

## **Diminishing the Divisions Among Us: Reading and Writing Across Difference in Theory and Method in the Sociology of Education**

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*Evidenced in several now classic reviews of the field, much has been made of theoretical and methodological “difference” with regard to research in the sociology of education. Although such renditions often constitute important intellectual contributions, the authors suggest that it is increasingly important to read across theoretical and methodological divisions that are now widely understood to characterize the field. The authors fear, in fact, that the seemingly taken-for-granted assumption of staked-out theoretical and methodological “camps” (with which scholars and doctoral students are inevitably allied) implies a misunderstanding or misreading of how scholars came to be where they are today while simultaneously stunting scholarship related to the production of social inequalities both in and outside of schools. The authors intentionally traverse select taken-for-granted boundaries as they work toward productive scholarly “trespassing” that encourages the kind of theoretical and methodological struggle, debate, and difference that characterized an earlier period.*

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Since the 1960s, sociology of education in the United States has offered a timeline marked by distinct and often divergent movement of thought—from one “more suitable” theory to the next, one “more appropriate” method to another. Though these moves often indicate progress toward improved understanding of the production and amelioration of social and educational inequalities, these transitions are too often marked by academic debates emphasizing only the differences between and among diverse theories and methods. Although research that progressively builds toward paradigmatic shift can powerfully provoke further research, more narrow analyses, self-severed from the larger conversations that spawn them, can eclipse the ways in which theoretical and methodological difference is built into the very fiber of scholarly activity and progress.

Evidenced in several now classic reviews of the field (Karabel & Halsey, 1977; Marjoribanks, 1985; Saha, 1994), much has been made of theoretical and

methodological “difference” with regard to research related to the key “problem” of sociology of education, that being the production of social inequality: what it is; how it is produced; how actions and activities within schools, families, and communities connect to it; and, to some extent at least, what we can do about it. Highlighted in these early and later renditions are, among others, theoretical debates and fractures such as conflict theory versus functionalism (Collins, 1971; Karabel & Halsey, 1977; Marjoribanks, 1985; Saha, 1994) and structurally based conflict theory versus more culturally driven conflict theory (Apple, 1979, 1982; Giroux, 1983; Levinson, Holland, & Foley, 1996; Marjoribanks, 1985; Willis, 1983) as well as key methodological differences, including qualitative versus quantitative (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Karabel & Halsey, 1977) and what scholars perceive to be the most appropriate type of qualitative work (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Fine, 1994; Weis & Fine, 2004).<sup>1</sup> Although we certainly respect the above-noted renditions of scholarly activity in the sociology of education since the early 1960s, particularly as related to the production of social inequality, we suggest in this essay that we have much to learn by reading across theoretical and methodological divisions that are now widely understood to characterize the field (Davies, 1995). We fear, in fact, that the seemingly taken-for-granted assumption of staked-out theoretical and methodological “camps” in the field (with which scholars and doctoral students are inevitably allied) implies both a misunderstanding or misreading of how we came to be where we are today while simultaneously stunting scholarship related to the production of social inequality both in and outside of schools.

Here we maintain that what Bourdieu (cited in Apple, 1996) calls “trespassing”—in this case, accessing and building on work produced across contrasting theoretical and methodological frameworks—affords us the opportunity to enhance our understanding of key social, economic, and cultural forces as linked to educational and socioeconomic arrangements and outcomes. By way of example, Ladson-Billings (2006) reminds us that this moment requires that we move beyond narrow conceptions of the achievement gap toward more nuanced and historically rooted understandings of educational inequality, a conceptual move that encourages attention to what she calls “the education debt.” Arguing that “the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral decisions and policies that characterize our society have created an educational debt” (Ladson-Billings, 2006, p. 5), she urges intensified focus on the cross-cutting conditions and practices that have created such debt, thereby pointing to deeper issues of historic neglect by the racial state.

In the spirit of Ladson-Billings, then, we argue that working across difference both within and among theory and method better enables us to track changing structural circumstance, engage in serious analysis as to what accounts for such structural circumstance, and chronicle and theorize the ways in which individuals and groups live in relation to historically forged structures, policies, and practices. Our goal is to provide a framework reflective of what we gain by the intentionally inclusive reading of theory and methods and what might be lost if we neglect to so do. With increasingly limited research in the sociology of education that engages findings produced under a range of perspectives, this essay constitutes a timely response to what we see as the “locking in” of theoretical and methodological difference. Here we intentionally traverse select taken-for-granted

boundaries as we work toward the kind of productive scholarly “trespassing” that encourages theoretical and methodological struggle, debate, and difference.

### Framework

As the field of sociology of education is both broad and multidimensional, we limit our analysis to select illustrative areas of inquiry. As noted earlier, the field’s broad focus on social inequality includes questions related to what it is; how it is produced; how schools, families, and communities connect to it; and, to some extent at least, what we can do about it.<sup>2</sup> In the first part of this essay we *read* across theoretical and methodological models, indicating what we learn about the production of social inequality by focusing our attention on research produced across theoretical and methodological difference. In so doing, we set the record straight as to the ways in which researchers and theorists in the 1960s and 1970s, in particular, worked with and against *multiple* perspectives or methods as they forged what we now see as deep divisions in the field. We follow with a specific and integrated reading and analysis of select literature on the *structure–agency* divide. We then proceed to discuss the context of education, focusing on the current division between research on in-school and out-of-school settings. We highlight these specific examples, as they constitute key focal points in much current research. In both illustrative cases, we stress the importance of “trespassing” boundaries and detail what we lose if we fail to do so.

### Reading Across Theory

Just as subsequent social theorists have taken the functionalist paradigm at its roots, extracted its worth in historical context, and extended the girth of an already robust sociological lens, we consider all theories as informed extensions of original thought. Rather than viewing various theories as separate, distinct entities, we stress the notion that all new thought is situated within previous thought and past context. The notion that theory in education is continually struggled over is at the core of our project to read and write across difference. Though language demands that we discuss varying theories as discrete forms, thereby highlighting difference to enable the analysis put forth, we simultaneously stress the binding, consistent force that drives much theory within sociology of education–social inequality.

Several major theoretical frameworks, and debates within and between these frameworks, provide a space for research and critique in the sociology of education. In essence, functionalists stress the interdependence of parts within what they see as the social system and carry this view through social analyses. With this in mind, functionalists proceed, via sociological research, to investigate the ways in which and degree to which such parts are empirically interconnected.

Paramount for the functionalists is the maintenance of social order and the facilitation of consensus and agreement; such theorists seek to understand desired social conditions that foster order, embracing the notion that consensus is the normal societal condition and that conflict reflects a breakdown of shared values. They further assert that schools function to socialize children into a commonly agreed-on value system while simultaneously sorting them into appropriate adult roles.

The foundation of what are termed modern functionalist theories of education lies in the work of Parsons, for Parsons views education as a critical, central component of modern societies. From this modern functionalist perspective, a key role of

education is to cultivate and sustain modern democratic society while simultaneously offering equality of opportunity to all citizens. Here, society is regarded as a meritocratic network, and school-based education serves to facilitate such meritocratic selection process. Within this framework, the “underachievement” of minority groups is contrary to democratic ideals such as equality of opportunity, serving both to prioritize a *particular* conception of equality of opportunity and simultaneously look toward school-based reform to alleviate social problems.

In his well-known “The School Class as a Social System,” Parsons (1959) emphasizes the functionalist view of the school classroom as a socializing agent in the lives of children. With that, Parsons puts forward the notion of schools as an arena of competition wherein students are evaluated based on their academic achievement. The school class becomes a place where students are differentiated “along a single continuum of achievement, the content of which is relative excellence in living up to the expectations imposed by the teacher as an agent of the adult society” (Parsons, 1959, p. 304). For these processes of socialization and differentiation of rewards to take place more or less seamlessly, there must be a system of shared values within the classroom, in this case, the “shared valuation of achievement” (Parsons, 1959, p. 309). Parsons tells us that the successful integration of all children into this consensus around the collective valorization of achievement rests on the school classroom as the epitome of equality of opportunity, as it “places value *both* on initial equality and on differential achievement” (p. 309). Regarding society as a whole, functionalists maintain that the opportunity structure is open to people across social background and that subsequent inequality of rewards is necessary to foster personal development and economic competition (Jacob, 1981).

