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Karl Mannheim and Jean Floud: a false start for the sociology of education in Britain?

Martyn Hammersley^{1,*} 

¹ Emeritus Professor of Educational and Social Research, Faculty of Wellbeing, Education and Language Studies, The Open University, Milton Keynes, UK

* Correspondence: m.hammersley@open.ac.uk

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Abstract

Arriving in the UK after exile from Nazi Germany, Karl Mannheim taught sociology at the London School of Economics and then also at the London Institute of Education, where he was awarded a chair just a year before his untimely death in 1947. In his later writings and teaching, Mannheim argued that the sociology of education could make a crucial contribution to the new type of society he regarded as essential if the problems of liberal democracy were to be overcome, and the slide towards totalitarianism avoided. And the period immediately after his death was a key phase in the development and establishment of the sociology of education in Britain. Jean Floud, who took over teaching the subject at the Institute of Education after Mannheim's death, played a central role in this, but, while she had studied with him and served as his research assistant, she adopted a very different approach. This focused, in particular, on whether the existing structure and operation

of educational institutions restricted social mobility. As a result of this change in focus, Mannheim's work had a very marginal role in the subsequent history of British sociology of education. In this article, I compare Mannheim's and Floud's competing conceptions of the character and role of the subdiscipline, and how these fared in later developments within the field.

Keywords Karl Mannheim; Jean Floud; British sociology of education

Introduction

After his exile from Nazi Germany, Karl Mannheim came to Britain, taught at the London School of Economics (LSE), and then also part-time at the London Institute of Education from 1941. In 1946, he was appointed to a chair at the Institute but died the following year. In his writings after his exile, Mannheim placed emphasis on the role of education in addressing the problems that he saw facing Western societies. He argued that liberal democracy, with its free-market economy and parliamentary party system, was unsustainable without significant modification, and that the events he had experienced in Weimar Germany demonstrated this. While, on coming to the UK, he was reassured by the stability of its political institutions and greater political consensus, he insisted that, unless there was a move towards more governmental planning of economic and social affairs, and increased efforts to mobilise support for a democratically elected political elite, the same disaster that had happened in Germany could occur here.

Mannheim viewed sociology as playing a key role in providing an overall understanding of the state of society, its development and future prospects, and in indicating what changes were necessary to ensure social order and to preserve the institutionalisation of Western ideals such as freedom and democracy, given the structural pressures of modernisation. He saw education as one of the most important social processes that must be brought under control and rendered more effective if totalitarianism was to be avoided. At the same time, he emphasised that, for all their iniquities, communism and fascism offered important lessons about changes that were necessary in order to adapt to the conditions imposed by the character of modern, industrial, mass societies (Hammersley, 2021a).

In his teaching at the Institute, and some of his writings in the 1940s, Mannheim began to elaborate what was needed for the development of an effective education system that would play the necessary political role. While recognising the contributions of philosophy and psychology, he emphasised the importance of the sociology of education. This provided essential understanding of the wider society that the education system must serve. He saw the discipline as offering guidance both at the level of policymaking and at that of classroom practice. Equally important, he believed that a broad social understanding was an important component of what students should learn in schools.

Mannheim had considerable influence during his lifetime (Clarke, 1967), but his ideas became marginalised in the subsequent establishment of the sociology of education in Britain, from the 1950s onwards. Jean Floud, who had studied and worked with Mannheim at the LSE, and took over the teaching of sociology at the Institute after his death, played a central role in this during the 1950s. However, her conception of the sociology of education was very different from his; indeed, she specifically distanced herself from his approach. She focused, instead, on the ways in which the education system continued to reinforce the existing class structure, rather than facilitating the increased social mobility required to achieve social equity and to ensure that the emerging 'technological society' could capitalise on the pool of talent in the working class. Moreover, the future development of the subdiscipline largely followed the lines she laid down, despite some important later changes, whereas Mannheim's approach was largely forgotten.

