, emotive and evocative poem in this chapter reminds us that "we could do well "to be with" rather than dismiss. This in itself suggests a restorative, healing and empathetic approach rather than exclusion through suspension or other such behavioural challenges.

Instead, it focuses on taking time to accept, which extends not only to listening but to knowing and building relationships with our children, to become fully aware of the sense of alienation that lack of belonging feels like. This concept is also the core of the last few chapters as well as providing a sense of *"true understanding"* through unconditional love leading to better self-regulation skills.

The Working Class at first glance might appear to be a political book but do not be fooled, rather it is an empowering and uplifting read about established and proven effective strategies that will change our education system to truly embrace inclusion and equality. Further it will create future generations of all children regardless of their socio-economic backgrounds to be globally questioning creative and innovative problem solvers that can contribute positively to society and their communities. A drive to create global citizenship for all and ensure that future generations are able to perform and contribute in an ever-changing evolving world.

If we want true social mobility this comes from within and how we individually mould each and every one of our children. It should not be founded on exclusive elite education

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for the few but an inclusive just and fair education for all that has a curriculum which questions and enables both a subject knowledge as well as a subjective holistic journey. Such will allow every pupil to embark on a journey of being, becoming and thriving i.e. *"what does it mean to be a truly conscious questioning challenging and resilient global citizen."* Surely this is what we want for our future generations and international/global society.

Finally, if we believe as Freire (2017, p. 17) states that *"education exists not in and of itself but in order that things change for the better"* then we need to rethink our education system fast and ask are how we are providing a fully inclusive creative and innovative education for all children regardless of their background to fully nurture, appreciate and contribute to society and the global world.

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Dr. Christine Challen previously taught at Newcastle University Dental School, Visiting Lecturer in Biomedical Sciences at Northumbria University and an Associate Lecturer in Health and Life Sciences at Sunderland University. Currently she is teaching Foundation degrees in Health and social care and Access to HE Education at Gateshead College, UK.

Dr. Christine Challen has over 23 years research experience in the field of cancer research. She has taught at Higher Education, Further Education and more recently as a Supply Teacher in Secondary Schools. Her areas of research interests include using case studies and the use of art, literature and film in science teaching as a means of enhancing cognitive and deep critical thinking skills. Rethinking Education and teaching through Creative curriculum as a journey for being to becoming to thriving towards global and innovative questioning citizenship. **Dr. Challen** has successfully published several blogs in Bera and Tes on different educational topics. She would like the opportunity to return to HE to pursue and develop her pedagogy interests, continue and expand her writing to include books. Additionally, to enable her to have the opportunity to build more networks that will benefit teaching and academic practice across educational settings as well as her own personal leadership.

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