Equity in Education

Edited by
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Contents

Contents

Equity in Education: An Introduction

Walter G. Secada

The purpose of this book is dual. Our first goal is to help bring equity back into the fore of discourse within educational debates; our second is to move that debate forward by providing new insights into the nature of equity which build upon prior work in the area. In the recent past, within both the United States and Great Britain there has been a shift away from concern for those for whom certain social arrangements have resulted in an unequal distribution of goods — wealth as well as education — towards a concern for more efficient production in terms of economic, military and educational systems.

In the United States, that shift began with an effort by the Reagan administration to dismantle the Department of Education and to remove the federal government from education. Failing at that, federal policy towards education was articulated in a reorganized Department of Education, which took a deregulatory stance; in which standards of 'excellence' replaced those of equity; ability and selectivity replaced needs and access; social and welfare concerns were ignored as economic productivity took the fore; parental choice and private education replaced the neighborhood public school; state and local autonomy overshadowed federal interventions (Clark and Astuto, 1986). By refusing to go along with many of the administration's most extreme positions, and by tempering others, the Congress served a moderating influence in that process.

Adding to this climate were concerns about the quality of American education in the face of increasing economic competition from abroad. The specter of a 'rising tide of mediocrity' haunted *A Nation at Risk* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). In mathematics, American students — even the most able — were found to lag seriously

behind their peers in most other industrialized nations, especially Japan (McKnight *et al.*, 1987).

Not surprisingly, calls for educational reform within the United States, pointed to the need for greater numbers of better educated students who will become a technologically literate work force and military and who will enable the United States to meet increased competition, economically and militarily. (National Alliance of Business, 1986; National Science Board Commission on Precollege Education in Mathematics, Science and Technology, 1983; Task Force on Education for Economic Growth, 1983). The rhetoric of these calls followed the rhetoric of production: schools were judged excellent based on their producing the desired kind of students, and students were expected to engage in work, even if it was termed academic (Tomlinson and Walberg, 1986).

Within that discourse, previous efforts for obtaining equity and/or equality of educational opportunity were faulted for the decline in educational standards. Tomlinson (1986) asked the rhetorically loaded question, 'Which way lies equity: making schools easy by routing students around academic courses, especially hard ones, or insisting that all children encounter the academic core even if some of them have a difficult time of it?' (p. 16), thereby linking efforts at equity with the threatened tide of mediocrity. It is hardly a wonder that the AERA Committee on the Role and Status of Women in Educational Research and Development (1983) likened the context of its equity concerns to being 'in a cold climate'.

Equity was not totally lost; rather, it was transformed by the rhetoric of 'excellence'. In this transformation, the very real disparities between men vs. women; Whites vs. Blacks, Hispanics and Native American Indians; and among socioeconomic groups which can be found along various educational indicators — school completion/dropping out, course taking, and academic achievement being the major ones — were used to help legitimate reform couched in terms of excellence, and for the *overall* populace. In this transformation, the original concern for the education of women, minorities and individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds was submerged to a concern for improving education for 'everyone'.

For example, there has been ongoing concern about the mathematics and science achievement and careers comparing men and women, minorities and whites (Cole and Griffin, 1987; Dix, 1987; National Science Foundation, 1986). Differences have also been found on various indicators used to compare the mathematics education for students from this country versus those from other countries (especially, Japan) (McKnight *et al.*, 1987). In response to these parallel sets of disparities, recent reports have provided detailed prescriptions for the mathematics which *everyone* should

learn (Commission on Standards for School Mathematics, 1987; Romberg, 1983); yet, these reports fail to provide needed assurance that everyone — including women and minorities — will, in fact, learn that mathematics. This failure to attend to the specific educational requirements of women and minorities results in the default position, as articulated by Tomlinson (1986) of 'insisting that *all* children encounter the academic core (in this case, the reformed mathematics curriculum) even if some of them have a difficult time of it' (p. 16). Without steps to address those difficult times, equity has become little more than 'trickle down excellence'.

No one denies the existence of disparities; nor would anyone deny the real concern about the need to address them. The issue has been, and continues to be, how to interpret those disparities and what sorts of responses, in social and educational terms, should be made. This book is an effort to articulate one such interpretation — one based on equity in education — and to outline some responses which might flow from such a view. Equity, as a position, argues that these disparities represent an injustice in the educational system's distribution of its goods and that affirmative steps should be taken to remedy those injustices.