In this article, I will examine Mannheim's conception of the sociology of education and compare it with Floud's, against the background of how the subdiscipline developed subsequently. I will conclude by briefly considering the significance of these competing conceptions for us today.

Mannheim on the sociology of education

Mannheim's interest in the sociology of education developed particularly after his arrival in Britain (Mannheim, 1943: Chapters 3, 4 and 5, 1950: Chapter 10, 1952: Chapter 6; Mannheim and Stewart, 1962; see also Mannheim, 2001; Loader and Kettler, 2002; Stewart, 1953, 1967). However, it was shaped by a view of sociology that reflected his background in German intellectual culture, and a preoccupation with the threat to the ideals of European societies posed by the rise of communism and fascism. Mannheim believed that this threat derived from an inherent weakness in liberal democracy, the model of governance that had been adopted in Weimar Germany. Mannheim argued that, with the growth of industrialism and mass democracy, this form of society allowed the development of anarchic forces which threatened to destroy it, as exemplified by the collapse of the Weimar regime in the early 1930s.

In line with an influential stream of opinion in the first half of the twentieth century, Mannheim insisted that it was necessary to exercise more governmental control over the economy, to counter both the role of business cycles in creating widespread unemployment, as exemplified by the Great Depression of the 1930s, and the inherent tendency towards oligopoly within capitalism (Hammersley, 2021b). Equally important was the threat posed by the emergence of political parties committed to fundamentally different models of governance, whether of the Left or the Right. These used the freedom allowed by liberal democracy to undermine it. Mannheim believed that what was required, above all, was a form of political education that sought to integrate conflicting ideologies, these deriving from the discrepant experiences produced by social class and generational differences, thereby capitalising on the distinctive insights they offered (see Loader and Kettler, 2002). He argued that this would provide guidance for effective governance and build the substantial degree of political consensus required to support it, rather than allowing destructive forces free rein in radicalising large sections of the population. In these terms, he saw sociology as providing 'clarification both of what education is and what it aims at being' (Mannheim and Stewart, 1962: 8).

While Mannheim recognised that there is a broad sense in which education occurs throughout society, for example in the family and through the mass media, he placed considerable emphasis on the role of educational institutions in shaping citizens: both children in schools and adults through facilities for adult education. He proposed that these institutions must provide social understanding, and thereby inculcate a necessary degree of consensus and conformity, while at the same time respecting and celebrating individuality and freedom (Mannheim and Stewart, 1962: 10). For this to be possible, educational policymakers and teachers must themselves have a clear understanding of the nature of the wider society, its needs and structural limitations. They must also recognise the role of the education system in sustaining modern society's evolution on a path that both recognises the threats to social order coming from industrial development and mass democracy and yet preserves Western ideals. He saw his own task, and that of the sociology of education, as providing this essential understanding.

Most of Mannheim's writings about education were produced in the last few years of his life, and many were not published until after his death, but his views were conveyed to contemporary audiences through his teaching, the many talks he gave around the country, and informal contacts with influential friends. Many of those friends were involved in *The Moot*, a discussion group concerned with addressing the problems of society from a Christian point of view that met between 1938 and 1947. Members of this group included the poet T.S. Eliot, with whom Mannheim had productive interchange (see Kurlberg, 2013). Characteristic of some members of this group, including Mannheim, was a concern with the cultural impact of mass democracy, as well as its potential political consequences, and a belief that it was necessary to learn not just from the threat of fascism but also from the way in which both Italian fascists and German National Socialists had set about organising society: their ability to combine control by an elite with democratic appeal to the people, however spurious this was.

