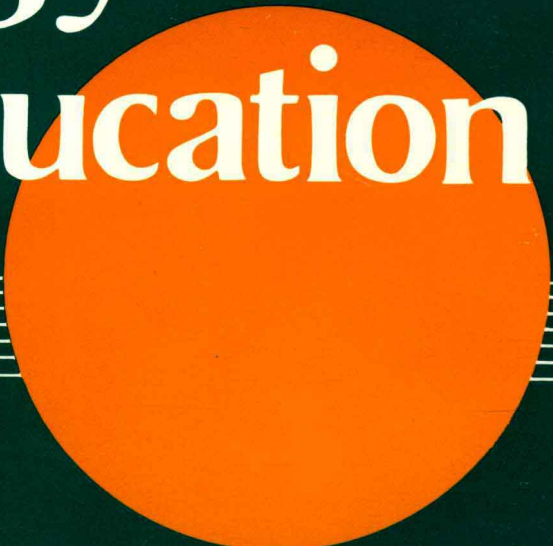


THIRD EDITION

Justice, Ideology, and Education



**AN INTRODUCTION TO THE
SOCIAL FOUNDATIONS
OF EDUCATION**

Edward Stevens, Jr./George H. Wood

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Social Foundations of Education

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Edward Stevens, Jr.
Ohio University

George H. Wood
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An Introduction to the Social Foundations of Education

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Edward Stevens, Jr., is a professor of history and philosophy of education in the School of Curriculum and Instruction at Ohio University. He is the author of numerous essays and has authored or coauthored six books dealing with literacy and social foundations. He is currently working on a study of changing relationships between theories of citizenship and theories of education.

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For our children

Foreword

Justice, ideology, and education are provocative words in the English language. Volumes have been written on each of these terms, and we still argue vehemently about what each of them means.

Who should decide the purposes of schools? Does it make a difference what kinds of schools exist for different students? How is justice a dominant consideration in providing schooling? What ideologies lie behind our efforts at mass education, and which ideologies are to be taught? How do the current reforms in education fit with our traditions—most particularly, our traditional ideology of democracy and its attendant concern for justice? Why does the pressure for “excellence” in school reform literature pose serious justice problems for a democracy?

Democracy is hard work. It can be time consuming; decisions can be difficult and may not be wise; and it can certainly be frustrating and imperfect. Yet the major political documents in societies of the modern world proclaim democracy as the best available way to operate a government. Even highly authoritarian national governments publicly support the concept of democracy, although they fall far short in the practice

The point here is that belief in the idea, the ideology, of democracy is widely accepted. It is predicated on the concept that people are capable of self-governance. This powerful concept has two extremely important features that this book addresses: justice and education. Justice is basic to the idea of democracy: Can one imagine real democracy without respect for the rights of others? There is a presumption that fair treatment in some form is necessary, although there are many disputes over what justice is and how it should operate. Education, like justice, is fundamental to the idea of democracy. Self-governance requires knowledgeable people; ignorance is inconsistent with democracy. Justice, ideology, and education are intertwined, and they are individually and jointly debatable concepts.

Not only are the concepts of justice, ideology, and education of concern to societies, they are also reflected in individual viewpoints. I like to think that justice is on my side in a debate on social policy; income tax, affirmative action and abortion policies raise such debates. I like to believe that the ideologies that undergird my views in a dispute about politics are clearly superior to those of my opponent. And, of course, I expect my ideas about a proper education to have wide support among those who have been properly educated. It is often a surprise to me to discover that strongly held opposing arguments can

also find their roots in justice, high-minded ideologies, and excellent education; that internal confrontation is the essence of education, including education about schooling. This book poses many schooling issues in this context.

Professors Stevens and Wood provide a challenge here, in original essays and in the words of significant writers over a long period of time, to consider the state of our schools in terms of justice, ideology, and education.

Jack Nelson

RUTGERS UNIVERSITY

Preface

The beliefs that underlie the theory and practice of American education are deeply ingrained in our culture. They affect our expectations for students, the way we organize curriculum and instruction, the decisions we make about school funding, and our judgments about the contributions of education to the national welfare. In addition, they shape our views on how people should be treated, how the rewards and benefits of education should be distributed, and who should make decisions about education.

