

Although these criticisms are somewhat simplistic in that they often scapegoat teachers for educational problems that go well beyond the shortcomings of teacher education programs, we do believe that teachers should be more liberally and critically educated. The emphasis on knowledge, however, is not sufficient. The cultural literacy envisioned by the educational reformers of the 1980s and championed by writers such as E. D. Hirsch, Allan Bloom, and Diane Ravitch will not by itself provide teachers with the analytical and critical tools needed for understanding the schools. Although cultural literacy is important (even though the question of what constitutes the knowledge that teachers and students ought to have is a crucial dilemma), teachers need critical literacy in their ongoing attempt to make their voices heard and to effect meaningful change.

Students and teachers often ask us how critical literacy will help them solve problems. Are we suggesting that teachers equipped with the ability to understand the educational system will improve it easily? Of course not! Understanding the schools and improving them are two different matters. Without changes in the factors that affect the schools, as well as changes in the structure and processes within the schools, it is highly unlikely that large-scale change or even significant improvement will take place. What we are saying, however, is that teachers must be part of the ongoing dialogue focused on improving schools, and in order to contribute meaningfully to this dialogue they need more than their own experiences. They need the knowledge, confidence, and authority that are products of critical literacy.

Developing critical literacy is a first and necessary step toward bringing the active voice of teachers into the educational debates so that, together with other professionals, teachers can become intimately involved in the development of a better educational world. It will not be easy. As sociologists, philosophers, and historians of education, we do not pretend that the record suggests that we should be overly optimistic; neither does it suggest, however, that we should lose hope. It is our profound desire that the readings in this book will give you the tools to become part of this ongoing effort—the quest for better schools, better teachers, and a more humane and intelligent society!

## 2

# The Politics of Education

## Conservative, Liberal, Radical, and Neo-liberal Perspectives

Too often, teachers and prospective teachers look at educational issues within the narrow context of schools. That is, they treat what goes on inside classrooms and in the school at large as unrelated to the larger society of which it is a part. Schools are institutions that are rarely immune from external influences such as the economy, the political system, the family, and so on. Moreover, schools in every society exist for specific reasons, not all of which are educational. It is essential, then, that you understand the diverse and often conflicting purposes of schooling, as these goals are often at the heart of disagreements about education.

The terms *education* and *schooling* are sometimes used interchangeably when, in fact, they refer to somewhat different but related processes. Lawrence A. Cremin, the distinguished historian of U.S. education, defined *education* as

the deliberate, systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, skills, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort . . . . The definition projects us beyond the schools and colleges to the multiplicity of individuals and institutions that educate—parents, peers, siblings, and friends, as well as families, churches, synagogues, libraries, museums, summer camps, benevolent societies, agricultural fairs, settlement houses, factories, publishers, radio stations, and television networks. (1977, pp. 135–136)

Cremin's definition looks at education in the broadest possible sense to include all processes in a society that transmit knowledge, skills, and values, and educational institutions as all the places in which these activities occur.

Schooling is a more narrow process, as it is concerned with the activities that occur in schools. Therefore, where education is the most general societal activity, schooling is a particular example of the ways in which education occurs within the schools. Clearly from these definitions, schools are educational institutions. Why do they exist and what are their purposes?

In the broadest sense, schools have political, social, economic, and intellectual purposes. On a philosophical level, however, the purposes of education speak to what the political scientist Amy Gutmann refers to as

that portion of education most amenable to our influence; the conscious efforts of men and women to inform the intellect and to shape the character of less educated men and women. And we naturally begin by asking what the purposes of human education should be—what kind of people should human education create. (1987, p. 19)

Therefore, the purposes of education, in general, and schooling, in particular, are concerned with the type of society people wish to live in and the type of people we wish to live in it. Ultimately, the purposes of education are directed at conceptions of what constitutes the “good life” and a “good person”—questions that have been at the center of philosophical inquiry from Plato to Aristotle, Marx, Freud, and Dewey.

As you will read throughout this book, there is little agreement about these difficult questions. Although men and women have different ideas about what society and individuals ought to look like, every society attempts to transmit its conception on these matters to its citizens. Education is crucial to this process.

### The Purposes of Schooling

The specific purposes of schooling are intellectual, political, social, and economic (Bennett & LeCompte, 1990, pp. 5–21). These purposes refer to their role within any existing society—for our purposes, U.S. society. As you will read later in this chapter and in Chapter 4, one often must make the distinction between what the purposes of schooling are and what they ought to be. For example, those who support the goals of a society believe that schools should educate citizens to fit into that society; those who disagree with its goals believe that schools should educate citizens to change the society. As you can see, differing visions of education relate back to differing conceptions of what constitutes a good society.

The *intellectual* purposes of schooling are to teach basic cognitive skills such as reading, writing, and mathematics; to transmit specific knowledge (e.g., in literature, history, the sciences, etc.); and to help students acquire higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, evaluation, and synthesis.

The *political* purposes of schooling are to inculcate allegiance to the existing political order (patriotism); to prepare citizens who will participate in this political order (e.g., in political democracies); to help assimilate diverse cultural groups into a common political order; and to teach children the basic laws of the society.

The *social* purposes of schooling are to help solve social problems; to work as one of many institutions, such as the family and the church (or synagogue) to ensure social cohesion; and to socialize children into the various roles, behaviors, and values of the society. This process, referred to by sociologists as *socialization*, is a key ingredient to the stability of any society.

The *economic* purposes of schooling are to prepare students for their later occupational roles and to select, train, and allocate individuals into the division of labor. The degree to which schools directly prepare students for work varies from society to society, but most schools have at least an indirect role in this process.

As you will read in Chapter 4, these purposes sometimes contradict each other. For example, the following question underscores the clash between the intellectual and political purposes of the school: If it is the intellectual purpose of the school to teach higher-order thinking skills, such as critical thinking and evaluation, then can it simultaneously engender patriotism and conformity to society's rules? Lawrence A. Cremin pointed out:

Schooling—like education in general—never liberates without at the same time limiting. It never empowers without at the same time constraining. It never frees without at the same time socializing. The question is not whether one or the other is occurring in isolation but what the balance is, and to what end, and in light of what alternatives. (1977, p. 37)

This dialectic, or the tension between schooling's role in maintaining the status quo and its potential to bring about change, is at the heart of differing conceptions of education and schooling. As we pointed out earlier, those who support the society tend to stress the school's role in helping to maintain it; those who believe the society is in need of improvement or change stress its role in either improving or transforming it. In the following sections, you will read about how different political perspectives on education view not only the purposes of schooling but a variety of related issues.

### Political Perspectives

Debates about educational issues often focus on different views concerning the goals of schools and their place within society. From the inception of the U.S. republic through the present, there have been significantly different visions of U.S. education and the role of schools in society. Although many of the views are complex, it is helpful to simplify them through the use of a political typology. In its most simple form, the different visions of U.S. education can be discussed in terms of conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives. Although the nature of these approaches has changed over time, what follows is a contemporary model of how each perspective views a number of related educational issues. In the following sections, we will explore each perspective in terms of its view of U.S. society, its view of the role of the school in relation to equality and the “American dream,” its explanation of student failure and under-achievement in schools, its definition of educational problems at the turn of the twenty-first century, and its educational policy and reform proposals.

#### **General Issues: Conservative, Liberal, Radical, and Neo-liberal Perspectives**

Political perspectives on education have rarely been used consistently. One of the problems in using labels or typologies is that there is often little agreement about what constitutes the basic principles of any particular perspective. Furthermore, there have been historical changes in the meanings of each of the approaches under consideration: the conservative, the liberal, and the radical. In addition, as many educators have used the terms *traditional* and *progressive* to denote similar approaches, there is often considerable confusion over matters of terminology. In this section, we will define each of the perspectives and relate them to progressive and traditional perspectives. In subsequent sections, the specific features of the conservative, liberal, radical, and neo-liberal perspectives will be delineated.