Mannheim argued for a 'third way' between liberal democracy and totalitarianism, then. While he insisted on the desirability of democratisation, in the sense of opening up participation in, and selection of, governing elites to those coming from lower social classes, he also argued that this process must be controlled. He suggested that if it were allowed to occur too rapidly, there would not only be a threat to social order, since those who were previously excluded could make excessive demands, but also that what is of value in Western culture would become devalued, because the lower classes had not learned to appreciate it and because capitalism would promote whatever satisfied their desires, as exemplified by what he dubs 'the amusement industry' (Mannheim, 1950: 292). Here, Mannheim is reacting against notions of democracy or freedom as allowing people to express whatever preferences they happen to

have through markets and democratic participation. He insists that there must be evaluation of such preferences, and that a key function of education is to socialise working-class children and adults into Western cultural values that were previously the prerogative of higher social classes. Furthermore, he argues that, for this to be achieved successfully, there needs to be a restructuring not just of children's schooling, but also of youth services and adult education (Mannheim, 1950).

In summary, Mannheim placed great emphasis on the role of sociology, as supplying a broad understanding of the wider society, and of the functions of education, to decision-makers; and also conveying a clear conception of their own role to teachers. Furthermore, he regarded sociological understanding as an important part of the school curriculum, since future citizens must learn about the nature of their society and their role within it. He also stressed the need to make the education system more effective, emphasising the importance of a sound psychological understanding of the process of learning. His predominant orientation, from the beginning of his intellectual career, was to try to synthesise competing ideological and disciplinary sources of knowledge, recognising that all perspectives include both insight and blindness.

Mannheim's work on education occurred within a context in which the education of teachers, such as it was, had previously been preoccupied with the biology and psychology of learning, along with the educational ideas of past philosophers. He did not deny the relevance of any of these topics, but he believed that they must be interpreted within an understanding of contemporary society and its needs, which only sociology could supply.

Floud and the development of the sociology of education

After Mannheim's death, Jean Floud took over teaching the sociology of education at the London Institute, staying there until 1962. She played a central role in establishing the subdiscipline in Britain through her research and publications (Floud, 1956; Floud et al., 1956; Floud and Halsey, 1957, 1958; Halsey et al., 1961). However, as I noted earlier, her approach differed significantly from that of Mannheim. This probably reflected not only different background experiences and political beliefs, the latter shaped by early membership of the Communist Party, but more importantly the very different post-war situation: fascism was no longer a threat, and in the UK a Labour government was in power, engaged in the process of constructing the welfare state. Furthermore, with the 1944 Education Act, a start had been made in opening up academic secondary education to all sections of the population. Looking back, Floud (1978: 8, 9) commented that 'not moral disarray so much as inequality posed the critical problem in the post-war years', and 'we saw ourselves as, first and foremost, students of social structure, not as advocates of social aims in education'. The break with Mannheim is highlighted here. (It is important to note, though, that there was some continuity as well. The Fabianism which underpinned Floud's conception of the sociology of education shared with Mannheim a commitment to the importance of planning, and an opposition to the neoclassical economics represented at the LSE by Hayek and Robbins. A closely related shared assumption was that sociology should play a key, and positive, role in relation to government policymaking.)

Floud's conception of the character and role of the subdiscipline was outlined in an early article on 'Sociology and education' (Floud, 1956), and elaborated in a review of the field produced with A.H. Halsey (Floud and Halsey, 1958), carried out for the International Sociological Association. While both these publications mentioned Mannheim's work, they distanced the new approach from his, even while acknowledging its value. In effect, his approach to the sociology of education became sidelined. There were several aspects to this change in orientation.

First, the problem focus and methodological orientation shifted. Floud and Halsey drew primarily on the 'political arithmetic' tradition, especially as represented by Lindsay's (1926) *Social Progress and Educational Waste*, Hogben's (1938) edited collection *Political Arithmetic*, and Glass's (1954) *Social Mobility in Britain*, to which Floud contributed a chapter. (It seems likely that a memorandum at the LSE by T.H. Marshall, calling for a long-term programme of research into social selection and differentiation in Britain [see Glass, 1954: v], provided the stimulus for Floud's work in the sociology of education, as it did for the research on social mobility that is reported in the volume edited by Glass. In an influential lecture in 1946 Marshall outlined the 'crossroads' faced by sociology at the time, not least as a result of the growing popularity of the subject [see Marshall, 1963: 3–5]. The role of Glass himself in shaping

sociology at the LSE during this period should also not be underestimated – see Glass, 1950, and, for useful background, Wise, 1983: especially 212–4 and Halsey, 1994). Floud (1956: 60) wrote that:

A desire for equality and justice and for economic efficiency, characteristically Fabian in its origins, has sustained a tradition of social investigation, which still flourishes, into the distribution of educational opportunity in relation to that of ability, its bearing on social mobility, or interchange between the classes, and its demographic and economic consequences.