It is critical to note that for functionalists, equality of opportunity means the existence of conditions that allow for equal competition for rewards rather than equal rewards or outcomes. Under such conception, schools serve the meritocratic goal of providing equal opportunity for all children to compete on a *level playing field* for the same life chances. The role of education, then, is to connect students’ individual talents and capacities with appropriately won adult occupations. This notion of equality of opportunity informs an array of important contributions to the study of education such as those of Blau and Duncan (1967) and Clifton (1981), who suggest and at the same time empirically test the extent to which educational and occupational attainment are based on earned achievement and performance, independent of social background characteristics.

In 1966 Coleman et al. published *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, commonly known as the Coleman Report (Marjoribanks, 1985). In this highly influential report, Coleman and his colleagues investigate the linkages between and among family background, school-related variables, and academic achievement while simultaneously offering a new definition of equality of opportunity as linked to the *outputs of school* (achievement in this case) rather than the *inputs to school*. Coleman differentiates between equality of inputs as resources put into the school, and equality of outputs as results of schooling. He follows by asserting that the existing notion of equality of opportunity is a “mistaken and misleading concept” (Coleman & Marjoribanks, 1975, p. 28) as it situates equality within school structures rather than within opportunities that education holds for adult attainment. This constitutes an important shift in our conception of equality of opportunity, opening the door for investment in those school-based factors that can be empirically shown

to increase school outcomes. As a direct result of the Coleman Report, equality of opportunity is widely measured by how students look when they leave school (achievement, attainment, etc.) rather than by what goes into the school as disconnected from outcome variables such as measured achievement, attainment, occupational status, and income. More concretely, equalizing school resources is no longer a measure of equality of opportunity unless such investment can be linked empirically to a commensurate rise in educational outcomes.<sup>3</sup>

Stretching further, Blau and Duncan analyze equality of opportunity with an eye toward understanding the nature of occupational stratification. In *The American Occupational Structure*, Blau and Duncan (1967) find that although discrimination has a cumulative, prohibitive effect on the occupational attainment of Blacks, for example, once a variety of control measures are introduced into the equation, background variables, such as father's education, exert little independent effect on occupational attainment (Hopper, 1968). Blau and Duncan pry open a "life chance" research genre, which probes empirically the connection between schooling and occupational outcomes. Following this shift in focus (from the inputs to school to the outcomes of school as a measure of equality of opportunity), important quantitative research related to the production of academic achievement, academic attainment, occupational status, and income dominated the field through the mid-1970s (Jencks et al., 1972; Sewell, 1971; Sewell & Hauser, 1975; Sewell & Shah, 1967).

Not long after the functionalist theoretical framework (and the accompanying empirically based political-arithmetic approach as evidenced in the work of Coleman, Jencks, Blau and Duncan, and others) becomes instantiated as the popular lens for analysis, social scientists widely challenge its theoretical boundaries, arguing for increased attention to the ways in which power allows some groups to exert and maintain control over others, thereby enabling those with privilege to maintain advantage in the educationally based race for ostensibly meritocratically obtained positions. This challenge, influenced by neo-Weberian and Marxist conflict theory, attacked the functionalist paradigm as misguided (Collins, 1971, 1974; Flacks, 1970, 1971; Gintis, 1970; Touraine, 1971). Following Weber, scholars under this theoretical lens focus on educational settings and inequality as best explained through notions of power and conflicting interests among social groups, as opposed to functionalist notions surrounding the needs of the economy (Karabel & Halsey, 1977). As Collins (cited in Karabel & Halsey, 1977) notes,

Functional analysis on the more abstract level does not provide a testable explanation of which ascribed groups will be able to dominate positions. To answer this question, one must leave the functional frame of reference and examine the conditions of relative power of each group. (p. 125)

In response to this challenge, what takes hold most quickly in the education research community is a focus on the ways in which school-sanctioned knowledge (later called the "official curriculum") serves the interests of those in power, thereby enabling certain groups to excel in school and maintain control over others (Anyon, 1981; Apple, 1979; Keddie, 1971; Sharp & Green, 1975; Wexler, 1976; Young, 1971). In the United Kingdom, for instance, the publication of Young's (1971) *Knowledge and Control* forcefully signals increased attention to the relationship between the organization and selection of curricular knowledge

and those who succeed in school. Bourdieu and Passeron (1977), Bernstein (1971, 1973, 1975), Wexler (1976), Apple (1979), Popkewitz (1987), Whitty (1985), and others argue that the organization of knowledge, the form of its transmission, and the assessment of its acquisition are crucial factors in the cultural reproduction of class relationships in industrial societies.

As Karabel and Halsey note in their well-known 1977 review of the field,

By the early 1970s, a school of thought stressing the content of education had formed, and one of its members was describing it as “the new sociology of education”—an emergent “alternative paradigm.” Previous work was dismissed as a “positivistic” version of structural functionalism using “input–output models” and a “normative paradigm.” (p. 5)

The challenge represented by the “new” sociology of education, popularly conceived as original thought born out of England,<sup>4</sup> leads sociology of education scholars down an alternative theoretical and methodological path, although far more has been made of the seemingly naturalized linkage between theoretical perspective and appropriate methodology than is ultimately helpful, a point which we take up later in this essay.

Streaming functionalist theory into conflict theory and subsequent theories of reproduction requires an understanding of these transitions marked by particular chronological moments—moments of critical awareness and shifting or challenging evidentiary bases to be sure, but ones fundamentally rooted in the careful reading and understanding of prior scholarly literature produced within the broader research community.<sup>5</sup>

Economists Bowles and Gintis (1976), for example, depart from the new sociology of education’s focus on knowledge, arguing instead that there is a “correspondence” between the structural relations of production and those of the school. Putting forth their well-known “correspondence principle,” Bowles and Gintis argue that schools directly reproduce social and economic inequalities embedded in the capitalist economy. As they note,

The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the work place, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social-class identifications which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy. Specifically the social relationships of education—the relationships between administrators and teachers, teachers and students, students and students, and students and their work—replicate the hierarchical division of labor. (p. 131)

Such neo-Marxist sensibilities critique the capitalist economy as the driving force behind the “need” for profit and domination as in conflict with the political economy that promotes democracy and equality. This conflict plays out in classrooms where students are marked by a larger and highly stratified economic structure (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Without great interruption in the intellectual flow of theoretical debate, varying theories of reproduction begin to emerge in the late 1970s as variations on forms of conflict theory.<sup>6</sup> Given the argument at hand, it is noteworthy that all such iterations take as their focal point the relationship between education and social and economic outcomes—outcomes more generally established as important to research on schools and schooling, as we argue here, by earlier theoretical breakthroughs in the equality

of educational opportunity and “life chance” genres. Debate related to schooling and social and economic outcomes quickly becomes more intense and theories of economic reproduction are soon critiqued as incapable of “provid[ing] adequate explanations of the complex and often contradictory roles that schools have in mediating and reproducing existing social orders” (Marjoribanks, 1985, p. 4691). As Sadovnik (2007) notes, “Unlike most Marxists, who tend to emphasize the economic structure of society, social and cultural reproduction theorists argued that school processes reflect the interests of cultural and social elites” (p. 7).

Initiated in Europe, and expanding on earlier calls for a focus on the nature of school knowledge, early theories of social and cultural reproduction find form, most notably, in the writings of Bourdieu in France and Bernstein in the United Kingdom. Bourdieu (1973; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) writes extensively on the process of cultural reproduction, powerfully highlighting the notion of “cultural capital” as knowledge that is transferred from one generation to the next through both families and schools. Though noted that all groups marked within a class structure acquire and exhibit their own distinct form of cultural capital, Bourdieu’s careful empirical work and subsequent theorizing suggest that it is the social and cultural capital of the elite that enables them, as a group, to maintain privilege, power, and advantage in a highly stratified educational system. In turn, knowledge of elite cultural capital (fine arts, literature, etc.) enables and encourages this group to ensure a place at the most valued and prestigious educational institutions, attendance at which transfers into the most valued and prestigious placements within the occupational structure.

Bernstein hones in on a particular kind of cultural capital—linguistic codes, a topic that is “concerned with how the macro-level (social, political, and economic structures of institutions) is dialectically related to the ways in which people understand systems of meaning (codes)” (Sadovnik, 2007, p. 9). Like those of Bourdieu, Bernstein’s important theoretical contributions rest on careful empirical work. He argues that members of the working class (specifically in the United Kingdom, where his empirical work was undertaken) are at a distinct disadvantage in schools as schools employ and promote middle-class language patterns, thereby privileging those who already possess relevant linguistic codes, specifically those students from middle-class backgrounds.

