
Introduction

Schooling, Cultural Politics, and the Struggle for Democracy

Henry A. Giroux
Peter McLaren

As the Age of Reagan comes to a close, a new stage in the national debate about the future of public schooling in the United States is beginning to develop. The growing interest in such a debate can be seen not only in the ongoing announcements by both of the major political parties but also in the increasing concern by members of the general public to improve the quality of American schools. There is little doubt that the ferment that has characterized the educational debate of the 1980s will continue; hopefully, the second stage of this debate will raise a new set of questions, provide a new language of analysis, and embrace a different set of interests for defining the purpose and meaning of public education.

All of the essays written for this collection are concerned with this debate and the significance it has for addressing some of the more important issues and problems the present generation of Americans will have to confront and think about in the near future. These chapters are bound together by a common concern. It is a concern for linking the issue of educational reform to the broader considerations of democracy, the ethical and political character of fundamental social relations, and the demands of critical citizenship. As different as these contributions appear in both their theoretical focus and their ideological representation, they all point to a number of important elements for creating a new public philosophy of education. This is a philosophy for the postmodern era. It is not one that seeks ideal fathers through the grand narratives that characterized the work of Marx, Freud, Durkheim, or Parsons; nor is it one that looks for salvation in the textual wizardry of the new poststructuralists. It is a philosophy that is decidedly concrete. It is one that embraces a politics of difference, that

links questions of history and structural formations, that views ideology and human agency as a source of educational change, and that integrates macro- and microanalyses with a focus on the specificity of voices, desires, events, and cultural forms that give meaning and substance to everyday life. Characterizing the contributions in this volume is a theoretical openness and a spirit of hope, a belief that schools are places where students can find their voices, reclaim and affirm their histories, and develop a sense of self and collective identity amidst the language of larger public loyalties and social relations. But there is also a spirit of historicity that informs the various positions that make up this book, a sense of the need to push the history of recent decades against the grain in order both to question its purchase on knowledge as received truth and to shift the debate on educational reform from one dependent on a claim to a privileged reading of the past to one committed to a provisional and relational understanding of truth and commitment to investigating culture, teaching, and learning as a set of historically and socially constructed practices. In short, the spirit of hope and historicity which informs the contributions to this volume does not see the mechanisms of injustice as indelibly inscribed in the social order but rather as open to change and reconstruction through a critical rethinking of and commitment to the meaning and purpose of schooling in our society.

With this in mind we want to argue that the current debate about education represents more than a commentary on the state of public education in this country; it is fundamentally a debate about the relevance of democracy, social criticism, and the status of utopian thought in constructing both our dreams and the symbols and stories we devise in order to give meaning to our lives. The debate has taken a serious turn in the last decade. Under the guise of attempting to revitalize the language of conservative ethics, the Reagan agenda has, in reality, launched a dangerous attack on some of the most fundamental aspects of democratic public life. What has been valorized in this language is not the issue of reclaiming public schools as agencies of social justice or critical democracy, but a view of schooling that disdains the democratic implications of pluralism, rejects a notion of learning which regards excellence and equity as mutually constitutive, and argues for a return to the old transmission model of learning.

It is worth noting that since the early 1980s the conservatives have dominated the debate over public education and have consistently put liberals and other groups of progressive stripe in the uncomfortable position of defending failed, abandoned, or unpopular policies and programs initiated in the 1960s, even though it is recognized that many of these programs and policies were either never properly implemented or were not

given an adequate chance at achieving their expected results. The power of the conservative initiative resides, in part, in its ability to link schooling to the ideology of the marketplace and to successfully champion the so-called virtues of Western civilization. In addition, it has doggedly defended a programmatic policy of school reform based on jargon-filled and undifferentiated conceptions of authority, citizenship, and discipline. Unlike many radical and progressive critics of the 1960s, conservatives have not merely argued that schools have failed in their primary vision of creating a literate and industrious citizenry; they have also attempted to develop both an analysis of the failure of public schooling and a program for curing the affliction. Through the sponsorship of a number of national reports, from *A Nation at Risk* to *American Education: Making It Work*, the Reagan administration had been able to set the agenda for both defining and addressing what it labeled the "crisis in education." To be sure, the conservative analysis is by no means original, but in the absence of an alternative position which is capable of publicly contesting the assumptions that have informed the Reagan-inspired education agenda, right-wing conservatives will continue to dominate the upcoming debate on education.

In our view, the debate over public education has been predictably one-sided in that the conservatives have set the agenda for such a debate and initiated a plethora of policy studies designed to implement their own educational initiatives. The success of the conservative educational agenda also points to a fundamental failure among progressive and radical educators to generate a public discourse on schooling. This is not to suggest that there has been an absence of writing on educational issues among leftist critics. In fact, the body of literature that has emerged in the last decade is duly impressive. One major problem facing the recent outpouring of critical discourse on schooling is that over the years it has become largely academicized. It has lost sight of its fundamental mission of mobilizing public sentiment toward a renewed vision of community; it has failed to recognize the general relevance of education as a public service and the importance of deliberately translating educational theory into a community-related discourse capable of reaching into and animating public culture and life. In effect, critical and radical writings on schooling have become ghettoized within the ivory tower, reflecting a failure to take seriously the fact that education as a terrain of struggle is central to the reconstruction of public life and, as such, must be understood in vernacular as well as scholarly terms. This, of course, is not to downgrade the importance of scholarly discourse on schooling, nor publications which serve to disseminate tracts and treatises on important epistemological and theoretical concerns. It is simply to highlight the fact that the assault on grand narratives should take

place not only in the paper chase of the academy but also in classrooms of resistance and in communities struggling for a better life through a variety of public spheres.

In the upcoming debate on education in the United States, critical educators need to regain the ideological and political initiative. Such a project should at the very least embody four challenges: first, the major assumptions that characterize the conservative critique of education must be effectively challenged and refuted; second, the programmatic reforms put forth by the Reagan administration and taken up by the Bush presidency must be unmasked for what they really are: part of a major assault on the egalitarian ideology of public education as well as the principles of equity and democracy; third, a new critical language of schooling must emerge in order to formulate its own criticisms of schools as part of a wider project of possibility, one which provides an educational vision capable of mobilizing not only the middle class, but also those minorities of race, class, and gender who have been largely excluded from the language and practice of school reform for the past eight years; and finally, it is imperative that progressive educators put forth a federal policy for funding public education as part of an alternative program for economic growth. Before indicating how the articles in this book contribute to a public discourse of educational reform, we want to address briefly some of the issues we have raised as part of a wider debate on educational critique and transformation.