There *have* been efforts at keeping equity — unreconstructed, but certainly cognizant of the changes in current thinking — alive and in the scholarly, if not public, eye. Strike (1985) argued that *A Nation at Risk* represented 'a triumph of our nation's economic goals over its political goals, of economic efficiency over democratic participation' (p. 416). The American Educational Research Association has kept its committees on the role and status of (a) women and (b) minorities in educational research and development active (AERA Committee on the Role and Status of Minorities in Educational Research and Development, 1986; AERA Committee on the Role and Status of Women in Educational Research and Development 1983; *Educational Researcher*, 1986; Frary *et al.*, 1985; Tittle, 1985). AERA has also criticized the downplaying of equity within the current administration (Committee on the Role and Status of Women in Educational Research and Development, 1983) and it sponsored publication of a *Handbook for Achieving Sex Equity Through Education* (Klein, 1985). Similar efforts can be found elsewhere; for example, a special issue of the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* asked the question: 'Whatever happened to inequality?'

At its 1987 meeting, in Washington, DC, the American Educational Research Association sponsored a symposium entitled 'What is equity in education?' Intended 'to provide a critical analysis of the construct of equity as it is applied in education' (Secada, 1986), it included papers by Maxine Greene, Patricia Campbell, and Walter Secada. Discussants were John Ogbu and Steven Selden. We were pleasantly surprised by the

interest in that session, in terms of audience size and subsequent requests for reprints. It convinced us and Malcolm Clarkson, Managing Director of Falmer Press, that there would be a real interest in an edited collection of original papers revolving around the topic *Equity in Education*. This book is the result of that effort.

This book can be read in different ways. The separate chapters represent a variety of views on equity in education. From Apple's analysis of the dynamics underlying the redefinitions of equity and equality, to Sanders' report from the field, one can see varying notions about what would constitute equity. In and of themselves, such variations represent robustness of thought and action. If, as Apple notes, the conservative restoration can accommodate a diversity of views — even some which are contradictory — so can the opposition.

Also, one can find common themes among the chapters. While Campbell argues for research paradigms that are broad enough to incorporate the views of all the groups which are involved in educational equity, Harvey and Klein propose a rather comprehensive framework for organizing that research. They suggest that this framework is general enough to be applied across different equity groups.

Secada's chapter argues that equity, while related to equality, should be viewed as a different construct, and that we need to articulate where equity and equality overlap as well as where they don't. Grant's chapter builds upon that distinction by looking for non-overlapping examples of equity and equality in the classroom through student–teacher interactions and the curriculum.

Both Freedman and Selden pose problems in how curriculum — within domains as seemingly disparate as art and science — has been used to legitimate unequal social arrangements of power, status, wealth and education. Taken together with Apple's chapter, all three provide insights into how equity is reconstructed by dominant groups in order to advance their interests without really addressing those arrangements which gave rise to equity concerns in the first place.

Fennema and Meyer look at equity in mathematics, following what might be considered the classic categories of equality of education — as do Harvey and Klein. Together with Sanders, Fennema and Meyer locate equity at the outcomes of education, and both remind us that, in Yates' (1986) words, 'education (is) a field of practice, not just . . . critique' (p. 130). Fennema and Meyer pose issues in terms of where our efforts should be directed: inputs, outcomes, processes. Sanders documents a rich array of researchable, as well as practical, problems in attempts to manipulate the educational processes in order to achieve equal outcomes.

Readers are also invited to look at these chapters to see if among

them can be found conceptual stresses, problems and even contradictions which need to be addressed and thought through a bit more carefully. Recall that ours is an effort to restart and to move a debate forward, one which is couched in terms of equity and which is focused on how one should interpret existing disparities. To succeed, that debate needs to clarify its concepts, to take account of new thinking, to take account of (in Apple's words) what is true in the ideologies of the new right, and to articulate a vision for education that can provide alternative answers to the vision proposed by the right.

There are other themes which could be alluded to and other ways of seeing the interplay of ideas, theory, policy and practice within this book. Our hope is that they engage others — researchers, policy makers and practitioners — in thinking about and working towards equity in education. As others join in the hoped-for discussion, we might develop a stronger consensus on our goals, and move closer to answering — in reality as well as in theory — the question posed in the symposium from which this book developed: 'What is equity in education?'

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How Equality has been Redefined in the Conservative Restoration

Michael W. Apple

Introduction

Concepts do not remain still very long. They have wings, so to speak, and can be induced to fly from place to place. It is this context that defines their meaning. As Wittgenstein so nicely reminded us, one should look for the meaning of language in its specific contextual use. This is especially important in understanding political and educational concepts, since they are part of a larger social context, a context that is constantly shifting and is subject to severe ideological conflicts. Education itself is an arena in which these ideological conflicts work themselves out. It is one of the major sites in which different groups with distinct political, economic, and cultural visions attempt to define what the socially legitimate means and ends of a society are to be.