Working with and against an array of important empirical studies of the time, and particularly Willis’s *Learning to Labour* (1977), Apple (1982) extends his earlier theoretical work (Apple, 1979) in important ways. Arguing that “schools need to be seen in a more complex manner than simple reproduction” (p. 13), Apple claims that what is missing from theories of reproduction, whether economically, socially, or culturally driven, are the “conflicts, contradictions, meditations, and in particular, resistances” (p. 13).

Though laced with heavy critique for its masculinist ethos (McRobbie, 1980),<sup>7</sup> Willis’s work provides a highly regarded empirical example of the complexities associated with resistance and contestation, and the volume remains seminal to the study of class position, structure, and individual agency. Intentionally pushing back on more structurally based or deterministic models such as those of Althusser (1971) and Bowles and Gintis (1976), Willis (1977) states, “In its desire for workers of a certain type, the reach of the production process must pass through the semi-autonomous cultural level which is determined by production only partially and in

its own specific terms” (p. 171). As such macro determinations need to “pass through the cultural milieu to reproduce themselves at all” (p. 171), Willis argues that processes of reproduction can never be assumed—that they are always shot through with fits, starts, and contradictions, all of which play out on the semiautonomous level of culture.

Offering a major theoretical breakthrough, Willis introduces human agency to broader processes of economic and social reproduction, suggesting that in advanced capitalist societies, individuals must be understood as agents who collude in systems of domination, thereby helping to produce their own continued marginality. Offering a complex analysis of the ways in which resistance is ironically linked to reproduction, Willis (1977) notes,

It is their own culture which most effectively prepares some working-class lads for the manual giving of their labour power and there is an element of self-damnation in the taking of subordinate roles in Western capitalism. However this damnation is experienced paradoxically as true learning, affirmation, appropriation and as a form of resistance. (p. 3)

Following Willis, a multitude of contemporary scholars have produced important work that uses this framework as its starting point.<sup>8</sup>

In *Schooling and Work in the Democratic State*, economists Carnoy and Levin (1985) soon turn our attention to contradictions embedded within the capitalist state itself. Carnoy and Levin argue that although schools play key roles in the reproduction of race, gender, and class relations as per earlier theoretical advances, both the educational system as well as its internal policies and practices emerge through conflict and contestation, thereby representing a partial win for the historically disenfranchised. Focusing on contestation as a fundamental part of any state sector institution in a democratic society, including schools, they note,

Educational institutions are not just producers of dominant class conceptions of what and how much schooling should be provided; public schools also reflect social demands. Attempts by the capitalist State to reproduce the relations of production and the class division of labor confront social movements that demand more public resources for their needs and more say in how these resources are to be used. The capitalist State and its educational system are therefore more than just a means for co-opting social demands or for simply manipulating them to satisfy dominant class needs. Social demands shape the State and education. (p. 47)

Under this formulation, Carnoy and Levin argue that the educational system cannot be understood simply as

an instrument of the capitalist class. It is the product of conflict between the dominant and the dominated. . . . Education is at once the result of contradictions and the source of new contradictions. It is an arena of conflict over the production of knowledge, ideology, and employment, a place where social movements try to meet their needs and business attempts to reproduce its hegemony. (p. 50)

By focusing specifically on struggles within the state sector, Carnoy and Levin challenge and extend prior work on reproduction and contestation.

The 1960s, 1970s, and into the 1980s constitute a heady time in the sociology of education, a period that represents significant scholarly struggle in the field. Although there has certainly been important research produced since this time, it is arguably the case that the level of theoretical debate and associated scholarly movement is both less vibrant and *increasingly less informed by a range of theory and evidence*. Unlike the situation chronicled in this section of the essay, wherein the very definitions of equality of educational opportunity emerge out of struggles over scholarly difference, and where conflict theory reemerges in relation to functionalism and variations of reproduction theory emerge in relation to one another, current-day scholars in sociology of education seem less compelled by the norms of the field to *read* across and engage varying lines of research on education and social and economic inequalities. Rather than representing any kind of “normal scientific practice,” this suggests substantial ignorance around a range of work that could inform any given project.<sup>9</sup> As we suggest here, this was much less the case during the earlier times of theoretical and methodological struggle and debate over difference, a set of struggles that led to important advances in the field.

This state of affairs not only limits engagement with larger academic conversations. It also presents very serious impediments to challenging the dominant discourse, as isolated conversations are unlikely to be able to challenge the status quo. This also potentially shuts down and further marginalizes theoretical and empirical challenges by scholars of color. In making this point, we are not suggesting that scholars of color always had access to dominant conversations in the academy. Clearly this is not the case, as the sociological imaginations of those noted in the first part of this essay authorize a particular worldview wherein other voices can only be presented in reaction to well-entrenched social visions.<sup>10</sup>

By way of example, Black sociologists such as Du Bois (1935, 1975) and Drake (1987; Drake & Horace, 1945) were writing parallel to those with “founding” imaginations, yet the work of these scholars barely punctures mainstream (including critical) debate. Even more to the point of this particular essay, Du Bois and Woodson were writing about power and school knowledge long before Young (1971), Whitty (1985), Apple (1979), and others were writing on the subject in the United Kingdom and United States, respectively, yet the contributions of Du Bois and Woodson are never acknowledged by these scholars nor taken into account in scholarly renditions of the genre.

Although past marginalization of the important work of scholars of color is obviously problematic, it is arguably the case that what we see as the current instantiation of “camps” works to ensure the continued marginalization of any real epistemological and structural alternatives as envisioned and struggled over by others. Given little real debate across theoretical lines, then, there is scant opportunity for such alternatives to seriously penetrate dominant discourse.

In this regard and from this point forward, scholarship that probes the production of inequalities tends to run on “parallel courses of difference” rather than engage knowledge or theory produced across such difference. In addition, since the 1970s, alignment with a particular research methodology or method in the sociology of education tends to imply alignment with a particular theoretical framework, wherein research inside reproduction or “new” sociology of education frameworks, for example, tends to be qualitative, whereas that linked to educational opportunity research programs (including life chance literature as earlier noted) tends to be

quantitative. Given, as we argue above, that twists in theoretical framework emerge out of or in response to theory and accompanying empirical material generated *across* competing frameworks, the wholesale dismissal of theory, data, and method across difference both limits imaginative possibilities and is, quite frankly, counter-productive to scientific progress.

In similar fashion to our point about theoretical framework then, we seek to move to more integrated ways of thinking about and utilizing qualitative and quantitative methods. In the next section we discuss both major research methodologies, stressing the ways in which they can be used in complementary fashion (Green, Camilli, & Elmore, 2006).<sup>11</sup>

### **Reading Across Method**

Through the use of national databases collected by large organizations and research centers, quantitative research methods are the most widely used techniques for sociological investigation of education at the onset of the 1960s (Sadovnik, 2007). Quantitative research generally involves the following general procedures: the use of sociologically relevant theory in the area of inquiry, development of a research question and corresponding hypotheses grounded in theory, formation of an explicit research design or framework, empirical testing of hypotheses and counterfactuals, evaluation and analysis of results, and subsequent generation of informed conclusions. Quantitative research studies have enabled us to look at differences in achievement based on race, class, gender, and other socially significant variables as well as assess the effects of school-based practices while holding background characteristics constant in the analysis. Important work has been conducted on the independent effects of tracking and ability grouping (Gamoran, 1987; Gamoran & Mare, 1989; Haller, 1985; Haller & Davis, 1980; S. P. Kelly, 2004, 2008; Rosenbaum, 1976), for example, and Carnoy (1994) offers an empirically based analysis of the politics and economics of race in America, contributing to our understanding of educational and occupational opportunities among the historically marginalized. As noted earlier, quantitative methodology has been largely employed by those who work within the equality of educational opportunity and life chance or status attainment traditions, although some crossover is evidenced in the work of scholars such as Carnoy and Levin, among others.