Challenging the conservative discourse of schooling

The Reagan conservatives have developed their analysis of public schooling in the United States in opposition to a number of advances associated with the progressive educational reforms of the 1960s and 1970s. Ironically, the ascendancy of the conservative critique of schooling began with the radical criticisms of schooling in the 1960s. Radicals and progressives argued for greater access to higher education for black and other minority students through a policy of open admissions; they criticized the schools for being merely adjuncts to the labor market; they challenged the racist, sexist, and culturally biased nature of the curriculum at all levels of schooling; they opposed school hierarchies which discriminated against women teachers and staff, which silenced a developing social conscience among students, and which excluded minorities; they challenged the tracking procedures in elementary and secondary schools which slotted minorities and other disadvantaged groups into vocational schooling; and they were instrumental in providing the impetus for a number of important federal entitlement programs in such areas as bilingual, compensatory, and special education. In

short, these educational critics attempted to democratize access to and outcomes of both public schooling and higher education, to make school curricula relevant to the lives of children, and to shape federal policy that would actively provide the financial support and national leadership to ensure that schooling in this country functions as a vehicle of social and economic mobility. Although the progressive educational movements of the 1960s and 1970s helped to inaugurate a number of important legislative programs, they unfortunately often exaggerated the concept of personal freedom, which at times collapsed into a form of vapid anti-intellectualism; they often legitimated infantile as opposed to theoretically mature forms of scholarship; moreover, they argued for a child-centered pedagogy which amounted to a romantic celebration of student culture and experience that made progressive reform patterns appear unrealistic—if not damagingly counterproductive—to the aspirations of parents of minority and working-class students and inhibited a more thorough theoretical investigation into other crucial aspects of racial and class domination.

The Reagan conservatives attacked this legacy of reform on a number of ideological and political fronts. Not surprisingly in an age of corporatist politics, the initial line of attack centered on redefining the purpose of public schools as agents of social discipline and economic regulation. Under the guise of proclaiming a national crisis in the schools, the conservatives have willfully misread and consistently argued against the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s, claiming that they both compromised the academic rigor of the public school curriculum and contributed to declining teacher and student performance. Most strikingly preposterous was the attempt to fasten the blame for the lagging domestic performance of the United States economy and its shrinking preeminence in the international marketplace on the failure of the schools to prepare adequately its young citizenry to be capable of reinvigorating corporate and industrial America. From such a human capital perspective, schools are important only to the degree that they provide the forms of knowledge, skills, social practices, and entrepreneurial values necessary to produce a labor force capable of aggressively competing in world markets. Today, as in previous decades, a concern with social transformation and critical citizenship has been replaced by a preoccupation with forging a school-business alliance. In the spirit of neoclassical economics, state boards of education continue to encourage schools to enter partnerships with industry, with its stress on producing efficient workers. The present-day culture of schooling appears more and more bent on producing what Andre Gorz calls “adapted individuals,” by which he refers to “exactly the kind of people that capitalist industry needs . . . those who will put up with the regimentation, repression, discipline and deliberately unat-

tractive programs . . . [those who] are ideologically reliable, and who will not be tempted to use their technical knowledge to their own political advantage.”¹

As part of the excellence movement ushered in by the Reagan administration, we see a continual emphasis on the vocationalization of learning and the deskilling of teachers in our public schools, all of which reaches its apogee in the “teacher-proofed” curriculum, which creates a nondialectical separation of conception from execution and effectively reduces teachers to the status of technicians or state-sponsored functionaries. To assert that schools serve as meritocratic institutions for the purpose of fostering equality of opportunity and outcome simply registers, in this context, as a quaint oversimplification which masks schooling’s socially and culturally reproductive dimensions.

The more this logic plays itself out in the contemporary educational scene, the more schools serve to multiply injustice under the banner of excellence, and the less likely it is that excellence will be equated with the development of pedagogical practices designed to foster critical intelligence and public conscience. In effect, the term *excellence* is reduced to a code word for legitimating the interests and values of the rich and the privileged. Within this perspective, remedial programs which try to extricate the lowly from their benighted condition label such students as “deprived” or “deviant” youth. This labeling not only serves to entrap students within the contours of a professional discourse, doubly confirming the legitimating power of school practices, but also serves to reproduce intergenerational continuity by defining who are to become members of the elite class and who are to occupy the subaltern caste.

Common perspectives animating this conservative position—and the privileged groups whose claim to power depend on its propagation and legitimation—consider social inequities to inhere in human nature and the inherent imperfection of groups marginalized by poverty, race, and gender. The logic of this position collapses into a defense of racial, class, and gender inequalities under the pretext of essentializing human nature by holding responsible for their own history and present conditions disadvantaged groups whose real powerlessness assures them of failure within the cultural and economic frames of reference set by dominant groups. The perspective that disadvantaged students should be the focus of special programs to remediate their deficiencies is in many respects as impoverishing and debilitating as the social and economic circumstances of which they are perennial victims since it impresses upon the disenfranchised that it is their personal shortcomings as minority or economically disadvantaged groups which prevent them from joining the elite tracks that lead to university life and a

better future. Nowhere does this perspective address or attempt to illuminate the lived subordination of students as it pertains to relations of power that constrain possibilities for empowerment within the dominant culture; and nowhere are relations of power and social structures acknowledged as working together as codeterminants of school failure. Within this view of excellence, learning is linked to acquiring “the basics” and uncritically adopting values consistent with industrial discipline and social conformity.

By separating equity from excellence, conservatives have managed to criticize radical and progressive reformers for linking academic achievement to the principles of social justice and equality while simultaneously redefining public schooling in relation to the imperatives of the economy and the marketplace. Consequently, when the Reagan administration trumpeted the term *excellence* as its clarion call for school reform, it usually meant that public schools should offer more rigorous science and math curricula—a notion in keeping with the conservative idea that scientific know-how and technical proficiency are equivalent to industrial progress. The language of “achievement,” “excellence,” “discipline,” and “goal orientation” effectively meant deemphasizing liberal and creative arts and stressing “job skills” curriculum more in keeping with vocational education and returning to the authoritarian classroom armed with the four Rs curriculum (which for President George Bush means “reading, riting, ‘rithmetic, and respect”).