What was central to this conception of the sociology of education was a view of the development of industrial societies as characterised both by economic growth, fuelled by science and technology, and by a drive towards equity, in the sense of overcoming social class divisions through an increase in social mobility. These two features were viewed as intimately related: economic growth required maximising use of the pool of unused talent that was present within the working class. Floud (1956: 59) comments that ‘economic growth and development come to depend increasingly upon the scale and efficiency of the education system’, and she argued that the creation of a new middle class of white-collar workers had ‘turned the education system into one of the main avenues of social mobility’:

Sociologists, already committed to the study of our outmoded but by no means moribund class structure, have been fascinated by the spectacle of educational institutions struggling to respond to the new purposes of an advanced industrial economy – an economy which, paradoxically, undermines as it develops the very structure of class and status in which our educational system is rooted and in terms of which it continues so largely to function. (Floud, 1956: 60)

As Floud indicated, this reflected the broadly Fabian (or ethical socialist; see Dennis and Halsey, 1988) political viewpoint that had long been influential in some quarters at the LSE. By contrast, while Mannheim touched on the issue of equality of opportunity (see Mannheim, 1950: Chapter 10), as we have seen, it was not his main concern, and he expressed fears about the dangers of moving too quickly towards such equality, as part of the process of democratisation, since it could lead to social disorder of a kind that might open the door to fascism.

In developing their conception of the sociology of education, Floud and Halsey drew on the work of Durkheim and on current developments in US sociology, although by no means uncritically. Of particular significance here were ideas about the development of industrial society that were influential in the 1950s and early 1960s. Aron (1961: 4) outlines the characteristics ascribed to this type of society at the time: ‘a predominant concern with production and productivity, a desire for growth, a changed distribution of labour, increasingly systematic application of science to technology and of technology in production, etc.’. By contrast with Mannheim, here the primary focus is on the relationship between the education system and the economy, not the polity. In their introduction to a collection of articles which more or less defined the field at the time, entitled *Education, Economy, and Society*, Halsey et al. (1961: 1) write that ‘education is a crucial type of investment for the exploitation of modern technology’.

The central concern of British sociology of education, as it came to be established in the 1950s, then, was the extent to which the education system, particularly as it existed in Britain, could provide increased equality of opportunity, and thereby serve the goal of economic growth. One area of debate focused on the size of the ‘pool of talent’ and the extent to which this was fixed by genetic inheritance, or open to expansion through education. There was a significant conflict in views between, on the one hand, many psychologists, exemplified by Cyril Burt, who argued that intelligence, and therefore academic ability, was largely determined genetically, with these differences partially reflected in the social class structure, and, on the other, sociologists and others who argued for the importance of environmental factors (Halsey, 1958, 1977). A focal point for this conflict was the 1944 Education Act, which relied on the psychological assumption that there are different types of child with different degrees of intelligence, and therefore different capacities to benefit from an academic secondary education. From the sociological point of view presented by Floud and Halsey, economic growth and increased equality of opportunity were in danger of being blocked both by barriers within the education system and by the material and cultural effects of poverty in homes and local communities. For this reason, the 1944 Act came to be regarded as, at best, only a first step towards achieving equality of opportunity, and perhaps even as a barrier, given that, in effect, it institutionalised a different form of education for

each social class (see Banks, 1955). By contrast, Mannheim seems to have largely accepted the need for different forms of education for those coming from different backgrounds (see Mannheim and Stewart, 1962: 25–6).

