

Chaire Jacques Leclercq 2026-2027

UCLouvain, Faculty of Social Sciences – Department of Sociology

8–12 March 2027

Rethinking Educational Justice in Secondary Schooling

Mechanisms of Inequality and the Politics of Care

Aina Tarabini, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)

General Description

This course offers a sociological approach to the study of educational (in)justice in secondary schooling, examining how inequalities are produced, experienced and potentially challenged within educational institutions. Starting from the classical debate between reproduction and resistance theories, the course adopts a multidimensional understanding of educational justice, encompassing redistribution, recognition, representation and care, as an analytical lens for examining three interconnected levels of the schooling process: the macro level of structural mechanisms (social origin, school segregation and educational transitions), the meso level of institutional practices (curriculum, pedagogy and the politics of care), and the micro level of relational and affective dynamics (teachers' expectations, labelling processes, and students' attitudes and forms of resistance).

Combining conceptual discussion with empirical material, including qualitative interview data and ethnographic vignettes drawn from the instructor's own research, the course invites students to engage critically and collectively with questions of justice, equality and social transformation in contemporary secondary education. Each session combines a lecture with collective work grounded in empirical material, and the course concludes by considering, more broadly, the conditions under which more equitable and caring forms of schooling might become possible.

Session 1. Educational Inequality as a Sociological Problem: Reproduction, Resistance and the Mechanisms of Inequality

This first session introduces the sociological study of educational inequality, situating it within the classical debate between functionalist, reproduction and resistance theories. It presents a multidimensional framework for understanding how inequality is produced through social, systemic, institutional, relational and subjective mechanisms, which will structure the analytical logic of the course as a whole. In this session we will also work collectively with excerpts of biographical and interview material, identifying which mechanisms and theoretical lenses best account for the experiences described.

Readings:

Mandatory:

Tarabini, A. (2023). Learning and Human Development: Sociological Explanations of Learning Inequalities. In C. Maxwell, M. Yemini & L. Engel (Eds.), *Sociological Foundations of Education*. London: Bloomsbury.

Complementary:

Giroux, H. A. (1983). Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(3), 257–293

Apple, M. W., Ball, S. J. & Gandin, L. A. (2010). Introduction: Mapping the Sociology of Education: Social Context, Power and Knowledge. In M. W. Apple, S. J. Ball & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 1–11). London: Routledge.

Session 2. Rethinking Equality: Redistribution, Recognition, Representation and Care

This session moves from three classical conceptions of equality (equality of opportunity, of conditions and of outcomes) to a broader, four-dimensional model of educational justice. Building on Fraser's distinction between redistribution, recognition and representation, and on feminist theorisations of care and affective (in)equality, the session introduces care as a fourth, often neglected, dimension of justice. In this session we will also work collectively, organised around the four dimensions of justice, to map specific expressions of (in)justice in schools,

their causes and possible remedies. This work anticipates the structure of Sessions 3 to 5, which revisit these dimensions at, respectively, the macro, meso and micro levels of schooling.

Readings:

Mandatory:

Lynch, K. & Baker, J. (2005). Equality in Education: An Equality of Condition Perspective.

Complementary:

Reay, D. (2012). What Would a Socially Just Education System Look Like?: Saving the Minnows from the Pike. *Journal of Education Policy*, 27(5), 587–599.

Gale, T. (2000). Rethinking Social Justice in Schools: How Will We Recognize It When We See It? *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 4(3), 253–269.

Session 3. Macro Mechanisms of Inequality: Capitals, School Segregation and Educational Transitions

Focusing on the macro level, this session examines how social origin, the unequal distribution of capitals, and the architecture of the education system (particularly school segregation and the divide between academic and vocational tracks at the post-compulsory transition) structure students' educational trajectories. Comparative and qualitative data on early school leaving and post-16 transitions will be used to discuss how issues of redistribution and representation operate at this structural level. This session will also involve collective work with this comparative and qualitative material.

Readings:

Mandatory:

Nylund, M., Rosvall, P.-Å., Eiríksdóttir, E., Holm, A.-S., Isopahkala-Bouret, U., Niemi, A.-M. & Ragnarsdóttir, G. (2018). The Academic–Vocational Divide in Three Nordic Countries: Implications for Social Class and Gender. *Education Inquiry*, 9(1), 97–121.

Complementary:

Tarabini, A. & Jacovkis, J. (2021). The Politics of Educational Transitions: Evidence from Catalonia. *European Educational Research Journal*, 20(2), 212–227.

Bonal, X. & González Motos, S. (2023). The Spatially Uneven Effects of a Desegregation Education Policy. *European Educational Research Journal*, 24(1), 30–47

Session 4. Meso Mechanisms of Inequality: Curriculum, Pedagogy and the Politics of Care

This session turns to the meso, institutional level of the school, focusing on curriculum, pedagogy and the affective dimension of teaching. Drawing on the concept of "powerful knowledge" and on the notion of "productive pedagogies", it examines how questions of recognition and representation are embedded in decisions about what counts as valid school knowledge, and how pedagogical practices implicitly construct an "ideal student". Building on the notion of "pedagogic affect", the session also considers care as an institutional and pedagogical practice embedded in curriculum and teaching, rather than a purely personal disposition. This session will also involve collective work on the traits attributed to the ideal student and on how curricular and pedagogical practices might be reconsidered from the standpoint of recognition, representation and care.

Readings:

Mandatory:

Watkins, M. (2010). Pedagogic Affect/Effect: Embodying a Desire to Learn. *Pedagogy, Culture & Society*, 18(1), 57–74.

Complementary:

Lingard, B. & Mills, C. (2007). Pedagogies Making a Difference: Issues of Social Justice and Inclusion. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 11(3), 233–244.

Young, M. & Muller, J. (2013). On the Powers of Powerful Knowledge. *Review of Education*, 1(3), 229–250.

Session 5. Micro Mechanisms of Inequality: Teachers' Expectations, Students' Attitudes and forms of school resistance

The final session focuses on the micro level of relational and affective dynamics within the classroom. It introduces labelling theory and the sociological study of teachers' expectations, examining how the construction of the "ideal student" translates into differential treatment,

self-fulfilling dynamics and unequal affective recognition. The session then turns to the other side of this relationship: students' own attitudes towards schooling, including forms of engagement, disengagement and resistance, and how these are shaped by social class, gender and ethnicity. Building on the discussions of care introduced in previous sessions, the session closes by considering the classroom as a space in which relational and affective justice is played out on an everyday basis.

Readings:

Mandatory:

Archer, L. (2008). The Impossibility of Minority Ethnic Educational 'Success'? An Examination of the Discourses of Teachers and Pupils in British Secondary Schools. *European Educational Research Journal*, 7(1), 89–107.

Complementary:

Hatt, B. (2012). Smartness as a Cultural Practice in Schools. *American Educational Research Journal*, 49(3), 438–460.

Tarabini, A., Curran, M. & Castejón, A. (2022). Ability as Legitimation of Tracking: Teachers' Representations of Students in Vocational and Academic Tracks. *British Educational Research Journal*, 48(6), 1052–1071.

Assessment

Students will be assessed through a written essay (3,000–4,000 words) in which they develop an educational biography, either real or fictional, and analyse it through the mechanisms of inequality and the dimensions of justice discussed throughout the course. This essay accounts for 70–80% of the final grade. The remaining 20–30% is based on continuous participation in the collective work carried out during the five sessions.