A critical theory of schooling needs to both criticize this position and, in a clear and discernible public language, drastically redefine the relationship between schooling and education. In the words of John Dewey, this means invoking a choice between education as a function of society and society as a function of education. The major economic problems faced by the United States have not been caused by public education, although the economic crisis has certainly had a significant impact on the problems schools are experiencing. Unemployment, declining productivity, inflation, and the persistence of vast inequalities in wealth and power among the general population have little to do with the declining academic achievement of American students. For example, high levels of unemployment and declining productivity have more to do with bad investment policies and the crisis within the world economy than with a decline in school-produced skills. Moreover, recent empirical studies make abundantly clear that the employment growth in the next few decades will be dominated by low-level jobs primarily in the service industries and will require little education and fewer higher-order intellectual and technical skills.

This is not to suggest that critical educators should disavow the importance of schools in educating youth with the basic skills that can be used to find employment. But it must be stressed that being educated for occu-

pational mobility must also include learning knowledge and skills of a different order of intellectual complexity from what has been advocated by the Reagan administration. In this case, we are referring to learning which is tied to forms of self- and social empowerment. Education for the future means that students will need to acquire advanced levels of economic literacy that will allow them not only to work in the marketplace but also to transform it as part of a broader struggle to create a more egalitarian and just society. Similarly, critical educators will need to address and promote policies for forging new linkages between schools and communities in relation to the issues of job creation and public service. For instance, a national youth service corps could provide students with the opportunity to integrate social reform, academic credit, and civic education. Finally, as part of an attempt to promote an ethic of civic and social responsibility, critical educators need to argue for forms of schooling that do not reduce the capacity for learning to economic or technical considerations: that is, critical educators need to develop an educational discourse that connects the purpose and practice of schooling to a public philosophy in which learning is seen as part of a wider discourse of freedom and democratic struggle.

The Reagan approach to public school reform has shifted in recent years, as reflected in a spate of recent publications either produced by the United States Department of Education or endorsed publicly by its administration. We refer here to former Education Secretary William J. Bennett's report, *American Education: Making Work*; Allan Bloom's *The Closing of the American Mind*; and E. D. Hirsch's *Cultural Literacy*. Rather than abandoning the old technicist discourse which reduces schooling to job training, Bennett has added to it the notion of cultural uniformity. Public schools are now defended as both cultural *and* industrial sites. For example, Bennett's call for more curricular content and increased standardized testing is a thinly disguised attempt to impose cultural uniformity on the schools, to make school content irrelevant to the culturally specific traditions, experiences, and histories the students bring to schools, and to deskill teachers by forcing them to concentrate on delivering a curriculum that is both prepackaged and intellectually vapid. Rather than raising questions regarding how schools actively silence students, how the hidden curriculum of tracking works to marginalize and ensure failure for working-class and minority students, or how the dominant culture excludes the voices, dreams, and collective memories of subordinate groups, Bennett argues that equal opportunity can be achieved through more rigorous academic discipline and by instilling in parents greater educational expectations for their children. Such prescriptions remain ominously silent with respect to the forms of moral and social regulation that schools embody which benefit the stu-

dents of the rich and the privileged, and the particularly odious forms of discrimination based on race. Similarly, Bennett's proposals render invisible the suffering and the social and political hardships that students from subordinate groups frequently face both in and out of schools.

Bennett's perspective trivializes the meaning of education through both a neglect of the larger social and political issues facing our society at the present moment and an unwillingness to expand the task of reform in terms of a more critical theory of ethics and curriculum. His prescriptions for pedagogical reform embody an equally truncated vision. For example, the attributes he associates with good teaching sound as if they were taken from the scripts of the Mr. Roger's children show: a good teacher is usually white and middle class, has a necessary grasp of his or her subject matter, communicates effectively by finding a style least offensive to the majority, vigorously avoids any serious challenge to prevailing accepted mores or the social relations which reinforce them, and exhibits an unflinching moral character. In the language of educational Reaganism, this translates into teaching the so-called canon of Western virtues, transmitting standardized and politically inoffensive content to students in ways that can be measured empirically and rendered morally neutral, adopting a work ethic that is scornful of unions, and equating school achievement with raising students' SAT scores and implementing tougher forms of classroom management. Bennett's general formula for classroom teaching, if accepted, turns teachers into hapless clerks or servants of the empire. But Reagan isn't content with an educational theory based solely on the values implicit in the Mr. Roger's view of the world. Teaching in the ghetto calls for an altogether different model. Reagan's view that educators also need to "get tough" was clearly reflected in public praise for the authoritarian tactics of Joe Clark, a New Jersey high school principal. Clark has gained his reputation by imposing his form of "educational leadership" on a school of inner-city students. It is a leadership style and pedagogical philosophy that has distinguished Clark through his intimidation of teachers who disagree with him, his expulsion of over nine hundred students whom he has labeled as perverts and troublemakers, and his imposing a schoolwide military model of top-down discipline. For example, students who commit infractions are made to sing the school anthem over the public intercom system. Clark, who wields a bullhorn and baseball bat as the trademarks of his educational philosophy, claims he has restored law and order to the school while simultaneously raising students' test scores. That these "gains" (which themselves are suspect) have taken place amidst the humiliation of both students and teachers, the expulsion of students who are most in need of schooling, and the creation of a police state atmosphere appears to heighten rather

than diminish the stature of Joe Clark in the eyes of the Reagan administration. Such mean-spirited tactics have no place in a democratic classroom; they simply serve as a prescription for powerlessness and social conformity.