Although quantitative research studies within and outside of the “field” have been highly valuable to sociologists of education in understanding school effects, interactionist theorists ardently note that these studies do not fully address the “reasons for these effects, as they [do] not examine school processes” (Sadovnik, 2007, p. 16).<sup>12</sup> Based on this critique, researchers utilizing qualitative methods examine, among other areas, issues of social background and schooling (Cookson & Persell, 1985), nature of knowledge (McNeil, 1986), ability grouping (Rist, 1970), and achievement and tracking (Oakes, 1985; Yonezawa & Wells, 2005) through ethnographic means. As a means of empirically investigating various sociohistorical phenomena, qualitative researchers utilize a range of methods to collect sociological data, including case studies, interviews, field observations, cultural texts and artifacts, historical documents, and focus groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). The researcher, as an integral part of the research process and design (often serving as the research instrument), must understand his or her own biography, power as researcher, ethical and political

stance, and relationship to the research site and that of other participants (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).<sup>13</sup> Although there are certainly important ways in which qualitative and quantitative research methodologies differ, these differences can both enhance methodological strengths and serve to reduce or offset methodological weaknesses. In addition, it should be noted that although considerable effort has been made to highlight the differences between major research frameworks, important similarities have not been articulated and/or emphasized to the same degree. Both methodologies, for example, engage in empirical work to address a particular research question, and both explain data strategically (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004).<sup>14</sup> Likewise, both qualitative and quantitative researchers use data to create a sound argument pertaining to the research question at hand, speculate about causality, and include provisions to protect their participants while minimizing potential biases in the research process (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). It is also worth noting that neither major methodology nullifies important political and power issues embedded in the research process. In point of fact, researchers who engage either methodology can abuse their participants, authorize highly questionable and destructive accounts of particular communities that result in grave consequences in terms of subsequent policies and practice, and engage in research solely for reasons of their own career enhancement.<sup>15</sup>

For present purposes we are drawn to the notion that a predisposition toward a mixed-methods approach to social science research will enable researchers to move beyond needlessly narrow research questions grounded in now narrowly conceived frameworks.<sup>16</sup> Mixed-methods research can be defined as a style of research in which the researcher combines qualitative and quantitative methods, approaches, and techniques into one study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The goal here is to create a space where multiple approaches to answering questions are welcome in the execution of innovative, productive, pluralistic research. Turner and Johnson (cited in Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004) contend that researchers should collect data in multiple forms through multiple strategies and techniques so as to ensure a combination that will produce “complementary strengths and non-overlapping weaknesses” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p. 18).

Articulating the strengths of a mixed-method approach, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) state that such studies allow for the use of words and narratives to add meaning to numerical data; foster the study of broader, more complex research questions; and combine and reinforce the strengths of *each* paradigm, thereby providing stronger evidentiary bases for conclusions and discussions based on findings. Along these same lines, Madey (1982) notes that qualitative methods can enhance quantitative methods, and vice versa, in the sampling procedures (assembling the appropriate participants and sites) and the collection and evaluation of data (e.g., coupling case studies and interviews with questionnaires and surveys). Although the advantages of mixed-methods approaches are compelling, the disadvantages, namely, the fact that they can be rather costly and time consuming, must also be considered. This suggests the need for a more team-based approach to social research, wherein scholars positioned differently in relation to method work together so as to answer more broad-based research questions. Such team-based integrated methodologies can, as Madey notes, be likened to “zooming in and zooming out with a lens . . . [as] zooming from different directions merely focuses on different facets of the same phenomenon” (p. 232).

In making this argument, we do not mean to imply that mixed-methods research offers some kind of panacea to narrowly conceived studies, as mixed-methods studies do not *necessarily* embody theoretical and methodological struggle, debate, and difference in ways highlighted as important in this essay. Too, it is not always the case that a mixed-methods approach is necessary or even desirable, as there are many excellent studies that employ one method or another. Our point here is that we must embrace a predisposition to engage whatever methodology, method, or methods enable us to answer important research questions.

To go back to our earlier examples of status attainment and equality of opportunity research and challenges associated with the “new sociology of education,” those who work within the equality of opportunity tradition are, by and large, trained highly quantitatively, with little to no training in qualitative methodology. Those who align themselves with any variant of the “new sociology of education,” interpretive research, or social and cultural reproduction frameworks are, by and large, trained qualitatively, with minimal training in the logic of quantitative research, including statistics. Here it is arguably the case that we have deskilled more than two generations of graduate students in statistical techniques of investigation. What this means is that an unacceptably high proportion of sociology of education scholars are now unable to even read critically across important bodies of research that potentially inform their work.<sup>17</sup> Although not intending to suggest that researchers become equally fluent with all methodologies and related methods, we argue for a level of methodological “cross training” that will enable us to read and write across difference.

In support of our position as to the utility of complementary methods, we offer, as illustrative example, the deservedly award-winning book *Black Wealth/White Wealth*. Oliver and Shapiro (1997, 2006) investigate racial differences in wealth holdings as a means of offering a deeper, more multifaceted perspective on racial inequality in the United States, centering their research on the analysis of racial differences in wealth holdings and what this reveals about dynamics of racial inequality that are otherwise concealed by discrete analyses of income and educational and/or occupational attainment. More specifically, they examine how wealth has been distributed in American society over the 20th century, the changes in such distribution during the 1980s, and the implications of such changes for Black–White inequality into the 21st century.

To accomplish this task, Oliver and Shapiro employ both quantitative (using a nationally representative large database) and qualitative (in-depth interview) methods. The mixed-methods approach powerfully enables the authors to track changing structural circumstance linked to race, engage in serious analysis as to what accounts for such structural circumstance, and chronicle and theorize the ways in which individuals and groups live in relation to historically forged structure, policies, and practice. This productive use of complementary methods enables Oliver and Shapiro both to dig deeply and theorize widely in their given area of investigation.

With regard specifically to research in education, we can imagine a team of quantitative and qualitative researchers who both map academic achievement and the predictors of such achievement over time (through the use of large databases), while simultaneously chronicling, through careful ethnographic work in a purposive sample of schools, the ways in which specific policies and practices are linked to the outcomes of interest. Drawing on a key strength of qualitative methodology,

this ethnographic work could take into account relevant areas of school life that are not tapped in national databases; for example, culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995), knowledge that nurtures cultural consciousness (King, 2005; C. Lee, 2007; Shujaa, 1994), and systemic detracking (Yonezawa & Wells, 2005), among other possibilities.<sup>18</sup> Although this example offers only a glimpse into research possibilities across perspective and method, our larger point is that a team of researchers who collectively struggle over a research problem while simultaneously capitalizing on diverse methodological strengths will contribute markedly to scholarship on education and socioeconomic inequalities.

We now take our conversation on “trespassing” into two concrete areas.<sup>19</sup> Although numerous examples could be offered here, we focus specifically on the structure–agency divide and the context of education itself. In the latter example, we discuss research on in-school and out-of-school sites for education while turning to the massively shifting global context and its implications for our discussion.

### **Exemplar Moments of Reading and Writing Across Theory and Method: A Focus on Structure Versus Agency and the Context of Education**

#### *Reading Across the Structure–Agency Debate*

At the center of our argument is the notion that transgressing theoretical and methodological boundaries better positions us to investigate and address the key problem of our field: the production of social inequality. In the same vein, critical race scholar Crenshaw (1991) puts forward the notion of intersectionality as a means of transgressing what have often been impervious boundaries around or between race and gender. Although Crenshaw originally conceives of intersectionality to look at race and gender, she subsequently advocates for the inclusion of social class, suggesting that research must examine the ways in which, and places in which, the three intersect (Crenshaw, 1991; Tate, 1997, p. 233).<sup>20</sup>

Much of Crenshaw’s work stems from her critique of critical legal studies as lacking concrete analyses that directly pertain to the life circumstances of racially oppressed people and the social problems impacting their experiences. We agree with Tate (1997) that Crenshaw’s “scholarship can make a potentially unique contribution to educational research on equity” as it “provide[s] a conceptual framework for analyzing the interplay of race, class and gender in educational contexts” (p. 233).<sup>21</sup> Although it is not our intent to focus specifically on the wide-ranging literature on race, class, and gender in the sociology of education, we highlight Crenshaw as illustrative of the ways in which transgressive interplay opens up possibilities for research.<sup>22</sup>

The utility of trespassing can be located in debates over structure versus agency. Following distinctions forged from disagreement over sociological analyses (macro- vs. micro-level analyses), the structure–agency dualism represents a marked schism among scholars in the field. As Shilling (1992) notes,

Since the early 1970’s the sociology of education has been characterized by two dominant (types of) approaches which are both flawed. In brief, structuralist and emerging post-structuralist accounts of education tend to be relatively strong on constraint yet weak on agency, while interpretive approaches tend to be relatively strong on dealing with human agency yet weak on recognizing and reconceptualizing social structures. (p. 71)

Though attempts have been made to unite notions of structure and agency by locating and theorizing individual acts of resistance as agency in the face of oppressive social structures, structure and agency continue to be largely discussed and investigated at two distinct levels of analysis, with primacy given to one or the other, depending on theoretical bent of the investigator or theorist. We begin this section with noted attempts to unite separate conversations of structure and agency, although such attempts do not, as we argue below, dig deeply enough into important findings generated by more structurally oriented scholars. We end with research that demonstrates a deeper, more nuanced, and complex analysis—closing in on a reconciliation of this debate.