A *perspective* is a general model for looking at something—in this case, a model for understanding, analyzing, and solving educational problems. As you will see throughout this book, there has been and continues to be little agreement about the nature, causes, and solutions to educational problems. In order to understand the ways in which various authors look at educational issues, it is necessary to understand how they approach the problems—that is, to understand where they are coming from (their perspective, its assumptions, etc.).

The conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives all look at educational issues and problems from distinctly different, although at times overlapping, vantage points. Although there are areas of agreement, they each have distinctly different views on education and its role in U.S. society. Moreover, they each have fundamentally different viewpoints on social problems and their solution in general, and their analysis of education is a particular application of this more general world view. Finally, the neo-liberal perspective supports some of the tenets of both the liberal and conservative positions. The following sections first summarize the conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives and then present the neo-liberal perspective in relation to these.

#### **The Conservative Perspective**

The conservative view has its origins in nineteenth-century social Darwinist thought (see Gordon, 1977) that applied the evolutionary theories of Charles Darwin to the analysis of societies. This perspective, developed originally by the sociologist William Graham Sumner, looks at social evolution as a process that enables the strongest individuals and/or groups to survive, and looks at human and social evolution as adaptation to changes in the environment. From this point of view, individuals and groups must compete in the social environment in order to survive, and human progress is dependent on individual initiative and drive.

A second feature of the conservative viewpoint is the belief that the free market or market economy of capitalism is both the most economically productive economic system and the system that is most respectful of human needs (e.g., for competition and freedom). Based in part on the eighteenth-century writings of the British political economist Adam Smith and applied to twentieth-century economic policy by the Nobel laureate economist Milton Friedman, conservatism argues that free market capitalism allows for the maximization of economic growth and individual liberty with competition ensuring that potential abuses can be minimized. Central to this perspective is the view that individuals are rational actors who make decisions on a cost-benefit scale.

Thus, the conservative view of social problems places its primary emphasis on the individual and suggests that individuals have the capacity to earn or not earn their place within a market economy, and that solutions to problems should also be addressed at the individual level. The presidency of Ronald Reagan represented the political ascendancy of this viewpoint. Reagan championed a free market philosophy and argued that welfare state policies (government intervention in the economy) were at the heart of an American malaise. His presidency (1980–1988) was characterized by supply-side economics (a form of free market capitalism), the elimination of many governmental regulations, and the curtailment of many social programs. The Reagan philosophy stressed individual initiative and portrayed the individual as the only one capable of solving his or her own problems. Whereas conservatives lauded Reagan's policies and credited him with restoring U.S. economic growth, both liberals and radicals were very critical.

#### *The Liberal Perspective*

The liberal view has its origins in the twentieth century, in the works of the U.S. philosopher John Dewey, and, historically, in the progressive era of U.S. politics from the 1880s to the 1930s. Perhaps more important, the liberal view became politically dominant during the administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1933–1945) and what is often referred to as the *New Deal era*.

The liberal perspective, although accepting the conservative belief in a market capitalist economy, believes that the free market, if left unregulated, is prone to significant abuses, particularly to those groups who are disadvantaged economically and politically. Moreover, the liberal view, based on the economic theories of John Maynard Keynes, believes that the capitalist market economy is prone to cycles of recession that must be addressed through government intervention. Thus, the liberal perspective insists that government involvement in the economic, political, and social arenas is necessary to ensure fair treatment of all citizens and to ensure a healthy economy. The impact of such liberal policies is evident throughout the twentieth century, from the New Deal initiatives of FDR (including the Social Security Act and the Works Progress Administration, a federally funded jobs program) to the New Frontier proposals of John F. Kennedy, to the Great Society programs of Lyndon Baines Johnson to (although he probably would take issue with this) George H. W. Bush's savings and loan bailout.

The liberal perspective, then, is concerned primarily with balancing the economic productivity of capitalism with the social and economic needs of the majority of people in the United States. Because liberals place a heavy emphasis on issues of equality, especially equality of opportunity, and because they believe that the capitalist system often gives unfair advantages to those with wealth and power, liberals assert that the role of the government is to ensure the fair treatment of all citizens, to ensure that equality of opportunity exists, and to minimize exceedingly great differences in the life chances and life outcomes of the country's richest and poorest citizens. Moreover, liberals believe that individual effort alone is sometimes insufficient and that the government must sometimes intercede on behalf of those in need. Finally, the liberal perspective

on social problems stresses that groups rather than individuals are affected by the structure of society, so solutions to social problems must address group dynamics rather than individuals alone.

#### *The Radical Perspective*

The radical perspective, in contrast to both the conservative and liberal perspectives, does not believe that free market capitalism is the best form of economic organization, but rather believes that democratic socialism is a fairer political-economic system. Based on the writings of the nineteenth-century German political economist and philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883), the radical viewpoint suggests that the capitalist system, although undeniably the most productive form of economic organization, also produces fundamental contradictions that ultimately will lead to its transformation into socialism.

Although the economic analysis of these contradictions is complex and unnecessary to the level of understanding required here, it is important to note that the central contradiction pointed out by radicals is between the accumulation laws of capitalism (i.e., that wealth is both accumulated and controlled privately) and the general social welfare of the public. That is, radicals (Gordon, 1977; Bowles & Gintis, 1976, 1986) assert that, at this stage in capitalist development, U.S. society has the productive capacity to ensure a minimally acceptable standard of living, including food, shelter, and healthcare for all its citizens. Thus, radicals believe a socialist economy that builds on the democratic political system (and retains its political freedoms) would more adequately provide all citizens with a decent standard of living. What is essential to the radical perspective is the belief that social problems such as poverty and the educational problems of the poorest citizens are endemic to capitalism and cannot be solved under the present economic system. Rather, radicals assert that only a transformation of capitalism into democratic socialism will ensure that the social problems that disproportionately affect the disadvantaged in U.S. society will be addressed.

Radicals believe that the capitalist system is central to U.S. social problems. They also recognize that the capitalist system is not going to change easily and, furthermore, that most Americans fervently support it. Therefore, most radicals place their primary emphasis on the analysis of inequality under capitalism, the economic and power relationships that are central to the perpetuation of inequalities, and policies that seek to reduce these inequities under the existing capitalist system. Thus, while theoretically and politically supporting change, the radical perspective often agrees with those liberal programs aimed at issues concerning equity.

Finally, the radical perspective believes that social problems are structural in nature—that is, that they are caused by the structure of U.S. society and therefore the solutions must be addressed to this structure, not at individuals. To argue that social problems are caused by deficits in individuals or groups is to “blame the victim,” according to the radical perspective (Ryan, 1971).

The collapse of the communist (state socialism) world in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union has resulted in serious challenges in the United States to the claims of the radical perspective. Conservatives and many liberals argue that the events in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe signal the death of communism, as well as socialism, and denote historical evidence for the superiority of capitalism. Although it is clear that state socialism as practiced in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe has failed, radicals do not agree that its failure denotes either the bankruptcy of socialism or the final moral victory of capitalism. Rather, radicals suggest that socialism failed in these cases for a number of reasons.

First, without a capitalist economic base to build on (a prerequisite for socialism in Marx's original theory), socialist economies in communist societies could not efficiently produce sufficient goods and services. Second, without a democratic political base, communist societies denied the necessary human freedoms essential to a healthy society. Furthermore, radicals suggest that the

collapse of state socialist economies does not preclude the ability of socialism to succeed in democratic-capitalist societies. Finally, radicals argue that the collapse of communism in no way eliminates the problems endemic to Western capitalist societies, particularly those related to extremes of inequality. Therefore, although conservatives view these events with great satisfaction, radicals point to the social problems in U.S. society. Liberals, to some degree, believe that these events point to the power of their point of view: that the collapse of socialist economies in communist societies indicates the strength of the capitalist economy, while the significant social problems that remain in U.S. society suggest the importance of further liberal responses.

