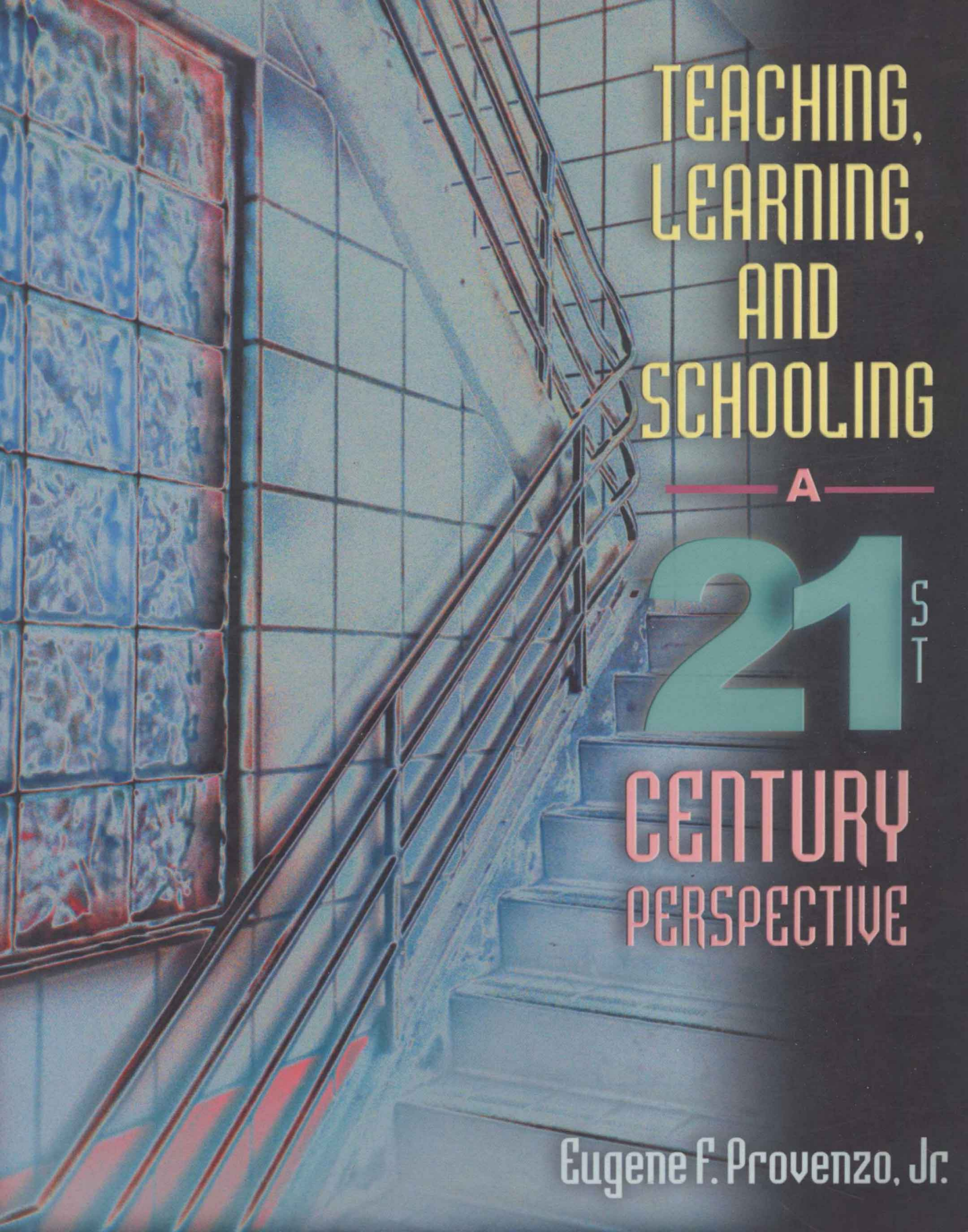
TEACHING, LEARNING, AND SCHOOLING
A
21ST
CENTURY
PERSPECTIVE
Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr.

Teaching, Learning, and Schooling

A 21st Century Perspective

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For my undergraduate students
at the University of Miami

PREFACE

Teaching, Learning, and Schooling: A 21st Century Perspective is written as a conscious challenge to many of the standard textbooks used in introduction to education and foundations of education courses. These books are vast encyclopedias of information that is often unconnected to contemporary schooling, culture, and society. One such book includes a chapter titled "World Roots of American Education" and topics ranging from education in ancient Indian civilization to the Enlightenment's influence on education (Ornstein and Levine, 2000).

These topics are important and worthy of careful study and reflection. But are they appropriate topics for beginning teachers? Do they have much immediate meaning for future professionals who will have to cope with students whose vision of the world is saturated by **media** such as television, video games, and the Internet and **World Wide Web**? Do they have much significance for beginning teachers faced with increasing pressures resulting from **cultural diversity** and from our country's avowed, but sometimes reluctantly pursued, desire to achieve greater

INTASC Standards

Principle #3

media
Sources of information such as television, movies, books, and newspapers. Media can be print or electronically based.

World Wide Web
A graphical user interface for the Internet, often confused with being the Internet.

cultural diversity
The idea of a culture or society being represented by many different cultural groups and their experiences.

INTASC Standards

The Appendix of this book includes the Model Standards for Beginning Teaching Licensing and Development that were developed by the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC), Council of Chief State School Officers. The standards include ten basic principles each of which is divided into three subcategories (Knowledge, Performances, and Dispositions). The principles that are relevant to this book are listed as a marginal icon like the one you see above. You can identify each of the principles and then look at their detailed descriptions in the Appendix. As you read through this book, reflect on the basic knowledge, performances (skills), and dispositions (concepts) that these principles address.