As a scholar who attempts to work the boundary between structure and agency, Ogbu's work on oppositional culture has been both widely utilized and contested in examinations of the school experiences and educational outcomes of minority students, particularly Black students.<sup>23</sup> Early iterations of his work seek to understand and explain the markedly lower academic achievement of minority students as compared to their White counterparts (Ogbu, 1974). Expanding on this early work, Ogbu later argues that minorities exhibit differing responses to discrimination based on how they entered the United States. Voluntary minorities—those who *chose* to relocate for educational or occupational purposes—do not view their place in the United States as being linked to oppression by White Americans (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). In sharp contrast, involuntary or nonimmigrant minorities—those peoples who were forcibly removed from their homelands or colonized by White Americans—interpret their situation differently: as a direct result of White oppression (Ogbu & Simons, 1998). Extending the argument to discussions of schooling, Ogbu suggests that “involuntary minorities see the curriculum as an attempt to impose White culture on them. This leads them to question the curriculum for not including information about their minority history and experiences,” thereby contributing to differences in school performance (Ogbu & Simons, 1998, p. 178).

Though Ogbu (and later Fordham, 1996) transcends any simplistic formulation of the structure–agency dualism, he does not delve deeply enough into the ways in which broad-based social and economic inequalities filter into schools. It is arguably the case, for example, that Ogbu holds Black students responsible for their own underachievement when he argues that they reject schooling because they see school knowledge and practices as White. This implies that if they did not reject such schooling, Black students would exhibit substantially greater academic achievement and social mobility than is currently evidenced. Although this may be partially true of course, this rendering of underachievement ignores the large and important body of school-based literature that suggests that schools embody a *range* of policies and practices that work to advantage some and disadvantage others, particularly poor Black youth.

Here, a comparison between Ogbu (1974) and Willis (1977) is helpful, as both scholars focus largely on the ways in which youth respond, at their own semiautonomous cultural level, to the environment in which they find themselves. Although both situate empirically documented youth cultural productions *inside historical circumstance*—Ogbu in the historically located position and struggles of U.S. Blacks since being forcibly brought to the states and Willis in the historically located position and struggles of the White working class in Britain—neither

scholar takes seriously enough the ways in which located forms of schooling as the culmination of *specifically* targeted policies and practices serve to constitute an important part of the environment in which student agency plays.<sup>24</sup>

Willis's "lads," for example, valorize their own home-based class culture inside a state-driven institution that both *devalues* their culture to begin with and offers, *by state design*, young men of their class background few real opportunities to be anything other than unskilled manual wage laborers. So too, although Ogbu's (and later Fordham's) youth may produce their own located oppositional identities in relation to historically rooted race relations and lack of opportunities in the States, they do so as much in relation to their everyday experiences in school—experiences that, as in Willis's case, devalue them to begin with. In point of fact, both groups under consideration produce oppositional identities inside a range of educational institutions that encompass their specifically located race- and class-based histories and oppressions (King, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Although youth in these emblematic studies engage in the production of oppositional cultures that take into account and valorize or respect their own lived experiences and locally produced practices, they do so firmly in relation to an educational system that markedly privileges some and denies privilege to others.

This suggests that we must take seriously the ways in which youth cultural productions are linked to social structure not only at the macro level as Willis and Ogbu do but also at the level of the school, an institution that ideologically offers equality of opportunity for all (most markedly in the United States and only more recently in the United Kingdom) while simultaneously denying any real opportunity to historically marginalized groups. This is an excellent example of where theoretical division (the structure–agency divide) is counterproductive in terms of our understanding of the ways in which educational and socioeconomic inequalities are produced and maintained. The sharp divide between scholars who focus on youth cultural productions (often twinned with an empirically based focus on oppositional identities) and those who focus on school-based structural inequalities is not helpful here.

We know, for example, from both quantitative and qualitative work on the processes of exclusion, that particular policies, practices, and representations embedded within schools in the United States work against the historically disenfranchised, particularly poor Black and Latino students. Research has shown that tracking (Gamoran & Mare, 1989; V. Lee & Bryk, 1988; Lucas, 2001; Oakes, 1985), school dropouts or "push-outs" (Fine, 1991), high-stakes testing (McNeil, 2000; Nichols & Berliner, 2007), nature of and differential access to academic knowledge (Anyon, 1981; Banks, 1969; King, 2005), differential access to college counseling (McDonough, 1997), pipeline constriction (Haney et al., 2005), the repeal of desegregation court orders that has led to increasingly large concentrations of poor African American and Latino children in high poverty schools in urban areas (Orfield & Lee, 2005), and the lack of culturally relevant curricula (Ladson-Billings, 1992, 1995; C. Lee, 2007), to name a few, lead directly to the intensification of unequal outcomes. Scholars interested in the production of oppositional cultural forms need to investigate and theorize such youth cultural productions in relation to concrete practices embedded in educational institutions.

This provides an excellent example as to the utility of academic trespassing. Quite bluntly, we must read and produce scholarship that works *across* theoretical

and methodological difference rather than instantiate such difference by our refusal, whether intentional to not, to engage a broader range of literature. In the case of the well-known structure–agency divide, this means that we must float the findings of largely culturally oriented researchers against what we know to be, from more structurally oriented scholars, the ways in which schools serve directly to advantage some and disadvantage others. This will enable us to produce a fuller and more nuanced picture as to the ways in which schools actively produce inequalities as well as render our understanding of so-called culturally produced oppositional identities that much more robust.

An excellent example of such “working across” is provided by Nolan and Anyon (2004). While employing Willis’s culturally driven framework to focus on Black urban youth in schools, they *connect* their theorizing to “complex interactions of economic, political, historical, and discursive forces” (p. 135) and situate their data within the effects of globalization on urban centers, specifically schools. Affirming the importance of work by King (2005) and others who focus on discursive representations of Blacks in the United States, Nolan and Anyon discuss their empirical findings in relation to the ways in which the media (McCarthy et al., 2004) supports “this new discourse through a dramatic increase in coverage of urban crime and the proliferations of representations of Black and Latino urban men as a ‘new class of superpredators’” (p. 139). Working with and simultaneously pressing against Willis, Nolan and Anyon argue that oppositional forms must be located within a particular political economy and at a specific moment in time. As they note, oppositional identity as produced and enacted by

Black urban youth in poverty neighborhoods in the United States—does not lead to the shop floor. Rather, in this postindustrial era of mass incarceration, oppositional behavior by working-class youth of color in educational institutions often leads them directly into the criminal justice system. (p. 133)

Pressing across the structure–agency divide, Nolan and Anyon powerfully illustrate the ways in which what goes on within the school—high-stakes testing, neoliberal notions of “official knowledge,” and continued stratification resulting from educational policy—“create at least two distinct groups of students—those prepared for high-paying professional jobs, and those who must vie for the low-wage service jobs or enter the illegal economy” (Nolan & Anyon, 2004, pp. 141–142). Taking this seriously suggests that in spite of attempts at resistance and moments of interruption that characterize the analyses of more culturally driven theorists, poor Black and Latino males are, in fact, “learning to do time” (Nolan & Anyon, 2004, p. 144).

We now turn to the context of education, focusing specifically on the division between research on in-school and out-of-school sites. Although we applaud the push to out-of-school sites, including the site of popular culture, there is comparable danger in establishing yet one more site of difference in the field rather than tying such out-of-school research to work done on schools (Weis & Dimitriadis, in press). This is particularly the case in light of massive shifts in the global economy that render the connection between schools and social structure much tighter than ever before. In an effort to engage the outside with the inside of schools, then, we must trespass on the boundaries of the nation-state.

*Reading Across Context: Pushing Into “Out-of-School” Spaces*

Education does not take place just in schools, as anthropologists well know. It occurs at dinnertime, in front of the television set, on street corners, in bookstores, in religious institutions, and in coffee shops. Such spaces can offer recuperation and what participants often call “home” (Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts, 2000; Weis & Fine, 2000). These out-of-school educative sites are not just a set of geographical and spatial arrangements but rather analytical and spatial displacements—a crack, a fissure, a fleeting or sustained set of commitments. Individual dreams, collective work, and critical thoughts can be smuggled in and reimagined (Fine, Weis, Centrie, and Roberts, 2000; Weis & Fine, 2000).