The three perspectives, then, have overlapping but distinctly different views on the nature of U.S. society and its social problems. The conservative perspective is a positive view of U.S. society and believes that capitalism is the best economic system, as it ensures maximum productivity with the greatest degree of individual freedom. Social problems, from its vantage point, are caused by individuals and groups, and it must be individuals and groups that solve them on their own, with little or no direct government intervention.

The liberal perspective is also positive about U.S. society, albeit with reservations. Liberals also believe that capitalism is indeed the most productive economic system, but they suggest that, if left unrestrained, capitalism often creates far too much political and economic disparity between citizens. Thus, liberals believe the state (government) must intercede to ensure the fair treatment of all and that social problems are often the result of societal rather than individual or group forces.

Finally, the radical perspective, unlike the other two, is negative about U.S. society. It recognizes the productive capacity of its capitalist economic system, but it argues that the society structurally creates vast and morally indefensible inequalities between its members. Radicals, who favor significantly greater equality of outcomes between citizens, believe that U.S. social problems cannot be solved under the existing economic system. They favor a movement toward democratic socialism: a society that, according to radicals, would combine democratic political principles (including representative government, civil liberties, and individual freedom) with a planned economic system—one that is planned for the satisfaction of the human needs of all of its citizens.

In the United Kingdom, under Tony Blair's and Gordon Brown's New Labour party, which was in power from 1997 to 2010, the government supported a blend of liberal and radical policies. Based on British sociologist Anthony Giddens's (the director of the London School of Economics) concept of the *third way* (1999), New Labour believed that the strengths of market capitalism, combined with welfare state socialism, reflected the goals of social democracy. After the election of Conservative Party Prime Minister David Cameron in 2010, the country returned to conservative and neo-liberal policies.

### **Traditional and Progressive Visions of Education**

Discussions of education often refer to *traditional* and *progressive* visions. Although these terms have a great deal in common with the conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives discussed earlier, they are sometimes used interchangeably or without clear definitions, and therefore there is often confusion concerning terminology. For our purposes, we will use the terms *traditional* and *progressive* as the most general representations of views about education. Traditional visions tend to view the schools as necessary to the transmission of the traditional values of U.S. society, such as hard work, family unity, individual initiative, and so on. Progressive visions tend to view the schools as central to solving social problems, as a vehicle for upward mobility, as essential to the development of individual potential, and as an integral part of a democratic society.

In a nutshell, traditionalists believe the schools should pass on the best of what was and what is, and progressives believe the schools should be part of the steady progress to make things better. In relation to the conservative, liberal, and radical perspectives, there is significant overlap. If we use a political continuum from left to right, with the left signifying the radical pole and the right the conservative pole (mirroring the political terminology of *left* and *right wing*), we suggest the following relationship:



Thus, progressive visions encompass the left liberal to the radical spectrums; traditional visions encompass the right liberal to the conservative spectrums. Obviously, as with all typologies, this is somewhat of a simplification. Although many theories that we will discuss and illustrate in subsequent chapters may have significantly more overlap, this typology is, nonetheless, a useful tool for understanding different visions about education.

The discussion so far has concentrated on the general approach to U.S. society and social problems taken by each perspective. The next section looks specifically at how each perspective analyzes education and educational problems.

### **The Role of the School**

The role of the school is a central focus of each of the perspectives and is at the heart of their differing analyses. The school's role in the broadest sense is directly concerned with the aims, purposes, and functions of education in a society.

The conservative perspective sees the role of the school as providing the necessary educational training to ensure that the most talented and hard-working individuals receive the tools necessary to maximize economic and social productivity. In addition, conservatives believe that schools socialize children into the adult roles necessary to the maintenance of the social order. Finally, they see the school's function as one of transmitting the cultural traditions through what is taught (the curriculum). Therefore, the conservative perspective views the role of the school as essential to both economic productivity and social stability.

The liberal perspective, while also stressing the training and socializing function of the school, sees these aims a little differently. In line with the liberal belief in equality of opportunity, it stresses the school's role in providing the necessary education to ensure that all students have an equal opportunity to succeed in society. Whereas liberals also point to the school's role in socializing children into societal roles, they stress the pluralistic nature of U.S. society and the school's role in teaching children to respect cultural diversity so that they understand and fit into a diverse society. On the political level, liberals stress the importance of citizenship and participation in a democratic society and the need for an educated citizenry in such a society. Finally, the liberal perspective stresses individual as well as societal needs and thus sees the school's role as enabling the individual to develop his or her talents, creativity, and sense of self.

Therefore, the liberal perspective sees the role of education as balancing the needs of society and the individual in a manner that is consistent with a democratic and meritocratic society. That is, liberals envision a society in which citizens participate in decision making, in which adult status is based on merit and achievement, and in which all citizens receive a fair and equal opportunity for economic wealth, political power, and social status.

Diane Ravitch, historian of education, eloquently summarizes the liberal view of education:

To believe in education is to believe in the future, to believe in what may be accomplished through the disciplined use of intelligence, allied with cooperation, and good will. If it seems naively American

to put so much stock in schools, colleges, universities, and the endless prospect of self-improvement and social improvement, it is an admirable, and perhaps even a noble flaw. (1983, p. 330)

The radical perspective, given its vastly differing view on U.S. society, likewise has a significantly different view of what the school's role is. Although radicals believe schools ought to eliminate inequalities, they argue that schools currently reproduce the unequal economic conditions of the capitalist economy and socialize individuals to accept the legitimacy of the society. Through what radicals term *social and cultural reproduction*, the school's role is to perpetuate the society and to serve the interests of those with economic wealth and political power. Most important, through a vastly unequal educational system, radicals believe that schools prepare children from different social backgrounds for different roles within the economic division of labor. The radical perspective, unlike the liberal, views equality of opportunity as an illusion and as no more than an ideology used to convince individuals that they have been given a fair chance, when in fact they have not. Therefore, the radical perspective argues that schools reproduce economic, social, and political inequality within U.S. society.

In Chapter 1, we discussed the U.S. belief in education and the view that schooling is an essential component of the American dream of social mobility and equality of opportunity. Conservatives, liberals, neo-liberals and radicals have differing views on the role of the school in meeting these goals.

The conservative perspective believes that schools should ensure that all students have the opportunity to compete individually in the educational marketplace and that schools should be meritocratic to the extent that individual effort is rewarded. Based on the belief that individuals succeed largely on their own accord, conservatives argue that the role of the school is to provide a place for individual merit to be encouraged and rewarded.

Liberals believe that schools should ensure that equality of opportunity exists and that inequality of results be minimized. Based on the historical record, the liberal perspective indicates that although schools have made a significant difference in the lives of countless Americans and have provided upward mobility for many individuals, there remain significant differences in the educational opportunities and achievement levels for rich and poor.

Radicals believe that schools should reduce inequality of educational results and provide upward social mobility, but that historically the schools have been ineffective in attaining these noble goals. Moreover, the radical perspective argues that under capitalism schools will remain limited, if not wholly unsuccessful, vehicles for addressing problems of inequality—problems that radicals suggest are structurally endemic to capitalism.

### Explanations of Unequal Educational Performance

If, as radicals and many liberals suggest, schooling has not sufficiently provided a reduction in inequality of results, and as educational achievement is closely related to student socioeconomic backgrounds (as was indicated in Chapter 1), then the explanation of why certain groups, particularly from lower socioeconomic backgrounds, perform less well in school is a crucial one. Conservatives argue that individuals or groups of students rise and fall on their own intelligence, hard work, and initiative, and that achievement is based on hard work and sacrifice. The school system, from this vantage point, is designed to allow individuals the opportunity to succeed. If they do not, it may be because they are, as individuals, deficient in some manner or because they are members of a group that is deficient.