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equity and justice? Do these topics hold much meaning for administrators who are facing parents who are demanding increased involvement in their children's schools and who are challenging the traditional curriculum? Do they help administrators cope with the epidemics of drug abuse and teen pregnancy?

INTASC Standards
Principle #1

This book is written as an alternative to the traditional textbooks available for introduction to education and social foundation courses. It is intended to direct students toward many of the most interesting and vital issues in the field. It covers nearly all of the traditional content of introductory textbooks and is concerned with engaging and **empowering** the students who read it. Students do indeed need to know about the organization of schools, **stereotypes** about teaching, the separation of church and state, the impact of the **civil rights movement** on U.S. education, among other concerns. But they also need to understand these issues within the context of a changing and extremely complex culture.

INTASC Standards
Principle #9

This book presents and portrays a consciously postmodern perspective. (Postmodernism and its meaning for education is discussed in detail throughout this book.) I argue that no absolute answers exist, and that many traditions and **canons** need to be accepted and understood in a **pluralistic** society such as the United States. The psychiatrist and historian Robert Jay Lifton has described our condition as one of "fragmentation." According to him, as a culture,

> We are becoming fluid and many-sided. . . . We feel ourselves buffeted about by unmanageable historical forces and social uncertainties. Leaders appear suddenly, recede equally rapidly, and are difficult for us to believe in when they are around. We change ideas and partners frequently, and do the same with jobs and places of residence. Enduring moral convictions, clear principles of action and behavior: we believe that these must exist, but where? (Lifton 1993, 1)

For Lifton, human history has become "increasingly open, dangerous, and unpredictable" (Lifton 1993, 4). This is especially evident as people everywhere are bombarded by the "tragedies" and "achievements" of our culture as presented in the mass media (Lifton 1993, 1).

Lifton suggests that to cope with the challenges posed by our culture—and by inference in our schools—we must become **protean** in nature. The term *protean* comes from the ancient Greek god Proteus, who could change shape at will. In Homer's *Odyssey*, for example, Proteus takes on the forms of a lion, a serpent, a leopard, a boar, flowing water, and a tree. His changing shape allows him to cope with difficult and challenging sit-

empower
To give power to someone.

stereotype
A discriminatory judgment typically involving race, gender, or ethnicity.

civil rights movement
The movement of African Americans for political and social equality, particularly during the 1950s and 1960s.

canon
Traditional texts and respected sources.

pluralistic
Referring to the idea of coming from many sources.

protean
Changing and variable.

uations. The protean self is a shape-shifting self. It is a self that has relatively consistent features but can adapt to new conditions when needed. These new conditions, as this book demonstrates, are a constant in postmodern society and its schools.

INTASC Standards
Principle #9

For theorists such as Henry Giroux, working in such a society and its schools requires students who are training to be teachers, and teachers themselves, to become **"border crossers"** (Giroux 1992, 28). Crossing cultural borders requires thinking more like anthropologists than scientists, more like explorers than technicians. According to Giroux:

> . . . border pedagogy offers the opportunity for students to engage the multiple references that constitute different cultural codes, experiences and languages. This means educating students to both read these codes historically and critically while simultaneously learning the limits of such codes, including the ones they use to construct their own narratives and histories. (Giroux 1994, 29)

INTASC Standards
Principle #1

Crossing cultural borders, as must an African American from an urban background teaching in a rural white school, or a male high school English teacher reading a **feminist** text with male and female students in an honors course, requires that you be willing to reshape yourself. You must adapt to different conditions, understand in new ways, teach according to the conditions and circumstances required. Giroux argues that this requires understanding how fragile identity is as you enter "into borderlands crisscrossed within a variety of languages, experiences, and voices" (Giroux 1992, 34).

INTASC Standards
Principle #5
Principle #7
Principle #10

Such an approach is deeply **ecological,** not so much in the biological sense, but in the context of a social ecology. I argue in detail that we need to become social ecologists. We need to take a deeply ecological approach to schooling. Simply put, schools are connected to the larger culture and society of which they are a part. Education is a reflection of—and responds to—the larger culture. Thus, to understand schools we must understand their connection to the larger society. You must try to understand what the anthropologist Gregory Batson refers to as "the pattern, which connects" (Batson 1979, 8).

What are the patterns that connect schools to the larger society in the United States? What is the relationship between elementary schoolchildren watching approximately thirty to forty hours of television and movies a week and the knowledge they bring to school? How do changes in the structure of the family (divorce, women increasingly working outside the home) affect children in school? How are new technologies such as computers changing the traditional organization and meaning of

border crossers
Individuals who work across different cultural groups and settings.

feminist
A person who supports and promotes the idea of gender (usually female) equality.

ecological
Involving the interaction or the interrelationship of organisms and their environments.

INTASC Standards
Principle #1

knowledge? Our access to information? The meaning of work? The meaning of schooling? What it means to be a teacher?

These are just a few examples of the issues addressed in this book. It is intended as a starting point for discovery, reflection, and discussion. It can be used on a number of different levels. I hope that it is used mainly with other books and articles, as well as with films and computer programs, to establish a framework for thinking about schooling, teaching, culture, and society. Frankly, I also hope that this is a book students keep on their professional bookshelves long after they have completed their studies. I hope it is a book from which they obtain much useful information but, more importantly, from which they draw key concepts and ideas that stay with them and evolve as they develop as professionals.

One final note: a unique feature of this book is the attempt not only to analyze emerging technologies and their impact on education, but also to maximize their use as instructional resources. Addresses for websites that contain information on many of the issues discussed can be found throughout this book. A website for this book has also been created. The website Teaching, Learning, and Schooling: A 21st Century Perspective can be reached at http://www.ablongman.com/provenzo21st. Hopefully this site will be a valuable resource for students and teachers.

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