Competing conceptions of the sociology of education

Whereas Mannheim's focus was on the content and nature of learning, with a view to how the skills and attitudes necessary for the new political and social order could be developed, Floud and Halsey were primarily concerned with the structural organisation of the education system and its role in relation to the economy. In particular, they focused on processes of selection, which led to differential educational outcomes and occupational destinations, and on how these reflected entrenched social class divisions. While they were also interested in 'the social determinants of educability' – in other words, how differences in children's home and community backgrounds impacted on their educational achievement – Floud (1956: 64) insisted that 'home and school, in interaction, determine educability' and that 'the school has been neglected'. She elaborates on this as follows: 'Little has been done to explore with any thoroughness or in any detail the explicit and implicit demands of life in school to which we find pupils responding selectively in terms of their differing social experience outside its walls' (Floud, 1956: 64). Floud and Halsey (1958: 168) comment that, while Mannheim was aware of these issues, he chose to 'concentrate on a modern treatment of the traditional problem of the individual socialisation in the interests of social integration and cohesion'. Here, in terms used at the time, they are contrasting a sociology focusing on conflict and change with one that is preoccupied with the requirements of social order. (For background information about sociology at the LSE at the time, see Dahrendorf, 1995: 376–80).

A second major difference between Mannheim's approach and that of Floud and Halsey, beyond the shift in problem focus, is signalled by the distinction they draw between 'educational sociology' and 'the sociology of education'. They trace the history of the former, as a discipline concerned with how to improve pedagogy in the service of human betterment, back to Lester Ward in the United States during the last couple of decades of the nineteenth century, and they place Mannheim's work in this tradition. For example, Floud (1959: 62) suggested that Mannheim should have restricted himself to 'understanding' and 'diagnosing', rather than also attempting 'to plan and legislate'. And she reports that he 'made his impact as an enthusiastic teacher of sociology upon intending teachers' (Floud, 1956: 58). By contrast, she treated the sociology of education as a branch of the parent discipline, one that is concerned with understanding how educational structures and processes relate to the development of modern societies. Where Mannheim had emphasised the urgent need for governmental intervention in order to guide societal development down one path rather than another, Floud and Halsey focus on what they take to be a single modern developmental path and the ways in which existing educational institutions can obstruct movement along it.

A third distinctive feature of Floud and Halsey's approach is that they view the sociology of education as a specialised field of *empirical* investigation, whereas Mannheim made little distinction between the discipline and subdiscipline, and treated it as a *synthetic* enterprise integrating the findings of other disciplines, and serving more or less the same function as a social philosophy. Floud and Halsey's (1958: 170) aim was 'to treat the educational systems of developed societies as social institutions, asking the same questions about them, in principle, as one asks about other social institutions and seeking the answers, in the main, with the aid of similar methods'. In this spirit, they outline a large field of empirical investigation, distinguishing between the macro level of the relationship between educational institutions and the wider society, the social functioning of particular types of educational institution, and the micro level of social relations in the classroom, viewing these against the background of informal educational processes going on in the surrounding society.

In short, whereas Mannheim's work was explicitly normative and synthetic, concerned with how both children and adults could be prepared for participation in democratic society so as to avoid the descent into totalitarianism, for Floud and Halsey the sociology of education had a much more specific analytic focus – identifying barriers to the achievement of equality of opportunity – and its method was empirical investigation.