In this chapter, I want to situate the concern with 'equality' in education within these larger conflicts. I shall place its shifting meanings both within the breakdown of the largely liberal consensus that guided much educational and social policy since World War 2 and within the growth of the new right and conservative movements over the past two decades that have had a good deal of success in redefining what education is *for* and in shifting the ideological texture of the society profoundly to the right (Apple, 1986 b; Giroux, 1984). In the process, I want to document how new social movements gain the ability to redefine — often, though not always, in retrogressive ways — the terms of debate in education, social welfare, and other areas of the common good. At root, my claim will be that it is impossible to fully comprehend the shifting fortunes of the assemblage of concepts surrounding equality (equality of opportunity, equity, etc.) unless we have a much clearer picture of

the society's already unequal cultural, economic, and political dynamics that provide the center of gravity around which education functions.

As I have argued at considerably greater length elsewhere, what we are witnessing today is nothing less than the recurrent conflict between *property rights* and *person rights* that has been a central tension in our economy (Apple, 1982; 1986 a; 1986 b). Gintis (1980) defines the differences between property rights and person rights in the following way.

> A *property right* vests in individuals the power to enter into social relationships on the basis and extent of their property. This may include economic rights of unrestricted use, free contract, and voluntary exchange; political rights of participation and influence; and cultural rights of access to the social means for the transmission of knowledge and the reproduction and transformation of consciousness. A *person right* vests in individuals the power to enter into these social relationships on the basis of simple membership in the social collectivity. Thus, person rights involve equal treatment of citizens, freedom of expression and movement, equal access to participation in decision-making in social institutions, and reciprocity in relations of power and authority. (p. 193)

While there is some sense in which a concern for earlier uses of the concept of equity is visible in the struggle for person rights, on the whole rather than trying to guarantee that specific applications of a set of principles are just in an individual case (see Secada's interesting discussion of this in this volume) the extension of person rights is tied to a collective dynamic which over time changes the *basic* rules of the game, so to speak. It argues that, in general, all institutions from the paid workplace to the home, government, school and elsewhere are to be organized around a system of rules and human relationships in which democratic principles guide the interaction. Thus, it lies closer to a concern for establishing social practices which sponsor equality not only of access, but of outcome and, as well, *of maximizing participation in creating the rules which govern these social practices*. Its ultimate grounding resides in a faith both in extending democracy, often in radical ways, and in the desirability of such an extension's social effects on the core values and institutions of the society: on what Levine (1984) calls freedom, justice, equality, welfare and efficiency, and democracy and rights. A concern for the expansion of person rights, therefore, combines elements of both equity and equality, but leans more heavily towards issues of a more extensive restructuring of social life.

For my purposes in this chapter, however, I shall construe both equity and equality as part of a broader and more general constellation of concepts and historic tendencies dealing with increasing the range of institutions and people that are covered by formally democratic mechanisms (see also Bowles and Gintis, 1986).

It is not surprising that in our society dominant groups 'have fairly consistently defended the prerogatives of property', while subordinate groups on the whole have sought to advance 'the prerogatives of persons' (Gintis, 1980, p. 194). In times of severe upheaval, these conflicts become even more intense and, given the current balance of power in society, advocates of property rights have once again been able to advance their claims for the restoration and expansion of their prerogatives not only in education but in all of our social institutions.

The United States economy is in the midst of one of the most powerful structural crises it has experienced since the depression. In order to solve it on terms acceptable to dominant interests, as many aspects of the society as possible need to be pressured into conforming with the requirements of international competition, reindustrialization, and (in the words of the National Commission on Excellence in Education) 'rearmament'. The gains made by women and men in employment, health and safety, welfare programs, affirmative action, legal rights, and education must be rescinded since 'they are too expensive' both economically and ideologically.

Both of these latter words are important. Not only are fiscal resources scarce (in part because current policies transfer them to the military), but people must be convinced that their belief that person rights come first is simply wrong or outmoded given current 'realities'. Thus, intense pressure must be brought to bear through legislation, persuasion, administrative rules, and ideological maneuvering to create the conditions right wing groups believe are necessary to meet these requirements (Apple, 1986 b).

In the process, not just in the United States, but in Britain and Australia as well, the emphasis of public policy has materially changed from issues of employing the state to overcome disadvantage. Equality, no matter how limited or broadly conceived, has become redefined. No longer is it seen as linked to past *group* oppression and disadvantagement. It is simply now a case of guaranteeing *individual choice* under the conditions of a 'free market' (Anderson, 1985, pp. 6–8). Thus, the current emphasis on 'excellence' (a word with multiple meanings and social uses) has shifted educational discourse so that underachievement is once again increasingly seen as largely the fault of the student. Student failure, which was at least partly interpreted as the fault of severely deficient educational policies and practices, is now being seen as the result of what might be called