A range of scholars has recently explored spaces for education beyond the traditional classroom: Heath (1983) on home-school connections; Heath and McLaughlin (1993) on community-based organizations; Lareau (1989, 2003) on race, class, and family; Centrie (2004) on the immigrant Vietnamese community; Barry (2000) on gay and lesbian youth; Proweller (2000), D. Kelly (2003), and Luttrell (2003) on pregnant and parenting teens; Hurtado (2003) on Chicana feminists; Dimitriadis (2005) on African American young men in community centers; Fisher (2006) on Black-owned and -operated bookstores; Dolby (2001) on popular culture in South Africa; Pattillo-McCoy (2000) on Black middle-class families in the context of communities and neighborhoods; and Dimitriadis and McCarthy (2001) on popular culture in the United States, among others. We applaud this move, as such scholarship opens up spaces of possibility beyond school borders, spaces that develop, as scholars remind us, in response to deeply entrenched sociohistorical patterns of oppression and exclusion (Evans & Boyte, 1992; Kelley, 1996).

Within this larger genre of research, much recent work valorizes out-of-school settings and popular texts as sites for the production of authentic and vibrant youth identities, particularly for historically disenfranchised urban youth. Dimitriadis (2001), for example, introduces readings of alternative educational contexts with *Performing Identity/Performing Culture: Hip Hop as Text, Pedagogy, and Lived Practice*. In this work, Dimitriadis focuses on how young Black men at a local community center use forms of hip hop culture to construct their personal, racial, and social realities through discussions of the film *Panther*; southern rap, and accounts of the life and death of rapper Tupac Shakur in ways that deviate from popularly held conceptions of urban youth. The author argues “that reception practices—how young people picked up and responded to these hip-hop texts—were unpredictable and became more so when moving from local social networks to individual biographies” (Dimitriadis, 2008, p. 263). These alternative sites produce pedagogies that have a profound impact on youth cultures, as youth produce identities and knowledge “in-between” schools and “in the context of profoundly relational human and caring encounters” (Dimitriadis, 2003, p. 102), specifically those occurring outside of schools.

Such encounters are further probed by Dimitriadis (2003) as he follows the life course of two African American young men as they grow into adulthood. By stepping outside of formal schooling, Dimitriadis is able to challenge popular notions of urban youth culture while simultaneously imploding the associated “good boy”–“bad boy” distinction. Providing us with one example of a broad-based approach to the context of education, Dimitriadis enables us to move beyond

both the boundaries of the traditional classroom as well as those that separate structure from human agency. As he notes,

Looking at such similar stories across different contexts allows us to think simultaneously about the ways in which broad structural questions of class difference might be addressed. The charge here is paying attention to the specificity of individual experience in all its particularity while looking more broadly at how we are all situated by larger structures not ‘of our own choosing.’ In many ways, we need to work toward a language that gets us past a very old and very unhelpful set of dichotomies—between structure and agency, the general and particular, etc. (Dimitriadis, 2008, pp. 270–271)<sup>25</sup>

In similar fashion, Fisher (2006) offers a critical analysis of Black-owned and -operated bookstores, focusing not only on alternative sites for education for youth, but for adults as well. As she states, “Participants viewed this alternative or supplementary education—one that included the geography, histories, cultures, and experiences of peoples throughout the African Diaspora—as an opportunity to access knowledge that was often devalued or omitted from mainstream schooling” (p. 83). Fisher uses the concept of “dual degrees” to emphasize the value of alternative sites for education:

Although a degree is typically associated with formal institutions of higher education, here it is also employed to reference a body of knowledge that is not only “relevant to” but also crafted by people of African descent. . . . A university or college degree would satisfy institutional requirements; however, it would not satisfy requirements to be an informed and engaged member of one’s community. (p. 84)

Although the above-discussed work has opened up an important space to look at and interrogate the ways in which young people’s lives often exceed the delimiting and narrow parameters prescribed in traditional school settings as well as the ways in which such educational alternatives offer space to contest dominant and debilitating narratives about race and gender, such work needs to take more serious account of research on schools. As with our earlier point about limitations associated with the structure–agency divide, research on out-of-school settings is not usefully isolated from important findings embedded in research on in-school settings. This is particularly critical, we would argue, in massively shifting economic context.<sup>26</sup>

As numerous scholars note, we are in new economic times—in a so-called New Economy (Reich, 1991, 2001)—times that affect all of us to be sure, but with particular long-term consequences for today’s youth, most notably poor youth of color. On one level, we see this in the well-documented move from an industrial to a postindustrial global economy where more and more young people will spend their lives working in service sector jobs that provide low wages, few if any benefits, and little job security (Reich, 1991, 2001). On another, broader level, we see this in the ways that *all* labor is coming to operate under these logics. As Head (2005) points out, many of the so-called white-collar job sectors (e.g., those of IT [information technology] and health care) have come to “manage” or “reengineer” the work of their employees in much the same way that Wal-Mart does—segmenting job tasks into discrete units and “flexibly” farming them out to the cheapest possible workers, whether in the United States or, as is increasingly the case, nations such as

India, Mexico, China, among others. The net effect has been both the offshoring of millions and millions of jobs as well as new, massive concentrations of wealth into fewer hands.<sup>27</sup>

Given economic rearrangement and accompanying widespread global realignment, it is clearly the case that there is less and less economic room for *anyone* in the industrialized West under new global economic circumstances. As Stromquist (2002) argues, as a dominant contemporary social process, globalization “links the economic and technical power of certain groups with the knowledge and skills that are produced in schools” (p. xiv), making schooling, in the hard sense of academic attainment and achievement (and as measured in particular and intensified ways), that much more pivotal as a sorting mechanism. Although the school has always been a site of sorting through tracking, vocational education versus preparation for college, and so forth (Spring, 1976), it is arguably the case that this process now takes a different, more vicious shape and form at one and the same time as it is becoming more critical to the future trajectories of youth.

Research conducted on academic achievement and outcomes tells us, for example, that the pipeline from kindergarten through secondary school graduation has constricted markedly over the past two to three decades, both nationally (1968 to 2002) and for the 50 states (1984 to 2000) (Haney et al., 2005). Focusing on simply “staying in school,” data indicate that the attrition rate between Grades 9 and 10 has *tripled* from 1968 to 2002, from less than 4% to nearly 12% (Haney et al., 2005, p. 23). The increasing bulge of students in Grade 9 relative to Grade 8 suggests a sharp increase in the numbers of students who are flunked at Grade 9, providing further evidence of pipeline constriction. Although Haney and colleagues (2005) do not analyze these data by race, it can be assumed that the effects of such attrition fall largely on poor African Americans and Latinos. This is particularly alarming given that there is an increasingly strong link between failure to graduate from high school and the likelihood of being imprisoned (Harlow, 2003).

In addition, Orfield’s (1996) work suggests that desegregation benefits African American students in academic and social terms as well as in relation to college attendance (Boger & Orfield, 2005; Orfield & Lee, 2005). As Orfield and Lee (2005) point out, however, because of the rollback in desegregation court orders, the American school system is rapidly *resegregating*, forcing millions of children into central city schools where more than 90% of the children live in poverty.<sup>28</sup>

Pushing directly into the realm of measured academic achievement, Gamoran’s (2001) work indicates that although the gap in achievement test scores has narrowed by race since 1965, the rate of narrowing has slowed, and even reversed in some cases since 1972. In addition, although racial differences at the bottom of measured academic achievement have narrowed over the years, group differences at the *top* levels of achievement remain large and are narrowing much more slowly (Gamoran, 2001). So too, work on higher education suggests that as a higher proportion of students from less privileged backgrounds go to college (although there is evidence that this, too, will change with recent shifts in federal grants vs. loans to low-income students), students from higher socioeconomic classes pursue more years of college and at increasingly prestigious institutions, thereby maintaining and even exacerbating inequalities related to schooling (Thomas & Bell, 2008). This suggests that even if those at the bottom begin to “close the

achievement gap,” those at the top will run harder and faster both in response to such attempts as well as the stark realities of the new economy.

The corpus of evidence from school-based studies suggests that poor Black and Latino students, in particular, are being more and more excised by the system, whereas those who remain are increasingly less competitive than their privileged (White) counterparts. The New Economy, and schooling related to opportunities produced by such economy, is one where fewer and fewer young people in the United States will prosper. Much evidence suggests that school-based inequalities are widening. This is the case whether we focus on the pipeline, standardized test scores, or status of school or college attended. Although credentials alone do not guarantee economic mobility, they are vitally necessary to compete on this new terrain. In many respects, we see an acceleration of dynamics, which began in the expansion of the education system in the mid 20th century. As Jacobs (2005) argues, “The credential is not a passport to a job, as naïve graduates sometimes suppose. It is more basic and necessary: a passport to consideration for a job” (p. 45). Although this perhaps has been true for the past hundred years or so, there is and will continue to be less and less “slippage” in this regard.