The liberal perspective argues that individual students or groups of students begin school with different life chances and therefore some groups have significantly more advantages than others. Therefore, society must attempt through policies and programs to equalize the playing field so that students from disadvantaged backgrounds have a better chance.

Democracy

Radicals, like liberals, believe that students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds begin school with unequal opportunities. Unlike liberals, however, radicals believe that the conditions that result in educational failure are caused by the economic system, not the educational system, and can only be ameliorated by changes in the political-economic structure.

### Definition of Educational Problems

Until this point, we have focused on the role of the school and, in particular, its relationship to equality of opportunity and results. Although these are certainly significant issues, the ways in which each perspective addresses specific educational problems at the close of the twentieth century, and consequently how each sees solutions to these, is of the utmost importance. We will begin with a discussion of the definition of educational problems.

The conservative perspective argues the following points:

1. In their response to liberal and radical demands for greater equality in the 1960s and 1970s, schools systematically lowered academic standards and reduced educational quality. Conservatives often refer to this problem as the *decline of standards*.
2. In their response to liberal and radical demands for multicultural education (i.e., education that responds to the needs of all cultural groups), schools watered down the traditional curriculum and thus weakened the school's ability to pass on the heritage of American and Western civilizations to children. Conservatives often define this problem as the *decline of cultural literacy*.
3. In their response to liberal and radical demands for cultural relativism (i.e., that every culture's values and ideas are equally valid), schools lost their traditional role of teaching moral standards and values. Conservatives often refer to this problem as the *decline of values or of civilization*.
4. In their response to liberal and radical demands for individuality and freedom, schools lost their traditional disciplinary function and often became chaotic. Conservatives often refer to this problem as the *decline of authority*.
5. Because they are state controlled and are immune from the laws of a competitive free market, schools are stifled by bureaucracy and inefficiency. Liberals have significantly different viewpoints on the major educational problems of our times.

The liberal perspective argues the following points:

1. Schools have too often limited the life chances of poor and minority children and therefore the problem of underachievement by these groups is a critical issue.
2. Schools place too much emphasis on discipline and authority, thus limiting their role in helping students develop as individuals.
3. The differences in quality and climate between urban and suburban schools and, most specifically, between schools with students of low socioeconomic backgrounds and high socioeconomic backgrounds is a central problem related to inequalities of results.
4. The traditional curriculum leaves out the diverse cultures of the groups that comprise the pluralistic society.

The radical perspective, although often similar in its analysis to the liberal viewpoint, is quite different in its tone. The radical perspective argues the following points:

1. The educational system has failed the poor, minorities, and women through classist, racist, sexist, and homophobic policies.

2. The schools have stifled critical understanding of the problems of American society through a curriculum and teaching practices that promote conformity.
3. The traditional curriculum is classist, racist, sexist, and homophobic and leaves out the cultures, histories, and voices of the oppressed.
4. In general, the educational system promotes inequality of both opportunity and results.

### **Educational Policy and Reform**

Defining educational problems is the first step toward the construction of solutions. From the 1980s to the 2000s, proponents of each perspective supported specific educational reform and policy recommendations. The following brief discussion outlines the policies and programs of each without going into any detail. (A more detailed analysis will be provided in Chapters 3, 6, and 10.)

#### **Conservatives support the following:**

1. Return to basics (often referred to as *back to basics*), including the strengthening of literacy skills, such as reading and writing, and other forms of traditional learning.
2. Return to the traditional academic curriculum, including history, literature, and the canons of Western civilization.
3. Introduce accountability measures for students and schools, including minimum standards of performance and knowledge—that is, create minimum standards for what students should know and for the skills they should possess at specific grade levels (e.g., fourth, eighth, and twelfth grades).
4. Introduce free market mechanisms in the educational marketplace, including tuition tax credits and vouchers for parents who wish to send their children to private schools and public school choice programs, including charter schools (allowing parents to choose among different public schools). This is often referred to as *school privatization*.

#### **Liberals support the following:**

1. Policies should combine a concern for quality for all students with equality of opportunity for all. This is sometimes referred to as *quality with equality*.
2. Policies should lead to the improvement of failing schools, especially urban schools. Such programs should include school-based management and teacher empowerment (decentralized control of individual schools with teachers having a significant voice in decision making), effective school programs (programs that are based on what is called the *effective school research*—research that indicates “what works”), and public school choice programs. Whereas liberals support parental choice of public schools, they rarely support conservative proposals for complete privatization, tuition tax credits, and vouchers, as these are seen as threatening public education and creating increasingly unfair advantages for parents who are already economically advantaged.
3. Programs should enhance equality of opportunity for disadvantaged groups, including Head Start (a preschool program for students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds), affirmative action programs, compensatory higher education programs (college programs for disadvantaged students), and so forth.
4. A curriculum should balance the presentation of the traditions of Western civilization with the treatment of other groups within the culturally diverse society.
5. A balance should be maintained between setting acceptable performance standards and ensuring that all students can meet them.

#### **Radicals support the following:**

1. On a general level, radicals do not believe that educational reform alone will solve educational problems, as they see their causes outside the purview of the educational system. Short of what most radicals see is necessary but unrealistic largescale societal change—they support most liberal reform programs as long as they lead to greater equality of educational results.
2. Programs should result in greater democratization of schools—that is, give teachers, parents, and students a greater voice in decision making. Examples of these are teacher empowerment, school-based management, school decentralization, and school-community cooperation efforts.
3. Curriculum and teaching methods should involve “critical pedagogy” (Giroux, 1988; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998)—that is, radicals support educational programs that enable teachers and students to understand social and educational problems and to see potential solutions (radical) to these.
4. Curriculum and teaching methods should be multicultural, antiracist, antisexist, anticlassist, antihomophobic—that is, radicals support educational programs that include curricular treatment of the diverse groups that comprise U.S. society and that are pedagogically aimed at sensitizing students to classism, racism, sexism, and homophobia.

Radicals, although often supporting many of the liberal educational reform proposals, are less sanguine about their potential effectiveness. In fact, as Samuel Bowles pointed out, the failure of liberal reforms may prove successful in a very different political context:

Educational equality cannot be achieved through changes in the school system alone. Nonetheless, attempts at educational reform may move us closer to that objective if, in their failure, they lay bare the unequal nature of our school system and destroy the illusion of unimpeded mobility through education. Successful educational reforms—reducing racial and class disparities in schooling, for example, may also serve the cause of equality of education, for it seems likely that equalizing access in schooling will challenge the system to make good its promise of rewarding educational attainment or find ways of coping with mass disillusionment with the great panacea. (1977, p. 149)

### ***Education and the American Dream***

The next chapter will focus directly on the ways in which educational reform evolved in U.S. history. Although our discussion thus far has looked at the last 50 years, it is essential to understand that the present debates and crises are outcomes of a much longer historical time span in which the disagreements about educational issues helped shape the present educational system. It is also important to note that all three perspectives have different views on U.S. educational history, especially with regard to the school's success in living up to the democratic promise discussed in Chapter 1.

Conservatives argue that the U.S. schools have succeeded in providing a quality education for those who are capable and have taken advantage of it, and that, until the 1960s and 1970s, schools were responsible for U.S. superiority in economic and technological realms. On one hand, conservatives argue that the system has provided a meritocratic selection process that has ensured that the most talented and motivated individuals are rewarded by the schools and later in life. This mechanism historically has successfully guaranteed that the important roles and occupations are filled with those individuals capable of handling them. On the other hand, conservatives believe that the progressive reforms of the twentieth century (to be discussed in Chapter 3), especially

those occurring in the 1960s and 1970s, eroded the quality of the schools, their curriculum, and what students learned. Thus, the U.S. educational system, from this point of view, is found wanting, especially in relation to its role in economic development and competitiveness.