Central to Bennett's view, which is a popularized version of much of what can be found in the works of Bloom and Hirsch, and which is indicative of the recent ideological turn the Reagan administration has made in its language of educational reform, is the notion that it is not just the American economy which is at risk in the present failure of our schools, but the very notion of Western civilization itself. Rather than becoming an object of engagement and analysis, culture is to be understood through either the wisdom of the Great Books or a view of cultural restoration that is ironically paraded as cultural literacy. Within Bennett's social vision, cultural and social difference quickly becomes labeled as deficit, as the Other, as deviancy in need of psychological tending and control. At stake in this perspective is a view of history, culture, and politics committed to cleansing democracy of its critical and emancipatory possibilities. Similarly, in this perspective, the languages, cultures, and historical legacies of minorities, women, blacks, and other subordinate groups are actively silenced under the rubric of teaching as a fundamental act of national patriotism.

Following Bennett's lead, Bush conservatives seek to promulgate a view of education designed to rewrite the past from the perspective of the privileged and the powerful; this is a perspective that disdains both the democratic possibilities of pluralism and forms of pedagogy that critically engage issues central to developing an informed democratic public. Critical educators must offer a more progressive view of cultural literacy based on a respect for the languages and traditions that, as June Jordan has remarked, "conform to the truth of our many selves and would . . . lead us into the equality of power that a democratic state must represent."²

There is little doubt that the legacy of Reagan conservatism will continue to display an instinctive hostility to the democratic implications of public education. This is clear from the rhetoric structuring educational reforms at the level of state policy and in the rhetoric of liberal and conservative reformers, in which an image of schooling is evoked that enlarges corporate and hegemonic cultural concerns while diminishing a view of schooling dedicated to educating students for the ethical and political demands of democratic culture and public responsibility. The challenge that this view poses for critical educators should not be underestimated; there is a real urgency for educators to construct new frames of reference for the debate over educational reform by reclaiming schools in the interest of creating citizens capable of exhibiting civic courage, extending democratic possibili-

ties, combating domestic tyranny, preventing assaults on human freedom and dignity, and struggling for cultural justice. It is important, especially at this time in our history, that a public discourse in education be developed that speaks not merely to adapting citizens to the existing configurations of power, but to creating a language of possibility and political imagination that will resuscitate the goals of self-determination and social transformation.

*Schooling for democracy and civic courage:
Elements of an educational platform*

Within the last decade, a group of critical educational theorists has emerged that has combined the best work of social theorists such as John Dewey, John Childs, Paulo Freire, and Antonio Gramsci in an attempt to extend and advance an emancipatory vision of public schooling. In this work, schooling is viewed as a form of cultural politics, one which focuses on the centrality of power and struggle in defining both the nature and purpose of what it means to be educated. Within this perspective, schooling always represents an introduction to, preparation for, and legitimation of particular forms of social life. Rejecting the traditional view of instruction and learning as a neutral process antiseptically removed from the contexts of history, power, and ideology, critical educational theory begins with the assumption that schools are essential sites for organizing knowledge, power, and desire in the service of extending individual capacities and social possibilities. At the core of this discourse has been a twofold task. First, as a language of protest, critical educational theory has attempted to develop a counterlogic to those relations of power and ideologies in American society that mask a totalitarian ethics and strip critical ethical discourse from public life. This logic has pointed to the importance of developing an educational language that moves beyond moral outrage in order to provide a critical account of how individuals are constituted within schools as human agents within different moral and ethical discourses and experiences. Second, this perspective has attempted to develop a critical theory of education as part of a radical theory of ethics aimed at constructing a new vision of the future. In this view, American schooling becomes a vital sphere for extending civil rights, fighting for cultural justice, and developing new forms of democratic public life within a life-affirming public culture.

Critical educators need to revitalize this critical tradition by appropriating the best of its insights from the ghettoized language and sphere of

academic life. In addition to a purely academic language of schooling, we need a public language, one that is theoretically rigorous, publicly accessible, and ethically grounded; called for is a language which refuses to reconcile schooling with inequality, which actively abandons those forms of pedagogical silencing which prevent us from becoming aware of and offended by the structures of oppression at work in both institutional and everyday life. We need a language that reconstructs schooling as a form of cultural politics, that links the construction of school knowledge to the concerns of everyday culture, that redefines the language of reform in unequivocal terms, and that situates the debate over education as part of a wider struggle for democracy itself. This wider struggle for democracy and social reform calls for an ethical conversion to the priority of labor over capital and to the elimination of economic and social injustices.

A critique of the conservative agenda for education should begin by defending schools as democratic public spheres responsible for providing an indispensable public service to the nation: that of awakening the moral, political, and civic responsibilities of its youth. More specifically, critical educators need to put forth a clearer vision of what education is supposed to do outside the imperatives of industry and why it is important as a public rather than merely private endeavor underwritten by the principles of liberal capitalism. By linking public education to the imperatives of a critical democracy rather than to the narrow imperatives of the marketplace, the debate on the meaning and nature of public education can be situated within the broader context of issues concerned with critical citizenship, politics, and the dignity of human life. In this view it becomes possible to provide a rationale and purpose for public education which aims at developing critical citizens and reconstructing community life by extending the principles of social justice to all spheres of economic, political, and cultural life. By viewing public schools as primary to the formation of a critical and engaged citizenry, schools can be envisioned as a social site from which to organize the energies of a moral vision. This means challenging the sterile instrumentalism, selfishness, and contempt for democratic community that has become the hallmark of the Reagan era. It means recognizing and struggling against the structured injustices in society which prevent us from extending our solidarity to those "others" who strain under the weight of various forms of oppression and exploitation. It also means enhancing and ennobling the meaning and purpose of education by giving it a truly central place in the social life of the nation, where it can become a public forum for addressing the needs of the poor, the dispossessed, and the disenfranchised.