Given this context, we are in an ironic scholarly moment of valorizing cultural productions in nontraditional learning sites (including popular culture) without ever asking how such youth vibrancy articulates with, or perhaps flies in the face of, the important body of literature in sociology of education on schools as sorting mechanisms. This means that research on out-of-school sites, particularly those that valorize youth cultural practices, *must* be read against what we know to be happening in schools. As a large body of research (informed both by status attainment and reproduction theory) going as far back as the early 1970s reminds us, the school is profoundly linked to social and economic outcomes. As with our example of the sharp divide between structure and agency then, it is less than helpful for researchers to act on the mistaken notion that important bodies of literature in the sociology of education are totally disconnected. This is particularly the case in light of the massively altered global economic context.<sup>29</sup>

### Concluding Thoughts

As we suggest in this essay, research in the sociology of education is now marked by intense difference of theory and method, with little accompanying recognition that “it is the ability to ‘trespass’ that may lead to major gains in our understanding” (Bourdieu, cited in Apple, 1996, p. 125). This is particularly ironic given that many of us lived through, and are marked by, the theoretical and methodological struggles, debates, and difference that we chronicle in the first section of this essay. Although some of what we discuss may be understood as being within the bounds of “normal” scientific progress, this is not the case if individuals and groups engage in border protection strategies at the expense of good research practice. Though the field is armed with unique, critical minds, we believe little can be accomplished with further fragmentation based on the stark defense of theoretical and methodological difference, with little accompanying reading and serious engagement across such difference. We therefore question the effectiveness of any widespread practice that seals off possibility through deeply entrenched theoretical and methodological divide, feeling strongly that it is time to work across, insofar as it makes sense to do so, starkly etched boundaries that mark and

perpetuate both the subcomponents of the field and its limits. As we demonstrate here, proceeding into a future with our narrowly conceived theoretical and methodological constructs without ever availing ourselves of work produced across such constructs is no longer useful. Proceeding into this same future clearly marked by dramatic economic and cultural shift without shifting our *own* approach and sensibilities dooms us to the proverbial academic treadmill—producing intense movement inside heightened university demands for research productivity without actually going anywhere. By reflecting on apparent gulfs of difference such as we have done here and subsequently working theory and method toward commonly valued ends, we stand some chance to more fully and authentically describe and theorize social conditions, and perhaps effect change.

Here we challenge the restrictive nature of academic discourse as it plays out in sociology of education. By way of contrast, we advocate for a more comprehensive and inclusive approach that is, at its root, based on broad-based research problems. Such an approach must remain academically rigorous and value traditional academic critique while at the same time work the borders of theory, method, and geographic space or location as better suited to broad-based scholarly intersectionality. We advocate nothing short of pushing the boundaries of theory, method, and place or space while simultaneously moving to understand and challenge social inequalities linked to education in massively shifting world context.

### Notes

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<sup>1</sup>It must be underscored that these renditions of the field often marked very important scholarly moments in an intellectually tumultuous time. Such key reviews did not necessarily intend to “lock-in” theoretical and methodological difference. Karabel and Halsey (1977), for example, authored a critically important essay that focuses on competing frameworks in the sociology of education, stressing the importance of blending interpretive studies of schools with structural analyses. As time goes on, however, the kind of intense struggle over framework and method that is evidenced in this earlier period almost entirely disappears. Also see Apple and Weis (1983, pp. 3–33).

<sup>2</sup>The scope of this review is confined by and large to materials concerning U.S. education. Key research produced in countries other than the United States (that was published in and/or translated into English) is also included when such work is highly relevant to the topic at hand and has simultaneously exerted a strong impact on the U.S. sociology of education research under consideration. In addition, although a number of scholars mentioned in this essay are neither trained as nor characterized as sociologists of education (whether by self or others), we highlight their work as it is our judgment that this work is or has been highly relevant to the broad scholarly endeavor that constitutes the epicenter of our analysis. As Apple (1996) aptly notes, “Surveying a field is itself an act of cultural production. Like social and cultural activity in general, any field encompasses multiple dynamics, multiple and partly overlapping histories, and is in constant motion” (p. 125). Noting that “what actually counts, as the sociology of education is a construction,” he further argues that

academic boundaries are themselves culturally produced and are often the results of complex “policing” actions by those who have the power to enforce them and to declare what is or is not the subject of “legitimate” sociological inquiry. Yet, as Bourdieu (1990) reminds us, it is the ability to “trespass” that may lead to major gains in our understanding. (Apple, 1996, p. 125)

In light of Apple’s important comments, we stress that our primary goal in this essay is not to delimit the field *per se* but rather to make a larger point—that the field as we know it emerged out of theoretical and methodological struggle, debate, and difference and that we must actively engage such difference as we move forward. Although this is the case for all fields, the subject at hand is sociology of education.

<sup>3</sup>It is important to note that the Coleman report has been subject to much important scholarly debate and critique. See, for example, Mosteller and Moynihan (1972) and particularly Bowles and Levin (1968) for important critical consideration of Coleman’s study. Despite trenchant critique, however, a long-term effect of the report is the shift in definition of equality of opportunity to one of school outputs rather than inputs. Working from within the life-chance and equality of opportunity genres, Jencks et al. (1972) offer an important challenge to this line of research, suggesting that equalizing educational opportunity, no matter how defined, cannot in itself result in equality of social or economic outcomes. Jenck et al.’s work was similarly subject to important debate and critique. See Levine and Bane (1975).

<sup>4</sup>The conception of the “new sociology of education” is commonly perceived as having originated in the minds of British scholars, but as King (2008) reminds us, Black scholars such as Ellis, Du Bois, and Woodson were thinking, theorizing, actively pursuing change, and producing scholarship about issues related to power, ideology, and the development of school knowledge prior to White scholars within and outside of the United States and Britain. Banks (1993) and Gordon (1990) have made similar observations regarding the contributions of these early Black scholars.

<sup>5</sup>Important work by Woodson and others on what King (2005) calls “alienating school knowledge or what is (and is not) taught—about African history, culture, and the significance of the contributions of African people on world development, community building, and economic development” (p. 11) as well as the ways in which such knowledge serves to disenfranchise Black students, is never seriously taken up in this set of challenges. This is in spite of the fact that numerous Black scholars were writing on this subject long before White sociologists of education took up the ways in which school knowledge serves to advantage or disadvantage students from particular backgrounds.

<sup>6</sup>Willis (1983) and Apple (1978) author important pieces regarding the similarities and differences among these subtheories, carefully pointing out the ways in variations of reproduction theory emerge in relation to prior empirical and theoretical work.

<sup>7</sup>Rather than pursuing strains of heavy gender-based critique, Arnot (2004) suggests that Willis pries open a sociology of masculinity, thereby establishing its intellectual terrain for the next 25 years. Important work on masculinities by Connell (1995, 2000), Kenway and Fitzclarence (1997), Jackson (2002), Kimmel (1996), and others follows.

<sup>8</sup>Notable examples here include but are not limited to Anyon (1981), Borman (1991), Proweller (1998), Wexler (1987), S. Lee (1996), MacLeod (1987), Solomon (1992), Fine (1991), Fordham (1996), Valenzuela (1999), McNeil (1986), Foley (1990), Weis (1990, 2004), Luttrell (1997), Gaskell (1992), and Dance (2002).

<sup>9</sup>This is not to deny the more recent theoretical and empirical challenges around class, race, gender, and social inequalities (Arnot, 2002; Arnot, David, & Weiner, 1999; King, 2005; Lather, 1991; McCarthy, 1988, 1993; McCarthy, Crichlow, Dimitriadis, & Dolby, 2005; Weis, 2008). Although consideration of the scope and impact of such challenge is beyond the scope of this essay, we urge serious consideration of this topic in light of our argument.

<sup>10</sup>This section has benefitted from important discussions with Joyce King.

<sup>11</sup>Green, Camilli, and Elmore (2006) exemplify this important step toward the use of complementary research methods. The authors argue for the union of particular methods for particular purposes, thereby extending and strengthening our conception regarding research related to social concerns in education.