Later developments in the sociology of education

A major shift occurred within British sociology of education at the end of the 1960s and in the early 1970s, which is often referred to as 'the new sociology of education'. Sometimes, application of this term has been restricted to the work of scholars at the Institute of Education (see Young, 1971; Gorbett, 1972), but around this time there were a wider range of new developments in the field of educational studies, these reacting against the dominant forms of work that had come to prevail in the 1950s and 1960s, including that of Floud and Halsey (see Atkinson et al., 1988). One aspect of this was that attention shifted away from the issue of selection and equality of opportunity to a focus on the curriculum and what children learned in school – with the education system frequently viewed as imposing a dominant culture on those who already had a culture of their own, and/or suppressing their freedom to learn for themselves. There are some similarities here with Mannheim's earlier preoccupation with the socialisation effects of schooling. Furthermore, the new sociologists also directly addressed teachers, as he had done. But there was a sharp difference in ideological tenor: he shared with conservative social thought, for instance that of Eliot, a concern with the role of education in bringing about the social integration that adaptation to developments in industrial societies required. By contrast, much of the new sociology of education was shaped by libertarian and Marxist ideas (Foster et al., 1996: 24–5). It is not a surprise, therefore, that there was no revival of interest in Mannheim's writings about education at this time (Stewart, 1967: 35). Another significant change, by comparison with the work of Floud, was a shift in emphasis from quantitative towards qualitative methods.

A bridging role between the old and the new sociology of education was played by Basil Bernstein, who was appointed in 1977 as the first occupant of a chair established in honour of Karl Mannheim at the Institute of Education. Bernstein's research had begun very much within the sort of framework laid down by Floud and Halsey: he was concerned with the role of differences in language use between social classes, and how these could result in educational and social inequalities (Lawton, 1968). However, he also came to develop a sophisticated theory about variations in the structural organisation of knowledge within education systems, as regards both relations among subjects in the curriculum and the boundary between school knowledge and the informal kinds of knowledge available in homes and communities (Atkinson, 1985). This theory was strongly influenced by the work of Durkheim and by the structuralist mode of analysis developed by the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966). While Bernstein's work shared a focus on the curriculum, and on classroom relations, it was at odds with much of the rest of the new sociology of education, for which the early writings of Marx and those of phenomenologists, as well as New Left politics, were more important influences. But, like the new sociologists, Bernstein made very little reference to Mannheim, and his later work was quite different in character from that of Floud and Halsey. (An interesting exception to the trend I have outlined here was the work of Tapper and Salter, 1978, which adopted a distinctive perspective but shared some of the concerns of both Mannheim and Floud. There was also a large body of work concerned with understanding the perspectives of teachers and students, and patterns of classroom interaction, for which see Hammersley and Woods, 1984, and Hargreaves and Woods, 1984).

In the 1980s, and subsequently, much sociology of education reverted to a primary concern with equality of opportunity, but with this now extended to other social divisions than social class, especially gender and ethnicity/race, but also sexual orientation and disability (see Hammersley, 2022). The emphasis on qualitative methods continued, and in some respects was reinforced by the influence of the various strands of French philosophical thought often gathered under the heading of 'postmodernism' (Hammersley, 1996). Nevertheless, Halsey and others continued to carry out research on social class inequalities, along the lines originally laid down by Floud, most significantly a major study of the role of education in social mobility (Halsey et al., 1980), as part of the Oxford Mobility Study (Goldthorpe, 1980). Furthermore, Halsey edited two collections of papers in the field (Karabel and Halsey, 1977; Halsey et al., 1997) that sought to re-centre it – theoretically, methodologically and politically – more in line with the conception outlined in Floud and Halsey's (1957) pathbreaking initial review, while incorporating some of the newer work (see also Halsey, 1994; Lauder et al., 2004). Another major focus of inquiry from the 1980s onwards concerned the effects of major UK government educational reforms taking place at this time. One of these reforms involved a reorientation of teacher education away from the disciplines and back towards practical instruction, plus a concern with teacher effectiveness. This had a significant impact on the fortunes of the sociology of education as a component of teacher education, not least on the number of sociologists working in the field.

