

Review of the book *Researching Equality and Social Justice: A guide for Education Students (1st edition)*, by Helena Gillespie

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This book includes six chapters focussing on why parental engagement matters, individual needs and inclusion, relationships, communication, the importance of balance and how to embed efficient and effective practice.

Researching Equality and Social Justice is an informative and accessible guide, marketed at student researchers in the fields of education and social science, but also serving as a valuable reference point for readers interested in an overview of issues of social justice and education or who are new to the process of developing a small-scale research project. Gillespie argues that, while understanding and researching issues of social justice can help develop a more “equal and just society”, in the age of “cancel culture” and the perceived suppression of freedom of speech, in reality this can be challenging. The book, therefore, offers two main aims. Firstly, to help the reader develop a secure understanding of issues of equality and social justice within education, and secondly, to empower the reader to develop their own ideas about social justice and providing them with a guide of the research process. I feel that both aims are achieved successfully.

The book sits within interpretive and critical realist positions and is divided into two sections, the first containing six chapters dedicated to understanding key topics and issues of social justice related to researching race and ethnicity, sex and gender, socioeconomic status, mental health and disability and sustainable development goals.

A unique strength of this section is the combination of key issues and how these can be applied to develop an ethical research project. The book offers an overview of historical issues and contemporary debates related to diverse groups, allowing the reader to critically reflect and understand the impact of inequality can have on a young person or students educational experiences. The book also encourages reflections on intersectionality such as race and socioeconomic status.

The chapter on “researching race and ethnicity” proved a hard hitting but informative read concerning the impact of structural and institutional racism of Black students and the impact of islamophobia, casteism, and antisemitism within education. It was also interesting to read about post-colonial theory and how this impacts on how knowledge

and ideologies are taught within education. It was refreshing to read Gillespie’s views that addressing issues racism and discrimination is everyone’s responsibility and “not just marginalised communities” serving an important reminder for the need for cultural responsiveness and anti-racist practice.

As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (Trainee EP), I found the chapter on “mental health and wellbeing” very relevant, and its application of the stress vulnerability model served as a reminder of how interacting factors can influence the development of mental health issues.

The chapter on “researching disability and SEN” was also highly relevant as it referenced that aspects of educational systems can influence support for children with disabilities such as attitudes and ableism which promotes the social model of disability and moved away from within child deficit models- an approach that EPs are aligned with. Given Educational Psychologists (EPs) work with culturally diverse groups, I felt an intersectional lens could have been applied to further highlight the experiences children with SEN and their families’ experiences within education such as cultural understandings of dis(ability) and experiences of exclusions and marginalised groups.

The second section of the book provides an accessible guide through the process of developing a research project from the planning stage to writing up the results. A key strength here is Gillespie’s emphasis on the reader engaging in critical reflections throughout each stage of the research process. A specific example of this can be found in Chapter Seven (“Starting out”) where Gillespie advocates for the researcher to maintain a reflective diary throughout the research project. She generously provides a selection of reflective questions and activities to help the reader develop new insights about themselves by asking them to reflect on their values and allowing the reader to make connections between what they already know about the topic what further information they need to find out. As a Trainee EP developing my skills as a reflective practitioner within the Educational Psychology profession, I found the strength-based approach to these questions supportive and encouraging. The last chapter (making sense of your findings), Gillespie offers thoughtful and encouraging

advice on “how to be a good writer” which I am sure will leave any reader feeling inspired and empowered!

Overall, Gillespie provides refreshing and urgent reminder that understanding issues of social justice and equality can help towards making positive change within education. Her book serves as a valuable reference point for anyone interested in research within education.



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