A critical educational theory also needs to redefine the public role of what it means to be a teacher. Developing a public philosophy that offers the promise of reforming schools as part of a wider revitalization of public life has important implications for redefining the nature and purpose of teaching itself. The Reagan era has seriously undermined the possibilities for teachers to extend the role that schools might play as democratic public spheres. In fact, the Republican agenda for schooling, with its emphasis on standardized testing, massive accountability schemes for teacher evaluation, standardized curricula, and top-down, get-tough approaches to school discipline, has further contributed to the deskilling and disempowerment of teachers. There is a growing need to generate policies that improve the working conditions of teachers as well as dignify their role as public servants. Instead of defining teachers as clerks or technicians, we should reconceive the role of teachers as engaged and transformative intellectuals. This means viewing teachers as professionals who are able and willing to reflect upon the ideological principles that inform their practice, who connect pedagogical theory and practice to wider social issues, and who work together to share ideas, exercise power over the conditions of their labor, and embody in their teaching a vision of a better and more humane life. Central to this position is the need for critical educators to fight for reforms that enable teachers to work under conditions in which they have time to reflect critically, conduct collaborative research, engage in dialogue with their students, and learn about the communities in which their schools and others are located. At the very least this means significantly raising teacher salaries; extending opportunities for sabbaticals; redistributing power in schools among teachers and administrators; providing school systems with increased funding for in-service programs; creating national public information networks that provide resources and funds for teachers to engage in individual or collective research projects related to their teaching; and forming teacher-parent resource centers that offer opportunities for teachers, parents, and community people to work together more closely in shaping school policy. Finally, schools must be given the resources to help meet the social, cultural, economic, and political problems they encounter. Drugs, teenage pregnancy, illiteracy, nutrition, and health care are not problems the schools can ignore; new policy initiatives need to be formulated and put to work regarding how schools can function as a community resource, initiatives which view students as active agents working within wider cultural and political contexts.

Another issue of central importance that needs to be addressed more forcefully by critical educators is learning for empowerment. Reagan con-

servatives have consistently defined learning in ways that ignore the diversity of experiences, traditions, voices, histories, and community traditions that students bring to school. Cultural difference has often been treated as a deficit. A curriculum policy must be put forth that argues for the importance of drawing upon the cultural resources that students bring to schools as a basis for developing new skills and engaging existing knowledge claims. This concept suggests advocating curriculum policies and modes of pedagogy that both confirm and critically engage the knowledge and experience through which students give meaning to their lives. In effect, it suggests taking seriously, as a crucial aspect of learning, the experiences of students mediated by their own histories, languages, and traditions. This is not meant to imply that a student's experience should be romantically celebrated or unqualifiably endorsed; on the contrary, it means developing a critically affirmative language that works both *with and on* the experiences that students bring to the classroom. Although this approach is often designed to valorize the language forms, modes of reasoning, dispositions, and histories that students use in defining the world, it is also meant to make student experience an object of critical analysis and debate. Similarly, it means teaching students how to identify, unravel, and critically appropriate the codes, vocabularies, and deep grammar of different cultural traditions. Such a pedagogy provides the foundation for developing curricula and pedagogical models that replace the authoritative language of recitation and imposition with an approach that allows students to speak from their own histories and traditions while simultaneously challenging the very grounds of knowledge and power that work to silence them. Such a pedagogy makes possible a variety of human capacities which expand the range of social identities students may become. A curriculum which respects the diversity of student voices also provides a fundamental referent for legitimizing the principle of democratic tolerance as an essential condition for forms of solidarity rooted in the principles of trust, sharing, and a commitment to improving the quality of human life. Schools need to incorporate the diverse and contradictory stories that structure the interplay of experience, identity, and possibility that students bring to the classroom. As we have argued elsewhere, for many students schools are places of "dead time," holding centers that have little or nothing to do with either their lives or their dreams. Reversing that experience for students must be a central issue in reconstructing a new educational policy.³

Finally, critical educators need to address the role the federal government should assume in financing its school reform movement. While fighting to restructure the economy in ways that would bring it into greater harmony with forms of democratic socialism, critical educators must not

forget that enduring qualitative educational improvements cannot take place without adequate funding. Four issues need to be dealt with in innovative ways. First, new revenue sources have to be developed as an alternative to the inequitable property tax system that privileges the students of the wealthy and the rich. Such sources might include taxing large corporations through a corporate profit tax; developing a graduated income tax; instituting a corporate property tax; or placing a hefty tax on real estate speculation. During the last decade, federal funding for military expenditures has doubled while educational funding has been cut by 15 percent. Needless to say, these priorities have to change so that the American government can demonstrate a commitment to life and education over death and militarism. Second, the problem of financing school reform must be tied to the wider issue of developing an alternative economic program committed to full employment or at the very least to extensive youth employment through the creation of programs in the public sector. Similarly, the federal government must make available the resources to ensure that qualified students can afford to enter and finish college. This means massively increasing the amount of money available for college loans, scholarships, and grants. Third, a major financial commitment must be made to the underprivileged and those youth who are labeled at risk. This might take the form of investing in a national family literacy campaign, providing health and nutrition programs for the poor while struggling at the federal level for forms of socialized medicine and a national day care plan, and doubling the financial commitment to Head Start programs. Fourth, although the issue of federal financing for educational reform does not exhaust the debate about improving the quality of education in this country, it needs to be argued that money does make a difference in providing suitable conditions for teachers to work, children to learn, and productive school programs to continue and succeed. Schools with broken toilets, inadequate school supplies, low teacher salaries, lead-filled paint, and limited resources for substitute teachers fail to educate, in part, because they lack financial resources. This situation points to the importance of the critical educators not only fighting for policies aimed at increasing federal spending on education, but also targeting financial aid for those populations labeled at risk.

At the current time, critical educators have a historic opportunity to reclaim the importance of public schooling as a basis for critical citizenship, civic responsibility, and democratic public life. Setting a new theoretical and ethical context for the debate on educational reform that will take place in the 1990s is a challenge that must not go unanswered. Central to this challenge is the need for education to develop a new public language of vision and hope that speaks to new forms of political and cultural analysis,

and a deepening and extension of the range of democratic social relations and practices in our schools and classrooms.

Re-presenting the text

The purpose of this book is to provide a series of articles that we believe demonstrate the basic elements of what we call a “language of critique and possibility.” Central to this language is a new vision of educational reform consistent with the civic hopes and democratic possibilities that public education has long held for most Americans. The aim of such a language is fourfold: to define the purpose of schooling as part of a democratic public philosophy; to reconstruct the theory-and-practice relationship as a normative, political endeavor whose importance is defined by a project of democratic empowerment rather than the technical mastery of skills; to develop a cultural politics of schooling in relation to a politics of difference and cultural justice that enables both teachers and students to speak from their own voices, histories, and experiences; and to provide the theoretical basis for a critical pedagogy that incorporates those knowledge forms and social practices that constitute the spheres of popular and everyday life.