When a system of beliefs functions to shape people's behaviors, to give them direction, and effectively acts to exclude other beliefs, we call that system an ideology. In American education the concepts of merit, opportunity, and equality together form an ideology that has helped to shape virtually every dimension of public schooling. Our beliefs about fairness and social justice in American democracy are organized around the concepts of merit, opportunity, and equality. These same concepts also determine much of what we think about how schools should be organized and how the outcomes of education should be evaluated. In this book we examine both the beliefs that make up an ideology of American education and how that ideology helps to determine the outcomes of education.

Two questions have guided our thinking about the educational issues presented in this book. The first is, Who makes decisions about schools and about how children are treated when in school? The second question is, Are the processes and outcomes of these decisions fair or just? Responses to the first question have to do with authority and power and how they are distributed in the decision-making process. The second question has to do with our ideals of individual and social justice.

The concepts of justice, authority, and power must be understood in some social context. They are, moreover, closely linked in practice. The principles of justice in a society help define the rights and obligations of people relative to each other and to the social institutions of which they are a part. These same principles define to whom and for what society's rewards ought to be distributed.

Fairness, itself, is often considered a part of justice. A situation is usually considered fair when no one feels exploited by participating in it or denied some legitimate claim.¹ Fairness, then, is very much a matter of common ex-

¹John Rawls, "Symposium: Justice as Fairness," *Journal of Philosophy* 54 (Oct. 1957): 657.

pectations as to how people will be treated. People feel unfairly or unjustly treated when agreed-upon expectations are not fulfilled or when those in authority deny them their due. Quite clearly, then, injustice may occur through delinquent or abusive authority. It may also occur when those in authority are not recognized as having a right to that authority or when their decisions are out of keeping with the rules most people accept.

In education, as in other social institutions, authority and justice are closely linked. Parents, children, and political leaders have certain expectations for what schools should accomplish and implicitly recognize certain legitimate means for achieving these. Virtually everyone recognizes schools as institutions that dispense credits that can be redeemed later for economic and social rewards. Everyone recognizes also that the public school serves a larger public interest as well as the interests of individuals. Because public schools are called upon to serve so many individual, group, and public interests, questions of individual fairness and social justice often arise.

Each of the sections in this book relates selected educational issues to the broader themes of individual and social justice. Thus issues having to do with equal opportunity, evaluation, student classification, curriculum, the politics of schooling, and democracy in schooling are all seen in the light of a broader concern with justice.

Part One (Chapters 1 and 2) focuses on the concept and practice of equal opportunity, including its relationship to the ideals of meritocracy and social utility and its application to minority groups in American culture. A historical overview is provided that introduces the students to issues of justice and fairness and how these have been played out in the legal system and legislative action.

Part Two (Chapters 3 and 4) addresses the ways in which American public schooling has dealt with human diversity. Race, ethnicity, socioeconomic stratification, sex-role socialization, and gender are dealt with in the context of literacy and language acquisition and tracking. The readings provide a close-up and sometimes personal view of these issues.

In Part Three (Chapters 5 through 7) the concept of ideology is examined in detail as are its implications for the curriculum of public schools. These chapters deal at length with citizenship and the quest for efficiency in the management of public schooling. The shaping of behavior through the structure of the school and curriculum is foremost in our concerns as we look at the school as a culture within which students' expectations for themselves and others are formed.

Our concerns in Part Four (Chapters 8 through 10) cut across the ways in which the bureaucratic structure of schools has influenced educational decision making and the dilemmas this raises for those interested in local control, more "choice," and democratic decision making. Here we deal broadly with the problems of whom should the public schools serve.

The final section of the book (Chapters 11 and 12) focuses on proposals for reform in the 1980s. Like previous sections, it begins with a historical overview: a summary view of reforms from the 1890s, the Progressive Era, and

the 1950s. The common element of reforms in these watershed periods—debate over the role of schooling in the civic and economic welfare of the nation—is then traced through to proposals of the 1980s. Issues of efficiency, quality, equity, and elitism are examined critically, and alternatives to present dominant trends are considered. Our discussion of current issues in education concludes by asking students to reconsider the historic conceptions of schooling in the United States and how they might aid in the resolution of current issues. We ask, also, that students critically reexamine the ideological foundations of American education to see how they converge with—and diverge from—democratic ideals.

Edward Stevens, Jr.

George H. Wood

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Schooling and Justice