The liberal perspective is more concerned with the social and political functions of schooling than the economic. As such, liberals believe that schools have been successful in extending public education to the masses and providing more opportunity for mobility than any other system in the world. Moreover, liberals believe that U.S. education has been essential in the long, slow, and flawed march toward a more democratic and meritocratic society—a society where one's individual achievement is more important than one's family background, a society that is more just and humane, and a society where tolerance of others who are different is an important value. Despite these successes, liberals argue that the educational system has been an imperfect panacea (Perkinson, 1995) and has yet to provide sufficient access, opportunity, and success for all citizens, and thus must continue to improve.

The radical perspective is far less optimistic about the historical success than either the liberal or conservative viewpoints. According to radicals, the U.S. schools have been unsuccessful in providing equality of opportunity or results to the majority of citizens. Although it is true that the United States has educated more people for longer periods of time than any other nation in the world, radicals believe the overall outcomes have reproduced rather than reduced social and economic inequalities. According to this perspective, the historical record suggests that, although educational opportunities expanded throughout the twentieth century, students from different class backgrounds were offered different types of education (e.g., middle- and upper middle-class students in an academic program in the public high school and poor students in a vocational program; middle- and upper middle-class students in a four-year baccalaureate college education and poor students in a two-year community college education). Therefore, according to radicals, the history of U.S. education has been the story of false promises and shattered dreams.

In the next chapter, you will have the opportunity to explore the events, conflicts, debates, and reforms that comprise this history and to judge for yourself the extent to which the history of U.S. education supports one or more of these political interpretations.

### The Neo-liberal Perspective

During the past decade, neo-liberal reforms have received significant attention as the latest solutions in policy discussions of urban school reform and efforts to reduce the achievement gap. Neo-liberal reform is often a synthesis of conservative and liberal perspectives. Neo-liberal reformers have critiqued failing traditional urban public schools and attribute their failures to teacher unions and their support of teacher tenure and layoffs based on seniority and the absence of student, teacher and school accountability to ensure improvement. This critique has been part of an over two-decade conservative and neo-liberal celebration of market based choice reforms, with reformers arguing that school choice through charters and vouchers is necessary to destroy the public school monopoly and to provide the competition required to improve urban schools. Borrowing from the logic of Diane Ravitch's *Left Back* (2000), neo-liberals turned the progressive left's argument about equity on its head, suggesting that traditional public schools, rather than providing equality of opportunity for low-income children, have systematically reproduced inequalities through failing schools for these students, a claim reminiscent of Bowles and Gintis's *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976).

This neo-liberal agenda has become an important feature of official federal, state, and local policy. At the federal level, President Bush's No Child Left Behind (2001) mandated the use of student achievement tests to measure school quality, and President Obama's Secretary of Education Arne Duncan's signature program, Race to the Top (RTT), requires states to expand

the number of charter schools and to implement Valued Added Models (VAM) of teacher evaluations based on student achievement to qualify for RTT funding. At the state level, Republican New Jersey Governor Chris Christie has pledged to eliminate teacher tenure and seniority based layoffs, increase the number of charter schools, and pass voucher legislation. At the local level, Democratic Newark Mayor, Cory Booker, with the influx of a \$100 million dollar gift from Facebook Founder Mark Zuckerberg and another \$100 million in matching funds, has initiated a school reform process that includes an expansion of charter schools. Also in Newark, the two-year-old Newark Charter School Fund, with over \$20 million in funding from among others the Walton, Broad, and Gates Foundations, has embarked on increasing the number of charter schools in Newark.

Neo-liberal reforms stress five areas for educational policy: 1. Austerity; 2. The market model; 3. Individualism; 4. State intervention; and 5. Economic prosperity, race and class. They have synthesized both conservative and liberal perspectives to provide a critique of traditional public education.

First, austerity involves cutting public spending on education. Like conservatives, they argue that the enormous increases in federal, state and local education spending has not resulted in concomitant increases in student achievement, especially in urban schools and that efficiency can reduce costs and improve quality. They argue that urban parochial schools perform at higher levels than their traditional counterparts at much lower costs, although the evidence on this is extremely mixed at best (B. Baker, 2011).

Second, neo-liberals, like conservatives, believe that the free market solves social problems better than governmental policy. Based on this belief, neo-liberals support charter schools, vouchers for private school attendance, especially for low-income children, and privatization of schooling through for-profit educational management companies (Lipman, 2011).

Third, like conservatives, neo-liberals believe that educational success or failure is the result of individual effort rather than of social and economic factors. The only factors outside the individual responsible for educational success are school quality, which is better addressed by a market model, and the culture of students and their families, which are better addressed through the promotion of middle-class educational attitudes, values and behaviors (Mosovitch et al., 2010).

Fourth, like liberals, neo-liberals believe that state intervention in the educational system is at times necessary to ensure equality of opportunity. Whereas conservatives believe that the market is capable of "raising all boats," neo-liberals believe that state intervention is sometimes required to ensure that failing schools or districts improve. Therefore, neo-liberal policies include state intervention into failing districts and schools, the closing of failing schools, and, as in No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, federal measures to support and reward successful educational policies, and negative sanctions to punish failing policies (Sadovnik, 2011b).

Fifth, like liberals, neo-liberals believe that race and social class are important factors in the achievement gap and that African-American and Hispanic students and lower income students are more likely to achieve and attain at lower levels than White, Asian and higher income students. While neo-liberals have made the elimination of these race and socio-economic achievement gaps as a central part of their reform policies, they do not see poverty as an excuse for educational inequality. Rather, neo-liberals blame failing schools and ineffective teachers as the primary causes of school and student failures. Moreover, they argue that education is the key to global economic competitiveness, so that improving education is fundamental to United States global economic superiority (Apple, 2004; Lipman, 2011).

Ironically, Diane Ravitch (2010) herself has attacked these neo-liberal reforms as betraying their promise of improving public schools because the new reformers have attempted to privatize public education, have championed closing schools rather than fixing them, have supported charter schools over traditional public schools, and narrowed the curriculum through the overreliance on standardized testing in reading, writing and mathematics.

## From Political Perspectives to the Politics of Education

As you have read, there is considerable disagreement among the four perspectives. In the world of education, these disagreements play themselves out in conflict. These conflicts involve different groups, parents, teachers, administrators, legislators, business people, and so on, and are central to understanding educational decision making. As you will read in Chapter 3, the history of education in the United States has rarely been a smooth one. It has involved the conflict between groups with opposing values and interests, groups all seemingly interested in the same thing—the best education for the nation's children—but with significantly different perceptions of what that constitutes and how to go about it.

Sometimes these conflicts have been about curriculum and pedagogy (e.g., the conflicts about vocational versus academic education in the 1930s and 1940s or traditional versus child-centered teaching at the turn of the twentieth century); sometimes they have been about values and morality (e.g., as in the textbook and book-banning controversies of the last 20 years or over the question of prayer in schools); and sometimes they have been about civil rights and racial issues (e.g., the violent battles over school desegregation in Little Rock, Arkansas, in the late 1950s and in Boston, Massachusetts, in the 1970s).

Sometimes these conflicts are external to the school and involve the federal, state, and local governments, the courts, and the business community. Sometimes they are internal to the schools and involve parents, teachers, and teacher unions or organizations, students, and administrators.

Whatever the specific nature of the conflicts, they all involve power and power relationships. Political scientists are concerned with understanding how power relationships (i.e., which groups have power and which do not) affect educational decision making and organizational outcomes. As our discussion in Chapter 3 about the history of education will reveal, struggles about education rarely involve equals, but rather involve groups with disparate degrees of power. Therefore, these struggles often involve the attempts to maximize political advantage and to minimize that of opposing groups.