Although united by a critical relationship to the prevailing orthodoxies in educational theory and practice, the essays included in this volume span a wide range of topics, are animated by different concerns, and are structured by a variety of theoretical discourses. As disparate in scope and specificity in relation to the issues as these essays are, the central themes engaged by each of the contributors and the continuity of assumptions linking them nevertheless converge to introduce modes of critical inquiry that contribute to a deeper understanding of schooling as a form of cultural politics. Taken together, these essays are devoted in their diverse ways to developing and demonstrating the importance of the aforementioned aims that we believe are central to developing a critical theory of schooling. The four sections that make up this book parallel the lines of inquiry we have attempted to define in this introduction. In what follows, we will briefly summarize each of these sections along with their respective articles.

The contributions that make up Part 1 of this volume, which deals with schooling and the struggle for public life, direct themselves in varying degrees to the task of rethinking the nature and purpose of schooling. Such a “rethinking” is not meant to occur at the conceptual or analytical level alone, but rather as part of a new democratic philosophy that grounds itself not only in a professional pedagogical discourse, but also in a language of public life. Underwriting these essays is both a criticism of the neoconservative and liberal discourses that currently structure the logic of the new

reform platforms endorsing the move towards national educational “excellence” and a materialist challenge to the “academicized” direction presently undertaken by some theorists in the critical educational tradition itself.

Signaling the emergence of the categories of culture and politics into our understanding of how schools work, and seeking to redefine the role of knowledge within the contexts of cultural and curriculum studies, these contributions strongly suggest that the categories which we use to understand and explain the purpose and process of schooling must be made as multifarious, as nuanced, and as variable in detail as the technologies of power that structure the social relations of classroom life; furthermore, they must become part of a critical vernacular that attempts to break free from the preserve of the academy where debates on the purpose and effects of schooling too often are radically disjoined from the manifold relations of everyday life, including struggles that take place within neighborhoods; churches; youth, minority, and women’s communities; and workplace-based communities of resistance: in short, within those very sites which set the preconditions for group formations and social action capable of vitiating the discourse of privatization and individualism common to our post-modern condition. In addition to calling for a new critical vernacular for analyzing the social, economic, and political contexts of school-society relations, these essays stress the importance of redefining the very nature and function of schooling itself; that is, rather than conceiving schools to be monolithically present as learning institutions, these essays urge us to rethink the contribution of schools to society in terms of public spheres designed to intervene in the serial, the mechanical, and the mass-produced aspects of everyday life in which inequality is able to reproduce itself. In this way schools become agencies for reconstructing and transforming the dominant status quo culture. What these essays collectively achieve is to rescue the term *culture* from its New Right and liberal status as a Platonic time capsule of elite knowledge or a community register of statistics and facts, and situate it in the nexus of power and knowledge and the contextual relations of class, gender, and race. The end result is the creation of a tactical and strategic connection among critical theory, pedagogical practice, and public philosophy which is designed to provide educators with a more productive and illuminating model for understanding and transforming existing relations of power and privilege in the classroom and the wider social sphere. What emerges from these attempts are the beginnings of a new public discourse formulated for use among those groups of educators, parents, administrators, and public servants who wish to develop a critical theory of practice learning for the modern age.

Martin Carnoy begins with the position that schools have become a

product of both “reproductive” forces—attempts by the dominant class to impose its concept of the world on the mass of students—and “democratizing” forces—attempts by subordinate groups to shape schools and school expansion to contribute to the development of their cultures in the context of an American capitalist development that serves them and not solely the business class. Carnoy argues that prevailing interpretations of school reform have, for the most part, failed to take into account an analysis of culture in relation to the state. Examining the role of schooling in the conflict between dominant and subordinate ideologies and the role of cultural resistance in American schools, Carnoy urges schools to participate in the expansion of mass culture and in the weakening of the grasp of dominant business ideologies as relate to education. Schools, claims Carnoy, should serve as sites dedicated to counterhegemonic struggle and resistance. Whether or not schools can become agents of counterhegemony—of a change in the dominant culture—involves a struggle more over the *control* of schools than the *content* of schooling, especially in relation to the dominant culture’s control over access to knowledge. Carnoy maintains that it is with social movements outside the school that the future of counterhegemony resides, since these groups can help schooling make an impact on American mass culture and on history and who gets to make it.

Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis maintain that liberal educational theory, grounded as it is in neoclassical economics, with its propensity to partition learning (human development) from choosing (human freedom), is prone to obfuscate the issue of domination in the educative process in which the freedom of the student is completely subordinated to an institutional will in which preferences are externally imposed. The authors stress a “becoming-by-action” model of individual choice as a means of correcting the arrested development of liberal educational theory. This means exercising one’s freedom to choose independently of collective sentiment, and entering into mutual, reciprocal, and participatory action with others to achieve commonly defined goals. By reconstituting liberal political philosophy in this way, the authors claim that it becomes more compatible with a democratic theory of education by constructing a space for individuals to develop their preferences, their capacities for social participation, and their ability to make critical and informed choices.

Michael Apple directs his attention toward the advent of the neoconservative consensus in the United States which has, regrettably, received the approbation of many of our social institutions such as the schools. To a large extent, the discourse of the New Right has laundered the term *culture* of its dialectical and political dimensions, deflecting attention away from the

significance of popular culture as a category for understanding the manner in which student subjectivities are constructed in opposition to the goals and intentions of many school programs. Apple is primarily concerned with the process by which dominant beliefs become dominant—how they “win ascendancy” through a specific and contingent process of ideological struggle. Maintaining that in order to fully comprehend the terms of the current debate in educational reform one must have a clear grasp of “society’s already unequal cultural, economic, and political dynamics that provide the center of gravity around which education functions,” Apple links these dynamics to the debate over property and person rights at a time of grave economic crisis in the United States.

Apple skillfully charts out how conservative ideologies appeal to people, not by creating a false consensus but by working on reorganizing the feelings, the contradictory lived experiences, and the popular sentiments of large groups of individuals by manipulating their perceived needs, fears, and hopes. Tracing historically the political, economic, and ideological reasons why the social democratic consensus that led to the extension of person rights in education, politics, and the economy has slowly faded, Apple documents how the new “hegemonic bloc” of neoconservative thinking and practices is being constructed, and how it relates to critical concerns surrounding the curriculum.

