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Title

Writing Inequality Across Borders: Auto-socio-biographical Literature as a Transnational Resource for Educational Reflection

Research Overview

This paper examines auto-sociobiographical writing as a transnational educational resource. Focusing on the widely translated works of Annie Ernaux and Édouard Louis, it explores how literary narratives of social inequality travel across contexts and foster critical reflection on class, education, and habitus in a globalized world.

Purpose of the Study

In recent years, autosociobiographical narratives that reflect on social class and educational trajectories have gained significant international attention. Authors such as Annie Ernaux and Édouard Louis, whose works have been widely translated and circulated across linguistic and cultural contexts, exemplify a broader transnational phenomenon of writing social inequality. This paper approaches these texts as forms of “auto-socio-biographical” (Ernaux 2003, p. 17) writing that not only depict class experiences but actively engage in the production and transformation of knowledge about inequality. Drawing on a Bourdieusian framework (Bourdieu 1992, 2005), the paper explores how such texts travel across contexts (Twellmann & Lammers 2023) and contribute to educational discourses beyond national boundaries. By situating these writings within global debates on education, inequality, and cultural production, the study highlights their relevance as a transnational resource for critical educational reflection.

The paper aims to investigate how auto-socio-biographical texts function as educational resources in a transnational context. It asks how narratives of class mobility, exclusion, and belonging, articulated in different stylistic and affective registers, can contribute to processes of critical reflection on social inequality across diverse educational settings. While existing research has often focused on the sociological analysis of such

texts, this study shifts the perspective towards their educational potential: How do these narratives enable readers to engage with issues of class, habitus, and symbolic power? And how can they be understood as mediators between individual experience and broader social structures in a globalized context?

Research Methods

The paper follows a theoretically grounded, interpretive approach. It combines concepts from Pierre Bourdieu's theory of practice, particularly habitus, cultural capital, and symbolic violence, with insights from educational theory on transformative and reflective learning. The analysis focuses on selected works by Annie Ernaux and Édouard Louis as exemplary cases of auto-sociobiographical writing. Rather than treating these texts as mere representations of social reality, they are analyzed as practices that produce and negotiate knowledge about inequality. In addition, the paper considers the international reception and circulation of these works, including their translation into multiple languages, as part of their educational significance. This allows for a conceptualization of literature as a transnational medium of knowledge production and dissemination.

Results and Discussion

The analysis shows that auto-socio-biographical texts operate as powerful sites of knowledge production in which social inequality is not only described but actively processed and reconfigured. Through distinct narrative styles, Ernaux and Louis articulate different modes of engaging with classed experience, ranging from distanced, almost ethnographic observation to affectively charged and confrontational accounts. These stylistic differences shape how inequality becomes visible and thinkable for readers across contexts.

Importantly, the transnational circulation of these texts enables a form of "co-creation of knowledge" that resonates with the conference theme. As readers in different cultural and educational contexts engage with these narratives, they are invited to relate them to their own experiences and social positions. In this sense, auto-socio-biographical writing can be understood as a catalyst for reflexive learning processes that extend beyond formal educational institutions.

At the same time, the paper argues that these texts carry a subversive potential in that they challenge dominant narratives of meritocracy and individual success that are prevalent in many educational systems worldwide. By foregrounding the structural conditions of inequality and the embodied dimensions of class, they disrupt taken-for-granted assumptions about education as a neutral or purely individual endeavor. From a Bourdieusian perspective, this can be interpreted as a form of symbolic struggle over the legitimate representation of social reality.

The findings suggest that literature, often marginalized in discussions of educational research, should be taken seriously as a site where educational processes occur and where knowledge about inequality is negotiated in ways that are accessible across cultural boundaries.

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Keywords

Social Inequality; Auto-socio-biography; Pierre Bourdieu; Habitus; Transclasse