Whereas political scientists are concerned with who controls our schools (Kirst, 1984), political philosophers are concerned with who ought to control them and for what end. In her brilliant book *Democratic Education*, Gutmann (1987) outlined the philosophical dimensions of this political question. She argued that there are four different conceptions of who should have the authority to determine educational matters: the family state, the state of families, the state of individuals, and the democratic state (pp. 19–47). Each perspective answers the question, Who should have the authority over educational decisions in a different manner?

The family state viewpoint is derived from Plato's theories of education (to be discussed more fully in Chapter 5). This approach sees the purpose of education as creating a socially stable society committed to the good life and justice. The definition of a just society, however, is determined by an elite—what Plato referred to as the *philosopher kings* (or in Gutmann's gender equal terminology, *philosopher queens*). It is this elite that defines the just society, and it is through education that citizens learn to accept this view of society and are thereby able to contribute to its smooth functioning. In terms of educational authority, it is a small and hopefully just elite that should determine educational decisions.

The second viewpoint, the state of families, is derived from the eighteenth-century English political philosopher John Locke. Based on the Lockean view that parents are the best guardians of their children's rights and interests, it suggests that families should have the final authority in educational decision making.

The third position, the state of individuals, is derived from the work of the nineteenth-century British philosopher John Stuart Mill. Based on the nineteenth-century liberal notion that the state should not impose its will on individuals nor threaten their individual liberties, it suggests

that educational authorities should not "bias the choices of children toward some disputed or controversial ways of life and away from others" (Gutmann, 1987, p. 34). Thus, educational authority ought to provide opportunity for choice among competing conceptions of the good life and neutrality among them (Gutmann, 1987, p. 34). In this manner, individuals have authority over educational matters to the extent that they are given the freedom to choose among the widest possible options about the kind of lives they wish to live.

Gutmann provided an exhaustive criticism of these three perspectives, suggesting that the family state leaves one at the tyranny of the state, the state of families at the tyranny of families, and the state of individuals without a clear way to reproduce what a society believes is responsible for its citizens. Each perspective, she argued, is flawed because it fails to provide a compelling rationale for either its view of a good society or who should define it.

Gutmann proposed a fourth perspective: the democratic state of education. In this view,

Educational authority must be shared among parents, citizens, and professional educators even though such sharing does not guarantee that power will be wedded to knowledge (as in the family state), that parents can successfully pass their prejudices on to their children (as in the state of families), or that education will be neutral among competing conceptions of the good life (as in the state of individuals). (1987, p. 42)

Recognizing that a democratic state has built-in problems, including the tyranny of the many over the few, Gutmann argued that there must be two limitations on such a state: nonrepresenation and nondiscrimination. Nonrepresentation does not permit the state or groups to use the educational system for eliminating choice between different alternatives of a just society; nondiscrimination requires that all children receive an adequate education—one that will enable them to participate in the democratic deliberations of their society (1987, p. 46).

As you can see, the question of educational authority is a complex one and has been at the center of educational conflict. Throughout this book, you will read about different educational viewpoints and different recommendations for solutions to educational problems. In this chapter, we have tried to make you aware that such conflicts rest on different assumptions about society, the purposes of education, and who should determine these important matters.

In the following readings, the perspectives on education are illustrated. In the first article, "Hijacked! How the Standards Movement Turned into the Testing Movement," historian of education and former Assistant Secretary of Education under George H.W. Bush, Diane Ravitch, argues the standards movement she once supported has become dominated by standardized testing.

The second article, "What 'Counts' as Educational Policy? Notes Toward a New Paradigm," by educational researcher Jean Anyon, argues that these types of conservative and liberal educational policies have had little impact on reducing the achievement gap. Anyon's article outlines a radical perspective in which she argues that liberal educational reforms must be tied to larger political, social, and economic reforms to be successful. Her article combines a radical critique of the excesses of free market capitalism with a view that liberal educational reforms are necessary under capitalism.

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An earlier version of this article was presented at the American Educational Research Association's 1995 Annual Meeting in San Francisco.

## 5

# The Philosophy of Education and Its Significance for Teachers

In Chapter 1, we argued that Americans place a great deal of faith in education, and particularly that Americans view schools as the great panacea for the multitude of problems that plague both individuals and society as a whole. In this chapter, we point out that the study of the philosophy of education as an integral part of the foundations perspective will allow prospective teachers to reflect on educational issues from a particular perspective—the perspective of philosophy. This perspective encourages logical, systematic thinking. It stresses the importance of ideas and allows—indeed, encourages—the act of reflection on every aspect of practice. Thus, philosophy acts as the building block for the reflective practitioner.

### The Perspective of Philosophy of Education

Practitioners often argue, as do students in schools of education, that although philosophy of education may add another dimension to the way in which they view schools, nevertheless, they haven't the time for a discipline that does not offer tangible results. Rather, they wish to learn *what* to do, not *why* to do it. For too many practitioners and students of education, the practice of teaching is reduced to action devoid of a rationale or justification.

We believe that the practice of teaching cannot be separated from a philosophical foundation. Philosophy, as applied to education, allows practitioners and prospective practitioners to apply systematic approaches to problem solving in schools and illuminates larger issues of the complex relationship of schools to the social order.

### What Is Philosophy of Education?

Philosophy of education differs from philosophy, as we have stated in Chapter 1. Philosophy of education is firmly rooted in practice, whereas philosophy, as a discipline, stands on its own with no specific end in mind. Given this difference, it is necessary to consider for a moment how a particular philosophy might affect practice.

All teachers, regardless of their action orientation, have a personal philosophy of life that colors the way in which they select knowledge; order their classrooms; interact with students, peers, parents, and administrators; and select values to emphasize within their classrooms. Engaging in philosophy helps teachers and prospective teachers to clarify what they do or intend to do and, as they act or propose to act, to justify or explain why they do what they do in a logical, systematic manner. Thus, the activity of doing philosophy aids teachers in understanding two very important notions: (1) who they are or intend to be and (2) why they do or propose to do what they do. Furthermore, through the action of clarification and justification of practice, teachers and prospective teachers think about practice and acquire specific information, which lends authority to their decision making.

### The Meaning of Philosophical Inquiry

Although people exist as individuals, they also exist within the greater context of their culture. Through interactions with the norms common to the culture, people form attitudes, beliefs, and values, which are then transmitted to others. As people go about this process of acquiring cultural norms, they may accept norms wholeheartedly, accept norms partially, or, in certain instances, totally reject them. Whatever people choose to embrace, if their choices are made in a logical, rational manner, they are engaged in the process of "doing philosophy."

To proceed in doing philosophy, certain key questions are posed that can be divided into three specific areas of philosophical inquiry. The first is called *metaphysics*, a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with questions about the nature of reality. The second is called *epistemology*, a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with questions about the nature of knowledge. Last is *axiology*, a branch of philosophy that concerns itself with the nature of values.

We believe that these distinctions in philosophy are important for prospective teachers to know, since ideas generated by philosophers about education usually fall under a particular branch of philosophy, such as epistemology. Furthermore, the ideas generated by philosophers interested in particular questions help people to clarify their own notions of existence, knowledge, and values—in sum, one's personal philosophy of life. Moreover, this philosophy of life, as one comes to understand it, becomes the foundation upon which people construct pedagogic practice.

### Particular Philosophies of Education

In the following pages, we will discuss several leading schools of philosophy that have influenced and continue to influence the way people view educational practice. We have included both classical philosophies and modern philosophies which, in our opinion, have made the most impact on the ways in which people think about schools. Many of the ideas overlap; many of the distinctions we make are artificial and, at times, arbitrary. Most important, we hope that you will appreciate the fact that all successful practitioners borrow from many schools of thought.