While there continued to be little reference to Mannheim's work in this later period, it was discussed in three articles by Geoff Whitty, the second occupant of the Mannheim chair (Whitty, 1997a, 2001, 2012). One of these was the published version of a Karl Mannheim Memorial Lecture given at the Institute of Education (see also Whitty, 1997b). Whitty insisted that 'some parts of the legacy of Karl Mannheim are well worth holding onto' (Whitty, 1997a: 149), but he suggested that 'his work was also firmly set in the redemptive project of the Enlightenment, albeit in the light of a recognition that it was in danger of all going horribly wrong' (p. 152). Furthermore, Whitty indicates his own significantly different political orientation by suggesting that it is necessary to employ 'more radical conceptions of democracy' (Whitty, 1997a: 159), and that 'the sort of overcentralized planning favoured by Mannheim' must be avoided (Whitty, 2001: 218).

The distance between the value orientation of Mannheim and the commitments of most subsequent sociologists of education is even more clearly evident in the work of the third holder of the Mannheim chair, Stephen Ball. Where, as we saw, Mannheim had been concerned with how education needed to be reformed in order to bring about social integration in a time of rapid change, in his later work Ball advocated 'semiotic guerrilla warfare' in order 'to sap power' (Ball, 1995: 268, 267). (By contrast, his PhD research, reported in *Beachside Comprehensive* [Ball, 1981], had been largely within the framework laid down by Floud, building on the work of Hargreaves, 1967, and Lacey, 1970). While there is a parallel with Mannheim, in that there is a focus on 'the role of education as a set of technologies of discipline and regulation' (Ball, 2020: 871), and on the role of experts (including sociologists), the attitude adopted towards these is quite different: Ball advocates refusal and opposition. He does not mention Mannheim, but he dismisses Floud and Halsey's approach as 'set within the grooves of an unproblematic progressive, utopian modernism' (Ball, 1995: 257). And it is striking that, where Mannheim had emphasised the need to increase the effectiveness of schooling in order to produce an informed and properly motivated citizenry, Ball criticises school effectiveness research for the way in which it constructs and reinforces authority structures, and for displacing attribution of the causes of educational and social inequalities away from wider social structures on to schools. Indeed, in a more recent article, he declares himself to be 'against schooling' (Ball and Collet-Sabé, 2021), in the name of equity and freedom. (There is an interesting contrast here between Ball's orientation in the field of education and the 'pragmatic reformism' [Striphas, 2017] of Bennett, 1998, who also relies on Foucault and is concerned with policy, but in the context of cultural studies.)

By contrast with this, while Mannheim assumed that the process of modernisation demands greater equality, he also believed that this ideal had to be interpreted in ways that were compatible with the structural requirements of modern society, and that this demanded recognition of the essential role played by cultural and political elites. Furthermore, he was committed to other ideals as well, both to social order and to a conception of the good life as requiring the restraint of desires, and enjoyment of what would today be referred to as 'high culture'. In this respect, his attitudes were similar to those of Adorno, with whom he had had rather an antagonistic relationship when they were both working at the University of Frankfurt, and also to those of Eliot, with whom he was on good terms in *The Moot* (see Mullins and Jacobs, 2006). So, Mannheim does not treat equity, freedom and democracy as the sole values relevant to education, and he believed that realisation of those values had to be moderated in order to satisfy others. For example, as we have seen, he insisted that too rapid a move towards equality of opportunity could destabilise the elites that necessarily play a key role in British society, and that in modern societies democracy could never take a form in which all citizens played an equal role in decision making. Like Floud, despite other differences, Mannheim also insisted that the education system must play a key role in the process of modernisation. So, there have not just been changes within the sociology of education in views about the nature of contemporary society (which is, of course, itself very different today in many respects), but also a fundamental shift in the political commitments motivating and framing inquiry.

Conclusions

In this article, I began by examining Karl Mannheim's conception of the character and role of the sociology of education, and then explored the subsequent development of the subdiscipline in Britain. Even though Jean Floud, one of the central figures in its early development, had known and worked with

Mannheim, the form it came to take, pioneered by her, was significantly different from his approach; indeed, she specifically distanced herself from his work in defining the scope of the field.