Miriam David offers an astute examination of how home-school relations are built into the formation of the capitalist educational system. She pays particular attention to the structuring of parental responsibility for children and the role of the school in promoting traditional family models. One of her central concerns is that the gendered division of labor in parenting largely operates unproblematically, reinforcing gender differences in both family, educational, and work activities in adulthood. Furthermore, she describes how the current call for educational reform and a return to more rigorous academic standards by the Thatcher government, in power since 1979, has sustained old educational inequalities while recreating new ones, often reducing parents to the role of ungendered consumers shopping for a middle-class product. In particular, David discusses how traditional family models fostered by the school condemn minority children by judging their patterns of family socialization against Eurocentric, Christian standards. Recent British initiatives in the area of multicultural education are uncovered to reveal a denigration of minority children and their cultures and their differential subjugation according to race, class, and gender. David describes how, within such a logic, schooling serves to replicate appropriate parental behaviors and roles by requiring certain forms of parental involve-

ment in the schools while at the same time serving to structure the role of teachers as types of surrogate parents and parents as types of adjunct teachers.

The contributions in Part 2, which examine rethinking schooling as the language of reform, seek to capture a greater historical and contextual understanding of the relation of schooling to the wider social order and the role that teachers can play as critical agents of social change, capable of effecting a new relationship between theory and practice and action and reflection. It becomes clear from these essays that what is needed, if schools are to truly make a difference, is a language of reform that is born of a socially and morally insurgent imagination, one that involves both critique and hope, that challenges and engages the educators who choose to appropriate it, and, at the same time, that provokes those interested in educational reform to rethink and reshape the specificities of their experiences as teachers, administrators, parents, and students with respect to the aims and purposes of present-day schooling. Highly critical of the mechanical, efficiency-oriented approach to schooling that has dominated the language of school reform over the last two decades, these contributors seek in their analyses to liberate reason and evaluation from the obviousness of the literal and the measurable and to distinguish practical and emancipatory knowledge from the merely technical and skill-oriented knowledge that has seeped into mainstream curriculum thinking from the ever-present discourse of scientism. The new language of school reform that must gain ascendancy over the next decade has to be built on a new ethical and intellectual foundation that can effectively countermand the ideological shift taking place in education toward the New Right. Such a foundation must rest on a preferred commitment to assist the disadvantaged and disenfranchised, to search for new forms of solidarity in the ongoing struggle against oppression, and to construct new forms of citizenship which move beyond a focus on individual virtue and the dangers of personalized moral transgression. Rather, the new model of citizenship that needs to be mobilized in our classrooms must begin to consider the meaning of cooperative learning, collective struggle for the common good, and a greater understanding of the sociology of oppression and the structural dimensions of evil that often occupy the very foundation of our social relations and our cultural, economic, and institutional life.

Like Michael Apple, Walter Feinberg rejects the view that has prevailed in the Age of Reagan: that schools should serve as a bulwark for national defense interests and as a recruitment center for participants in our industrialized economy. He reports on the ideological shift that is occurring in disparate fields today which suggests the need to drastically reform the voice

of institutionalized authority which has served as a major mechanism of large-scale social inequality. Discussing in detail the various reform documents and reports on the crisis in American schooling as part of a wider ideological shift in American society, Feinberg seeks to build an intellectual and moral tradition that will enable students to begin to reflect on the ideological and material shortcomings of the present era.

Philip Wexler argues that the history of the curriculum can essentially be seen in the victory of scientism over humanism, a victory in which the scientific has replaced humanity, spirit, and reason. Current attempts by the school reform movement to redefine knowledge as skill and information echo, for Wexler, Horkheimer and Adorno's notion that a culture of scientism would reinforce a rationalized and alienating daily social life. Wexler sees the advent of postmodernism as the antithesis of scientism, yet at the same time he claims that the ironic revolts of postmodernism really reflect yet another form of scientism in that both scientism and postmodernism dissolve into the deeper logic of commodity culture. Wexler maintains that postmodernism ended when it could no longer provide any values as an alternative to the marketplace.

Drawing upon his own ethnographic research, Wexler reveals that the most powerful aspect of the sociality of the school is its institutional authority to define legitimate knowledge and personnel, and that the informal social lives of students largely support the institutional production of stratified identities. Although there are students who actively resist the social rules and rites of the school, each form of student opposition is paired with a pattern of student affirmation. Together, the paired identities follow the overarching institutional class form of the school. Although the split identities of the students are unified under the class character of the institution as "symbolic economies of identity," Wexler claims that the fusion of identity and institution is so pervasive in schools that the basic binary conception of resistance and domination that has gained ascendancy in critical studies of schooling is no longer serviceable for our understanding of the hegemonic operations within the cultural field of school life. Against the backdrop of a failed oppositional culture, Wexler argues for a "new science" which would offer a revolutionary openness presently derived by contemporary culture and social relations. This opening, he contends, can be found in the specificity of history and scientific practice.

Richard Smith and Anna Zantiotis's contribution illustrates how teacher education has come to constitute a social form of practicality that is fundamentally preoccupied with the specifics of occupational needs. In fact, this social form has, over the years, solidified into a regime of truth in which the source of knowledge, skills, and attitudes for the production of knowl-

edge about teaching and for teacher preparation has become located in the objective relations of teaching itself: that is, from within its own performative text. In other words, the “doing” of teaching has become privileged over the ability and necessity of teachers to reflect critically on what constitutes the ideological dimensions of pedagogy. Through an explication of dominant, realist, and avant-garde discourses on teacher education and their historical situatedness, Smith and Zantiotis argue for an approach to teacher education that takes seriously the political, economic, and social implications of schooling and the part played by teacher education as a site for the production of knowledge.