#### Idealism

We begin our discussion of particular schools of philosophy that have influenced educational thought with *idealism*, the first systematic philosophy in Western thought. Idealism is generally thought to be the creation of the Greek philosopher, Plato (427–347 B.C.), the pupil of Socrates, a famous Greek teacher and philosopher who lived in Athens (c. 469–399 B.C.). Socrates did not write anything down; rather, he taught through establishing oral dialogues with his students or those he wished to engage in philosophical questions. Socrates saw himself, as Plato stated in *The Apology* (*The Defense*), as "the gadfly of Athens." Through questioning, he forced his fellow Athenians to consider their life choices, and, in many instances, made them uncomfortable or often provoked them to anger. In 399 B.C., Socrates was executed for his beliefs. He was officially charged with corrupting the minds of the youth of Athens.

Plato wrote down Socrates' ideas and his method, which was the dialogue. While doing so, he probably added to Socrates' ideas, since he was only 28 years old when Socrates was executed, and he continued to write Socratic dialogue long after Socrates' death. Scholars concur with the idea that Plato augmented Socrates' beliefs, since it is generally held that Plato was far more sophisticated in his thinking than Socrates (Guthrie, 1969). Nevertheless, it is difficult for the uninitiated to distinguish between Socrates' and Plato's work. Thus, we will refer to this combination as *Platonic philosophy*.

### Generic Notions

Philosophers often pose difficult, abstract questions that are not easily answered. Plato helped to initiate this tradition through his concern for the search for truth.

Plato distrusted the world of matter; he believed that it was in a constant state of flux. Therefore, matter was an inaccurate measurement of truth since it was constantly changing. Plato also believed that the senses were not to be trusted, as they continually deceive us. Because truth for Plato was perfect and because truth is eternal, it was not to be found in the world of matter: "The unchanging realities we can apprehend by the mind only: the senses can show us only transient and imperfect copies of reality" (Kitto, 1951, p. 194).

The only constant for Plato was the field of mathematics, since  $1 + 1 = 2$  will never change. In fact, it is eternal. The problem, however, with all of this is that mathematics is only one field of inquiry and so individuals must look to other modes of inquiry in the quest for truth. For Plato, this was the task of the philosopher.

Plato's method of doing philosophy was to engage another individual in a dialogue and, through the dialogue, question that individual's point of view. This questioning was done in a systematic, logical examination of both points of view. Ultimately, both parties would reach a synthesis of viewpoints that would be acceptable to both. This approach, called the *dialectic*, was used by Plato to move individuals from the world of matter to the world of ideas. Perhaps, as some philosophers suggest, Plato's philosophy should be called "ideaism" rather than idealism, since, for Plato, ideas were what mattered above all.

Plato thought that education, in particular, was important as a means of moving individuals collectively toward achieving the *good*. He believed that the state should play an active role in education and that it should encourage the brighter students to follow a curriculum that was more abstract and more concerned with ideas rather than with concrete matter. Thus, brighter students would focus on ideas, and data collecting would be assigned to the less able. Plato's "tracking system" was gender free; however, he proposed that those students who functioned on a more concrete level should assume roles necessary for maintaining the city-state, such as craftsmen, warriors, and farmers. Those who functioned on a more abstract level should rule. In fact, Plato put forth the idea of a philosopher-king: an individual who would lead the state to discover the ultimate good. Thus, Plato believed that rulers were individuals of thought, action, and obligation.

Since Plato's time, people have seen the state become a major force in determining the system of education. People have also witnessed how increasingly the school and tracking, in particular, determine the life chances of students. Additionally, people still cling to the importance that Plato attached to education as the instrument that will enlighten rulers and aid them in achieving the highest good. Perhaps naively, people still believe that evil comes through ignorance, and that if only the rulers are educated, evil will be obliterated. Unfortunately, modern history has yet to validate this view.

### Modern Idealists

Since Plato, there has been a series of philosophers who have augmented his original notions. For example, St. Augustine (354–430 A.D.) added religion to classical idealism; later philosophers, such as René Descartes (1596–1650), Immanuel Kant (1724–1804), and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770–1831), added their particular visions to Platonic idealism.

### Goal of Education

Educators who subscribe to idealism are interested in the search for truth through ideas rather than through the examination of the false shadowy world of matter. Teachers encourage their

students to search for truth as individuals. However, with the discovery of truth comes responsibility—responsibility of those who achieve the realization of truth to enlighten others. Moreover, idealists subscribe to the notion that education is transformation: Ideas can change lives.

#### **Role of the Teacher**

It is the teacher's responsibility to analyze and discuss ideas with students in order for students to move to new levels of awareness so that ultimately they can be transformed. Teachers should deal with abstract notions through the dialectic method but should aim to connect analysis with action as well.

In an idealist's classroom, the teacher plays an active role in discussion, posing questions, selecting materials, and establishing an environment, all of which ensure the teacher's desired outcome. An idealist teacher subscribes to the doctrine of *reminiscence*, described in the *Meno*, an important Platonic dialogue, which states that the role of the teacher is to bring out that which is already in the student's mind. Additionally, an idealist teacher supports moral education as a means of linking ideas to action. Last, the idealist teacher sees herself or himself as a role model in the classroom, to be emulated by students.

#### **Methods of Instruction**

Idealist teachers take an active part in their students' learning. Although they lecture from time to time, perhaps to fill in background material not covered in the reading, they predominately use the dialectic approach described by Plato. Through questioning, students are encouraged to discuss, analyze, synthesize, and apply what they have read to contemporary society. Students are also encouraged to work in groups or individually on research projects, both oral and written.

#### **Curriculum**

Idealists place great importance on the study of classics (i.e., great literature of past civilizations that illustrated contemporary concerns). For idealists, all contemporary problems have their roots in the past and can best be understood by examining how previous individuals dealt with them. A good example of an idealist curriculum would be the Great Books curriculum at Saint John's University, in Annapolis, Maryland. During their four years in college, students read, analyze, and apply the ideas of classical works to modern life. For elementary school-age children, there is a Great Books course promoted by individuals in the private sector and there exists as well a grass-roots movement to institute a core curriculum in elementary and junior high schools throughout the nation.

An interesting proposal that has not taken root is Mortimer Adler's *Paideia Proposal* (1982), which advocates great literature for children of all abilities. Adler proposed that elementary school children read great literature that would contain issues of relevance to all. Adler emphasized both content and process through the actual readings, much like the current whole-language movement.

Many idealists also support a back-to-basics approach to education, which emphasizes the three Rs. Such an approach became popular among educational conservatives, such as President Reagan's Secretary of Education, William Bennett, in the 1980s.

#### **Realism**

Realism is a philosophy that follows in the same historical tradition as idealism. Realism is associated with both Plato and Aristotle, although philosophers tend to view Aristotle as the

leading proponent of realism. Aristotle (384–322 B.C.), a student of Plato's, was the son of a physician. He studied at Plato's Academy in Athens until Plato's death in 347 B.C. Aristotle also lived in Asia Minor and in Macedonia, where he was tutor to King Philip of Macedonia's son, Alexander. Aristotle's pupil later became Alexander the Great and a lover of all things Greek, thanks to Aristotle's influence.

In 355 B.C., Aristotle returned to Athens and started a school in the Lyceum, a public grove. Aristotle's career as a great teacher was cut short by the death of Alexander, his protector. The Athenians charged Aristotle with "impiety" and thus Aristotle was forced to leave Athens and settle in Euboea, where he remained until his death. Aristotle is particularly important because he was the first philosopher who developed a systematic theory of logic.

#### **Generic Notions**

In our discussion of idealism, we noted that Plato argued for the centrality of ideas. Aristotle, however, believed that only through studying the material world was it possible for an individual to clarify or develop ideas. Thus, realists reject the Platonic notion that only ideas are real, and argue instead that the material world or matter is real. In fact, realists hold that matter exists, independent of ideas. Aristotle, in fact, might have argued that a triangle exists whether or not there is a thinking human being within range to perceive it.

If Plato were to study the nature of reality, he would begin with ideas, since he believed that the world of matter was shadowy and unreliable (see *The Allegory of the Cave*). Aristotle, however, in his quest for the nature of reality, would begin with the world of matter. It is important to note that both Plato and Aristotle subscribed to the importance of ideas but each philosopher dealt with them very differently.

