

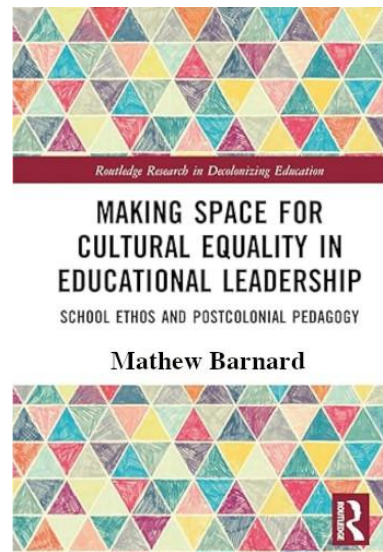
Barnard, M. (2024). *Making space for cultural equality in educational leadership: School ethos and postcolonial pedagogy*. Routledge.

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In *Making Space for Cultural Equality in Educational Leadership*, Mathew Barnard uses case study evidence from three schools in Leicester, England, to demonstrate how the nation's colonial past continues to impose cultural hegemony on its increasingly multicultural present. Additionally, he discusses the role school leaders play in facilitating or impeding this process. Barnard argues that education leaders have the ability and the responsibility to create postcolonial spaces within their schools where all students' cultural capital is recognized by the institution. Grounded in Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital and Lefebvre's (1991) work on spatial codes, Barnard argues that leaders possess the greatest opportunity to create these spaces at what the author terms the "meso-level" of the school: the areas students and staff inhabit (e.g., hallways and classrooms) and the objects the institution produces (e.g., special assemblies and school newsletters). By doing so, education leaders can begin to reshape schools from sites of cultural reproduction to sites of cultural genesis—places where students' various cultural backgrounds are not only recognized but also inform the operation of the institution.



In its introduction, Barnard situates the book alongside academic works that seek "to disrupt Whiteness in cultural capital research" (p. 1). The context is Britain, a nation with a well-documented history of colonization, and one that has since experienced an influx of "Global Majority" residents, i.e., individuals from or tracing ancestry to the nonwhite nations that make up much of the world's population. Barnard argues that these conditions do not exist in isolation. The increasing diversity of Britain has engendered a social, political, and institutional response that he terms "cultural securitisation" [*sic*]. He cites policies like Fundamental British Values and Prevent as part of an effort to define and preserve what constitutes *valid* British culture. Fundamental British Values (FBV)

mandates that schools promote the values of “democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs” (p. 41). Prevent requires schools to engage in early intervention with students seen as at-risk for radicalization or supporting terrorism. Driving this effort is what Barnard refers to as the “colonial metanarrative”: the set of beliefs used to justify the colonial project that remains prevalent in many Western societies. Central to the colonial metanarrative is the idea that people from the Global Majority are inferior, and therefore have inferior cultures, values, and ways of knowing. Barnard claims that the role of cultural securitisation policy is to insulate White British culture from the presumed deleterious influence of the nation’s Global Majority residents.

In Chapter 2, Barnard discusses the implications of cultural securitisation policy for educational spaces using Pierre Bourdieu’s (1986) concept of cultural capital. As cited in the chapter, Bourdieu argues that culture acts like other forms of capital in that it is possessed by individuals and can be used to access benefits or contribute to further production. However, an individual’s culture can only be used to access these benefits if it is accepted as valuable by society and its institutions. In the schools under study, Barnard examines how students’ cultural backgrounds are given or denied cultural capital by the institution and its leadership. In Chapter 3, he explains that this analysis is conducted at three levels, each derived from Henri Lefebvre’s (1991) concept of space: the micro-level (the formal curriculum and teaching practice), the meso-level (the inhabited spaces like hallways and school assemblies), and the macro-level (the building, its planned facilities, and institutional policies). Of particular interest is the meso-level space, which Barnard argues holds the most promise for education leaders to recognize the cultural capital of Global Majority students.

In Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the author presents his analysis of case study data collected from two secondary schools (ages 11-16) and one sixth-form school (ages 16-18) in the city of Leicester. Each school served a majority of Global Majority students at the time of the study, a key reason for their selection. Through observations, interviews, and artifact analyses, Barnard dissects how education leaders make use of the meso-level space of their schools, and how these uses may impact students’ perceptions of the value of their culture in the schooling experience. Across the three chapters and three institutions, the book features several key themes. While most students at each school were from the Global Majority, leadership teams were mostly White British, with Global Majority representation increasing at the “pastoral” level. Pastoral roles are like counselors or student deans in the U.S. and constitute a lower level of authority. Within the meso-level spaces of each school, few cases could be identified in which Global Majority students’ cultural capital was reflected or represented. For those instances in which the school recognized diverse cultural capital, they were often temporary events or displays initiated by students or teachers, representing deviations from the normal uses of space in the institution. Lastly, a prevailing attitude among the staff and students interviewed, with a few notable exceptions, was that cultural difference was something to be neutralized in the school setting.

In the analysis of each case, Barnard presents this lack of spatial representation and attitude of cultural indifference as part of the broader project of cultural securitisation in Britain. He asserts that no space is neutral, being imbued with the culture of its producers—in this instance, White British practices, values, and ways of knowing. Therefore, by treating the cultural differences of Global Majority students as a potential impediment instead of a resource to their education, schools work—sometimes unwittingly—to preserve this inherent cultural orientation and inhibit these students' efforts to influence the structure and operation of educational spaces. As a result, Global Majority students are made to adapt to the institution, foregoing the opportunity to share and learn in an authentically multicultural environment. The book's conclusion sums up this process of assimilation with a poignant quote from an interview with a vice-principal: "We're certainly global in terms of what comes in. Are we global in what comes out? I don't know..." (p. 138). Throughout the findings and analysis section of each case, Barnard returns to the core argument that education leaders possess the ability to change this environment of cultural exclusion by consciously working to make the meso-level space of their school one that recognizes the embodied cultural capital of their students. This requires that leaders work to imbue the lived spaces of the school with the cultural knowledge, skills, values, and norms of their students. By doing so, Barnard asserts that by doing so, leaders chip away at the falsehoods of the colonial metanarrative and signal to Global Majority students that they too possess cultural capital within the institution.

Making Space for Cultural Equality in Educational Leadership is written at the intersection of multiple fields of study: the legacy of colonialism, school leadership, cultural capital, educational spaces, and culturally relevant education. Barnard employs a nuanced theoretical framework for case study analyses, the components of which are laid out in detail in the first three chapters. This is perhaps the book's greatest strength, as Barnard deftly weaves together multiple concepts from the disciplines in a coherent and accessible manner. Further, the author examines the topic of education leadership and spatial practice through an important perceptual lens, positioning schools as sites of intentional cultural suppression, as opposed to sites of cultural ignorance or apathy. This framing broadens the scope of the case study research, identifying opportunities for schools to recognize students' cultural capital while also highlighting extant practices that inflict cultural harm. It also speaks to the book's international import, as its conceptualization of cultural securitisation policy echoes concerted political efforts in nations like the United States to stem the tide of cultural diversification and use institutions like public education to reassert whiteness, patriarchy, and the Christian religion at the center of national identity.

This strength in theory is tempered somewhat by the book's lack of practice-oriented recommendations for school leaders. While the argument for the use of the meso-level space of schools to recognize students' cultural capital is clear, the book provides few actionable strategies for doing so. Future contributions might focus on translating this theory into practice, providing resources for education leaders to engage in postcolonial pedagogy. Furthering this work not only has significant implications for education in Britain, but also for the social and cultural development of a rapidly diversifying Western world.

References

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About the Book Author

Mathew Barnard is a lecturer in education at Keele University in Staffordshire. He earned his PhD from the University of Birmingham in 2020. His work focuses on the social, political, and global aspects of education in formal and informal settings. He is particularly interested in the growing “securitization” of culture, politics, and epistemology within educational institutions and public spaces.

About the Reviewer

Blake Marlowe is a doctoral student at the University of Texas at Austin studying education policy and planning. His research and advocacy work focuses on how fiscal policy impacts K-12 students, particularly those on the social and economic margins of society. This interest was cultivated during his seven years working in public education as a teacher and program supervisor. In addition to his graduate work, Blake is an associate member of the Texas Legislative Education Equity Coalition (TLEEC), a policy advocacy collaborative dedicated to improving the quality and equity of public education in Texas. Blake received his bachelor’s degree in history and social sciences from the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point and his master’s degree in education policy from the University of Texas at San Antonio.



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