All of the authors in Part 3, which focuses on the relationships among schooling, ideology, and student voice, address in different terms how schooling functions as a cultural and political site that embodies a project of transformation and regulation. Schooling in this section is viewed as a form of cultural politics, that is, as a place in which a sense of identity, worth, meaning, and value is constructed through social relations which legitimate particular knowledge forms, ideologies, and ways of life. As the introduction to particular ways of life, schooling is analyzed as a site where students are both enabled and silenced, where meaning is produced within specific arrangements of power, and where contradictions and tensions emerge between the human capacities students bring to schools and the social forms that mediate them. In many ways, schooling is a process of marking off culturally desired forms of meaning and practice; it is an ideological practice that implicates the wider society, the institutional life of the school, the familial patterns in the surrounding community, and the lives of the students and teachers in the production of stories and narratives that challenge as well as produce particular forms of oppression and violence. But it is also a site that expands human capacities through practices that celebrate a pedagogy of and for difference, that presupposes the importance of democratic community, that inextricably connects student achievement with the ability to take risks, and that affirms the voices of teachers and students while simultaneously encouraging them to be self-reflective and more socially critical.

Henry A. Giroux explores some of these issues by addressing three important themes. First, he argues for a new public philosophy to provide schools with a sense of purpose and meaning that supports the education of students as critical risk-taking citizens; second, he calls for a theory of ethics that provides the referent for teachers to act as engaged and connected intellectuals; third, he maintains that existing forms of radical educational theory have failed to appropriate some of the more important theoretical gains being made in the wider fields of social theory. In keeping with

this position, he then draws from some of the theoretical work being done in literary and cultural studies to develop what he calls a “pedagogy of and for difference.”

Michelle Fine, in her article, “Silencing and Nurturing Voice in an Improbable Context: Urban Adolescents in Public School,” analyzes the various mechanisms through which the practice of silencing works in schools to undermine the project of individual and social empowerment. Focusing on the ways in which minority students from low-income families are positioned within pedagogical and administrative practices in a New York public school, Fine demonstrates how power, knowledge, and ideology structure curriculum, pedagogy, and school regulations so as to shut down and disconnect the voices, experiences, and histories of subordinate groups. But Fine is not content just to analytically map how the practice of silencing works through various aspects of the everyday workings of schools; she is most concerned with developing a theoretical, political, and ethical case for naming oppression. For Fine, this means developing an educational theory and practice that recognizes and addresses the importance of affirming and legitimating the various voices that give meaning to the diverse groups of disempowered students that increasingly inhabit American schools.

Peter McLaren’s essay on ideology and education addresses the importance of breaking away from the heritage of Marxian categories in order to readmit hope and possibility into the language of educational theory and practice. Specifically, McLaren focuses his critique on Marxian orthodoxy and its one-sided view of ideology, particularly its failure to recognize the limits of meaning and rationality as the exclusive terrain of both subjectivity and subjection. For McLaren, ideology better serves as a critical and empowering referent when it expands its focus to include not only the production of meaning but also the production of desire and the mobilization of affect. McLaren attempts to expand our understanding of how power both enables and constrains in various ways through practices that focus on the body as a central terrain of struggle: that is, he investigates as a pedagogical and ideological issue how the body becomes the site at which desire is mobilized, pleasure is experienced, joy is invested, and humiliation administered. In sum, McLaren charts out the fundamental elements of a theory of the body and desire as part of a wider theory of how students come to be positioned with the matrix of knowledge, desire, and power.

In Part 4, the authors take up various theoretical positions regarding the relationship between popular culture and critical pedagogy. What unites the articles in this section is the refusal to view popular culture as either merely vulgar knowledge or as an unproblematic and romanticized sphere of resistance and opposition. Instead, it is viewed as a site of struggle and

contestation, an important cultural and social terrain that authorizes, endows, and sometimes imperils youth and their identities and which simultaneously serves to empower or disempower them. The authors recognize that educators who refuse to acknowledge popular culture as a significant basis of knowledge often devalue students by refusing to work with the knowledge that students actually have and in doing so eliminate the possibility of developing a pedagogy that links school knowledge to the differing subject relations that help to constitute their everyday lives. It becomes clear in this section that a more critical theory of schooling demands that teachers be more attentive to the ways in which students make both affective and semantic investments as part of their attempt to regulate and give meaning to their lives. This suggests that educators make popular culture a legitimate object of school knowledge so as to deepen the relationship between schooling and everyday life and to better grasp as a basis for critical analysis the totality of elements that organize student identities, experiences, and cultures.

In his study of children's literature, Joel Taxel argues that such literature has to be analyzed as more than simply a hegemonic discourse. In effect, Taxel examines such texts as part of a wider struggle over a selective tradition and its relationship to complex and sometimes contradictory ideologies and messages. For Taxel, reading texts is a form of cultural politics and demands a theory of learning that views knowledge as a contested terrain, as a repository where meaning is produced within, outside, and between dominant and subordinate traditions, that is, among the discourses of dominant, mass, and popular cultures.

David Shumway makes a strong case for using popular culture in the classroom by examining the importance of teaching rock 'n' roll. For Shumway, rock 'n' roll cannot be treated merely as music, but as a cultural form that embodies codes, conventions, rules, and values that transcend their being relegated either to the status of folk culture or an uncritical populist tradition. Shumway argues that using rock 'n' roll in the classroom provides a counterpoint to the way the body is shaped and policed in schools. Popular culture presents another body to students, one that is in-formed by pleasure and joy, as well as a body that refuses regimentation and deadening habit. Rock 'n' roll in this view is itself a contradictory form, containing elements of both domination and emancipation, and as such needs to be developed and analyzed as part of a critical pedagogy. For Shumway, rock 'n' roll, like any other popular form, should be treated as text and needs to be read critically, especially when it plays such a powerful role in shaping students' perceptions and social practices. In effect, a critical pedagogy of the popular is important in Shumway's view because it helps stu-

dents learn skills regarding how their own interests are being either reproduced or severed through particular cultural forms.

In the final article of this section, Giroux and Simon argue that both pedagogy and popular culture have been ignored by critical and radical educational theorists. They proceed to outline the basic elements of a critical pedagogy and then raise some serious issues about how to rethink the notion of the popular and what this rethinking might suggest for incorporating the latter into a critical pedagogy. They finish by raising a number of questions that have been asked by students and educators who have traveled the difficult journey from critical educational theory to classroom practice. The questions suggested and the problems raised serve as a reminder that a critical pedagogy is never finished, that it is always in a state of tension because it is supportive of a cultural politics that defines itself through a project of hope and possibility.