There were several important differences between these two conceptions of the nature and role of the sociology of education. First, Floud, and her close associate Halsey, rejected Mannheim's conception of sociology as a *synthetic* discipline, designed to integrate knowledge from diverse disciplines, and from conflicting ideological sources, into a comprehensive normative understanding of the present state of society, its future development and the forms of education this demands. Instead, they saw its task as to carry out empirical research into specific topics, albeit ones of central importance for educational policy and practice. Second, they shifted the problem focus of the subdiscipline away from Mannheim's preoccupation with the role of education in forming personalities so as to meet the demands of industrialisation and mass democratic politics. Instead, their focus was prompted by concern about whether the education system in the UK was able to exploit the pool of talent available within the working class, this being necessary to facilitate economic growth and to increase social mobility – two goals they regarded as intimately related. Where Mannheim's concern had been with the relationship between education and the polity, they focused on its role in relation to the economy. They emphasised the distinctiveness and relative autonomy of educational institutions, and in particular the extent to which these could reinforce barriers to the development of 'technological society', specifically those arising from social class divisions. Thus, their primary interest was in selection processes within the education system. Finally, Floud and Halsey set about locating the subdiscipline as a branch of sociology, rather than as a source of normative educational theory designed to play a direct role in the training of teachers or in shaping the school curriculum, which is how it had been envisaged by Mannheim.

As a result, Mannheim's writings about the sociology of education became marginalised after his death, and this remained the case in the subsequent history of British sociology of education – despite a chair being named after him at the Institute of Education. One of its incumbents, Geoff Whitty, did explore the relevance of Mannheim's work sympathetically, although he also distanced himself from some of its central features. His successor in the chair, Stephen Ball, adopted a conception of the sociology of education that was even further away from that of Mannheim, in both theoretical and political terms, and that was also highly critical of the work of Floud and Halsey (for his assessment of the history of British sociology of education, see Ball, 2008). And in this he is representative of many sociologists of education in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Several issues arise from the history recounted here. The question of whether the sociology of education should have a synthetic orientation or be a specialised research discipline seems to have been largely resolved in favour of the second option, though its relationship to policymaking and practice remains a key topic. In the 1970s, a useful model was put forward according to which educational practice should be guided by a body of practical theory that emerged out of it, but which at the same time drew on the full range of disciplines that could provide relevant knowledge (see Hirst, 1983). From this point of view, the sociology of education would serve as just one contributory source in making judgements about policy or practice – an important, but not all-important, one. While this solution to the problem seems to have fallen from favour, there is still much to be said for it – although its feasibility in the present political climate is uncertain, to say the least.

Another relevant issue arises from the contrast between Mannheim's explicitly normative orientation and Floud and Halsey's more restricted focus on producing value-relevant facts. In recent decades, while often retaining a concern with empirical investigation, many sociologists have moved back to a normative stance, albeit often one that is 'critical' in character, by contrast with Mannheim's and Floud's vision of the sociology of education as providing positive recommendations for policy and practice. One question that arises here is how the value-priorities adopted are to be justified, against the background of fundamental value conflict within the wider society, along with the discrediting of the meta-narratives of progress – whether Mannheimian, Marxist, Fabian or liberal – that have framed the sociology of education at various times. This is a question that has not been addressed effectively (Foster et al., 1996; but see Gewirtz and Cribb, 2006; Hammersley, 2008, 2017). In the spirit of Mannheim, we might also ask whether a radically critical evaluative stance is politically desirable. However, as Halsey (1994) points out, positive engagement depends on governmental regimes being able and willing to use sociological evidence; he bemoans the rupture in this relationship that took place in the 1980s – one which has only been partially repaired subsequently, at most. In addition, Mannheim's work usefully indicates that there are other values that could legitimately provide the framework for inquiries in the sociology of education

besides a concern with equity, important though that is. As Ball and Collet-Sabé (2021) suggest, British sociology of education has become largely focused on quite a narrow range of issues.

In short, while the developments described in this article belong to the relatively distant past, there are unresolved problems inherited from that time which still need attention. And we must learn from the past if we are to make any headway in dealing with them.

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