

Stephen Kemmis and Christine Edwards-Groves.

Understanding education: History, politics and practice.

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Springer texts in education series aim to provide researchers and scholars with professional and comprehensive pedagogical materials – on educational research, and for the scholarship of education. Accordingly, the fourteenth title of this series '*understanding education: History, politics and practice*' aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the different assets and various perspectives of education; it reviews the history of education, the dual purpose of education, and the position of the educational practice, the book also discusses the political aspects of education; outlines the theory of education; and concludes some certain challenges to be an educator as well. The book comprises four chapters; Chapter I establishes a framework for understanding education and its dual purpose; Chapter II shows the relation between theory and practice, and the history of schooling and practice; Chapter III addresses the politics of education and sets out for the grounded theory of understanding education, and eventually Chapter IV concludes a theory of education and addresses the theory of practice.

In this book, Kemmis and Edwards-Groves follow a distinctive format for the book's pages, that the margins highlight the main ideas and key element arguments, while the footnotes establish an argument on some particular issues. For instance, at the beginning of the first chapter the authors outline the double purposes of education (pp. 2-6); in the meantime, they discuss in the footnotes the history of these social and individual purposes. Additionally, the authors distinguish between *teachers* and *educators*, whereas teachers teach knowledge, skills, and values; educators go far beyond these tasks; they not only teach their students but also are always solicitous about

the future of their students, and therefore give attention to a wider range of – critical, technical and practical senses. Furthermore, they contribute to the history of the future, through their pivotal role in transforming students’ personalities.

The first chapter provides insights into studying education. It sheds light on Aristotle’s theory of education, his philosophy emphasized that education brings *eudaimonia* -happiness in ancient Greek- to individuals; *eudaimon*, the person who has achieved happiness, finds the real happiness in morals; it is therefore if those people democratically admit their laws and regulation, and abide by *moral virtues*, they will not only live a good life; but also they will act like a democrat in a democracy (pp. 11-14). However, Kemmis and Edwards-Groves argue that “the good life of each person cannot be conceived or enacted without of some notion of the good for humankind” (p. 14); likewise, Aristotle’s theory is made explicit in today’s education. As well as, Kemmis and Edwards-Groves distinguish ‘education’ from ‘schooling’, ‘training’, and ‘socialization’ (pp. 23-24).

In the second chapter, the authors discuss the schooling and the anti-schooling, as well as the position of *practice*; furthermore, they review the historical basis of schooling through Greek *skholē*, and the continuous development of the institutional theme of schools, until the notions which have led to the emergence of classrooms by David Hamilton (pp. 54-57). The authors also focus on the history of the university, and its development during the mediaeval ages, associating it with the Christian cathedral or monastic schools. As long as the historical journey waves different ages and diverse landmarks, as well as reviewing and highlighting the views of varied philosophers respectively, the reader may yet feel that it is stereotyped.

The third chapter examines the political context of education, in relation to the social perspective. Kemmis and Edwards-Groves state that the reproduction and transformation of the social domains occur in schools and in societies as well (p. 69), consequently, the advantages or disadvantages of producing and transforming the knowledge, skills and values relatively depend on the social conditions of families. Furthermore, table 3.1 (p. 89) shows the intergenerational reproduction of disadvantage through the conditions of parents in correspondence to children; for example, the less family income, the more recurring experiences of financial need and

hardship. In addition, the authors explore the political roles of education and schooling and its theoretical context.

In the final chapter, Kemmis and Edwards-Groves clarify that “education aims for the good *for each individual* by teaching three intertwined kinds of knowledge: (1) forms of understandings, (2) modes of action and (3) ways of relating to one another and the world” (p. 116), this quote implies the authors’ point of view towards understanding education; since knowledge contributes to practice, and therefore the authors maximize the role of practice in transforming individuals. Hence, they comprehensively outline the framework of *the theory of practice architectures* (pp. 120-133). It is noticed that each of the first three chapters end with *a thesis*, which summarizes it; whilst the final chapter concludes with the challenges to be an educator. These challenges include political, socio-economic, cultural and environmental aspect, for example: providing equal learning opportunities for all the students, providing a professional judgment when needed, and teaching for sustainability. Moreover, any educational medium or context has its own characteristics and conditions, as well as students reproduce the common tendencies of their society, which make it dissimilar other societies. However, within the same group of learners, there are individual differences, this diversity necessitates the educator to reflect his practices, in order to choose the most appropriate practices for the educational context. Thus, the educators shall overcome these challenges through understanding practices that relatively enable them to understand education systematically.

Perhaps, in a future edition of this book, it would seem to be more of great scope if a deep discussion on the role of sociology for understanding education was included, besides a discussion on social justice and its connection to human rights education. Nonetheless, the book is recommended for graduate students, educational practitioners, educators, and educational researchers.

In conclusion, although the theme of the book as an educational milestone, every now and again, has been investigated along the past two millennia, but the authors, Stephen Kemmis and Christine Edwards-Groves, have made some remarkable contributions to the educational literature on the history of education, its politics, and the theory of practice.