<sup>12</sup>As noted above, it is not our intention to draw ever more rigid lines around the field but rather to trace important threads of influence while urging a more open-minded disposition regarding work produced under a range of competing theories and methods.

<sup>13</sup>It is worth pointing out that all researchers must reflect on their own power as researchers in authorizing knowledge about others. Although qualitative researchers take on this task directly, quantitative researchers ought not be exempt from this form of reflexivity.

<sup>14</sup>For too long now quantitative research has been considered empirical research whereas qualitative research is rarely accorded this status. The fact is that both major methodologies rely on empirical data. The American Educational Research Association (AERA) Standards for Reporting on Empirical Social Science Research in AERA Publications are exceptionally helpful in this regard. These standards make clear both that qualitative research is empirical and that reports of all empirical research should be warranted and transparent (AERA 2006).

<sup>15</sup>Although the argument has been made that participatory research strategies aim to be more empowering and inclusive as well as being more located within and for community, consideration of this point is beyond the scope of this essay (Fine, 1994; Fine et al., 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999).

<sup>16</sup>Again, methods alone can never resolve the many power-related issues involved in conducting research. Although important, consideration of this particular issue is not within the defined scope of this essay. In this regard, see Fine's (1994) important essay on "working the hyphen" and Fine, Weis, Weseen, and Wong (2003).

<sup>17</sup>In similar fashion, those who evidence little to no cross-methodological training will be unable to participate on research teams that will increasingly demand familiarity with both major methodologies at one and the same time as such teams will, we believe, be poised to produce some of the most broad-based and important scholarly findings. Although full consideration of this point is beyond the scope of this essay, it must also be noted that there is considerable pressure in the academy toward team-based research, as such research stands a better chance of attracting external dollars. The generation of external money is particularly critical in state-assisted institutions, where there is marked evidence of fiscal abandonment. As money needs to come from somewhere, and tuition can only go so high, universities increasingly look toward faculty to generate grants.

<sup>18</sup>Pushing into the effects of school-based policies and practices as part of a larger cross-methodological team-based approach to such questions will encourage the field to take into account important work by researchers of color in sociology of knowledge

and pedagogy. Building on Woodson's point that "ideologically biased school knowledge systematically teaches whites to feel superior and Black people to feel inferior" (cited in Cochran-Smith, Feiman-Nemser, McIntyre, & Demers, 2008, p. 1095), recent work by C. Lee (2007), King, (2007), Wynter (2003), and Murrell (2003), among others, stresses the ways in which "official knowledge" and the nature of its distribution devalue the contributions of marginalized peoples, serving to suppress both academic engagement and achievement among African American students in particular. Work on decolonizing methodologies and indigenous epistemologies by Tuhiwai Smith (1999) and others is also important in this regard.

<sup>19</sup>Although we focus on two exemplar areas in this essay, we encourage others to take up the task of reading and writing across theoretical and methodological difference in sociology of education through other examples.

<sup>20</sup>It is important to note that sexual orientation also constitutes a key part of this interlocking system although it is not often conceptualized or recognized as such in frameworks of intersectionality. Weis (1990, 2004), for example, argues that the representation of gay men as "other" is tied in key ways to the production of White working-class male identity in the latter quarter of the 20th century. Her empirical work over a 15-year time period suggests that the production of class can only be understood in relation to other key nodes of difference, including race, gender, and sexuality. Although not the focus of this essay, we urge further consideration of this issue.

<sup>21</sup>Picking up on our earlier argument as to strengths associated with a range of methods, we call attention to the work of Steinbugler, Press, and Dias (2006) and Lopez (2003). Steinbugler et al. operationalize the intersection of gender and race in survey research, investigating how gender or racial stereotypes about African Americans affect White attitudes toward affirmative action programs. Through qualitative techniques of investigation, Lopez explores the mechanisms through which second-generation Caribbean students in the United States are gendered and raced and the impact of such race and gender intersectionality on the school engagement, experiences, and outcomes of young men and women of color. In both studies there is value added by trespassing race and gender categories, at one and the same time, as they suggest the importance of a range of methods and methodologies with regard to the empirical exploration of intersectionality.

<sup>22</sup>We do not mean to deny that race and gender, in particular, must be seen as ideological productions. A focus on the intersections between and among race, class, and gender and the ways in which such intersectionality is tied to ongoing inequalities does not necessarily contradict the notion that race and gender are ideologically constructed and produced to begin with. Our point here is that there are important research possibilities associated with class, race, and gender intersectionality, or what Weis (2008) calls the "nested" context of class, race, and gender.

<sup>23</sup>Horvat and O'Connor (2006) edited an important volume that offers critique of Ogbu's framework, specifically the notion of "acting White."

<sup>24</sup>It is not our intention to equate in any simplistic manner the experiences and practices of Willis's White "lads" in the United Kingdom with those of Black males in the United States or elsewhere (see Wright [2005] for work on discursive representations of Black youth in the United Kingdom)—an experience set within very different social and historical contexts, discursive representations of the designated "other" (e.g., Black male vs. White working-class male), and degree of marginality. Our point here is that the genre of scholarship that spawns notions of oppositional cultural production is

almost entirely disconnected from what we know to be policies, practices, and debilitating ideological representations (particularly in the case of Black males) that circulate within schools and the broader society. It is arguably the case that such school-based policies, practices, and ideological constructions *directly* encourage the oppositional identities picked up by more culturally driven theorists, a point that cannot be engaged without reference to both structure and agency. See, for example, Ferguson's (2001) work on Black masculinity in public schools.

<sup>25</sup>Though not necessarily focused on the lives of youth and youth identity formation, important work has been done on wider populations, including adults as to the ways in which spaces outside the context of formal education enable the contestation of dominant narratives and allow for cracks and fissures in traditionally held notions and assumptions. Fisher's (2006) analysis offers an example of such work.

<sup>26</sup>Although for present purposes we focus on the economic aspects of globalization, we are well aware that globalization is a broad-based and multifaceted contemporary process that involves culture, technology, and the movement of peoples across national borders. See, for example, Appadurai's (1996) work on shifts in global flows of people and products, Kenway and Bullen's (2002) discussion of gender and labor roles, Blackmore's (2000) writing on gender and education, and Burbules's (2000) work on the role of technology in the global community. It is also noteworthy that writing in these areas has flourished within and across the social sciences at the same time that critical indigenous scholarship that privileges local knowledge and cross-site indigenous knowledges (Battiste, 2000; Gilmore, Smith, & Kairaiuak, 2004; Grande, 2004; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2005) has gained intellectual and political ascendancy. This range of work exhibits the kind of vibrant debate across difference that we call for in this essay.

<sup>27</sup>This section draws on work by Weis and Dimitriadis (2008).

<sup>28</sup>It is not universally accepted that desegregated schools have worked to the benefit of poor African Americans and Latinos. Using alternative methodologies, Walker (1996, 2000, 2001), Foster (1993), and Noguera (2001) argue that desegregated institutions do not necessarily benefit poor African American and Latino students. These data point to continued racial segregation within ostensibly desegregated schools, thereby perpetuating racially linked access to knowledge and curricula. Although we appreciate the nuances of this debate and do not mean to suggest that desegregated institutions are necessarily better for students of color in all respects, we call attention to the increasingly large numbers of African American and Latino students who now attend central city schools where more than 90% of the children live in poverty.

<sup>29</sup>Although we touch on this only briefly in the final section of this essay, future work in the sociology of education must focus more seriously on the larger world context as one that informs and is informed by local (regional and national) action. As Apple (2000) reminds us, "It is impossible to understand current educational policy in the United States without placing it in its global context" (p. 58). Examples of excellent studies that take the world context more fully into account include but are not limited to those of S. Lee (2005) and Dolby (2001). S. Lee, for example, exemplifies this approach in her study of the identity formation of Hmong American youth in school. She situates her analysis inside the broader context of the global economy, the segmented racial structure of the United States, and the ways in which such structures and accompanying discursive representations interconnect with the production of

“Asian” youth in general and Hmong youth in particular. Similarly, Dolby situates her research on youth in South Africa in the global context and uses this context to deepen our understanding of the shaping of youth identity through popular culture. As she notes, “Through the course of study, the global context of popular culture emerges as a critical site for the negotiation of race: for the marking of racialized borders, and for their subsequent displacement and rearrangement” (p. 9). Situating the production of identities inside global sensibilities enables these authors to go well beyond existing work in their area. We not only gain insight as to the complexities of identity formation and educational and social inequalities in a global economy but also add to our knowledge base regarding the links between and among race, class, and gender as well as the interactive workings of structure and agency.

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