Since the classical realism of Aristotle, many forms of realism have evolved. These range from the religious realism of Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) to the modern realism of individuals such as Francis Bacon (1561–1626) and John Locke (1632–1704) to the contemporary realism of Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947) and Bertrand Russell (1872–1970).

#### **Aristotle's Systematic Theory of Logic**

Aristotle is particularly important because he was the first philosopher to develop a rational, systematic method for testing the logic of statements people make. Aristotle began his process with empirical research; then, he would speculate or use dialectic reasoning, which would culminate in a syllogism. A *syllogism* is a system of logic that consists of three parts: (1) a major premise, (2) a minor premise, and (3) a conclusion. A famous example of a syllogism, used by many philosophers is as follows:

All men are mortal  
Socrates is a man  
therefore, Socrates is mortal. (Ozmon & Craver, 1990, p. 43)

For a syllogism to work, all of the parts must be correct. If one of the premises is incorrect, the conclusion will be fallacious. Basically, Aristotle used syllogisms to systematize thinking. The problem, however, with this method is that Aristotle never made it clear where the syllogism was to be placed in his schema or framework. Thus, subsequent philosophers may have misinterpreted Aristotelian logic, grossly misusing the syllogism.

As you may have concluded by now, philosophers have been posing questions concerned with "the good life" or "the importance of reason" from the Greeks through the present (and probably

long before the Greeks, considering that recorded history began in 3500 B.C. in Sumer). Aristotle, as did his contemporaries, stressed the importance of moderation in all things—the importance of achieving balance in leading one's life. Reason, concluded Aristotle, was the instrument that individuals could employ to achieve the proper balance or moderation in their lives. Education, therefore, became particularly important in achieving moderation since education would introduce individuals to the process of systematic, rigorous thought. Through education, individuals would learn to reason and thus become able to choose the path of moderation in their lives. Since Aristotle, there have been important subsequent developments in this school of philosophy.

### **Neo-Thomism**

Aristotle was never clear about the place of the syllogism in his schema, although classical scholars believe that the syllogism was to be the culmination of his system rather than the starting point (Bowder, 1982). Many medieval thinkers, however, used Aristotle's syllogism to begin their logical proofs and deduced from generalizations to specific conclusions.

Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) was an important medieval authority on the works of Aristotle. A school of philosophy, Neo-Thomism, is derived from Aquinian thought based on Aristotle. Basically, Aquinas affected a synthesis of pagan ideas and Christian beliefs, employing reason as a means of ascertaining or understanding truth. Aquinas thought that God could be understood through reasoning but reasoning based on the *material world*. Thus, Aquinas and Aristotle both emphasized matter and ideas in their particular philosophical investigations.

Aquinas's philosophy became known as Neo-Thomism in the latter part of the nineteenth century when it was revived by the Vatican as a way of resolving the conflict between the natural sciences and the Catholic Church. In particular, the Church, through Neo-Thomism, could argue that there was no conflict between science and religion since scientific inquiry ultimately led to belief in God. Aquinas's influence on contemporary educational practice is especially profound in Catholic schools, that base their educational goals on balancing the world of faith with the world of reason.

### **Modern Realism**

Modern realism dates from the Renaissance, particularly with the work of Francis Bacon (1561–1626), who developed the inductive or scientific method of learning. Bacon was troubled by the reliance of classical realists on a prior or preconceived notion upon which thinkers deduced truths. Based on Aristotle's use of observable data, Bacon was able to develop a method starting with observations, that might culminate in a generalization, which then might be tested in specific instances for the purpose of verification.

John Locke (1632–1704), continuing in the scientific tradition established by Bacon, attempted to explain how people know things from the empirical point of view. He, too, chafed at the notion of a priori *ideas*, stating that the mind was a blank page, or *tabula rasa*, and what humans know is based on information gathered through the senses and through experience. Locke thought that the human mind ordered sense data and experience and then reflected on it.

### **Contemporary Realists**

Contemporary realists, or realists in modern times, have tended to focus on science and philosophy—in particular, on scientific issues that have philosophical dimensions. For example, Alfred North Whitehead came to philosophy through the discipline of mathematics and was concerned with the search for "universal patterns" (Ozmon & Craver, 1990, p. 50).

Bertrand Russell studied both mathematics and philosophy as a student at Trinity College and Cambridge University, and coauthored with Whitehead the important book, *Principia Mathematica*. Both men believed that the universe could be characterized through universal patterns; however, Russell proposed that these patterns could be verified and classified through mathematics. Both were interested in education. Whitehead confined his interests to writing about education—in particular, advocating (like Plato) the primacy of ideas. Nevertheless (like Aristotle), he recognized the necessity of grounding ideas within the context of the living world. Russell actually founded a school called Beacon Hill, in which he sought to put into practice some of his notions of education, particularly the idea of employing knowledge to social problems in order to create a better world.

### **Goal of Education**

Both Plato and Aristotle believed that important questions concerning such notions as the good life, truth, beauty, and so on could be answered through the study of ideas, using the dialectical method. They differed, however, in their studying points. Plato emphasized only the study of ideas to understand ideas. Aristotle believed that it was possible to understand ideas through studying the world of matter. For Plato, the real world was shadowy and deceptive; for Aristotle, the real world was the starting point in the quest for understanding philosophical concerns.

For contemporary realists, the goal of education is to help individuals understand and then apply the principles of science to help solve the problems plaguing the modern world. Again, the leading notion of realists is that through basic disciplines—and in particular, science—individuals will be able to fathom what philosophers have been debating since the beginning of their discipline: existence of the good life, but thanks to Aristotle, how it can be encouraged through science.

### **Role of the Teacher**

Teachers, according to contemporary realists, should be steeped in the basic academic disciplines in order to transmit to their students the knowledge necessary for the continuance of the human race. They should have a solid grounding in science, mathematics, and the humanities. Additionally, teachers must present ideas in a clear and consistent manner, and demonstrate that there are definitive ways to judge works of art, music, poetry, and literature. From this point of view, it is the role of the teacher to enable students to learn objective methods of evaluating such works (Ozmon & Craver, 1990, p. 63).

### **Methods of Instruction**

Realists would support a number of methods—in particular, lecture, and question and answer. Additionally, since realists believe in objective criteria for judging the value of artistic and literary works, they would support the lecture as a method of instruction in order to give students the knowledge necessary to make these evaluations. Finally, many realists support competency-based assessment as a way of ensuring that students learn what they are being taught (Ozmon & Craver, 1990, p. 63). Remember that realists believe that the material world holds the key to the ideal world; therefore, realists would encourage questions that would help students in the classroom grasp the ideal through specific characteristics of particular manifestations.

### **Curriculum**

Curriculum for realists would consist of the basics: science and math, reading and writing, and the humanities. Realists believe that there is a body of knowledge that is essential for the student

to master in order to be part of society. Indeed, as stated previously, this body of knowledge is viewed as being essential for the survival of society.

Recent debates have centered on various groups questioning whether, in fact, there is an essential core of knowledge and, if so, what it might consist of. In particular, the debate about cultural literacy, sparked by the work of E. D. Hirsch, and the championing of the primacy of history and geography in social studies curricula proposed by Diane Ravitch, Chester Finn, and Paul Gagnon (see the Bradley Commission, 1988, for a detailed discussion of these proposals) support the notion of specific knowledge that helps students better understand their culture. Those who might question just what "culture" consists of and support a curriculum that truly reflects the multiplicity of U.S. society are scholars of curriculum, such as James Banks (1988).

### **Pragmatism**

Pragmatism is generally viewed as an American philosophy that developed in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Generally speaking, the founders of this school of thought are George Sanders Peirce (1839–1914), William James (1842–1910), and John Dewey (1859–1952). However, there are European philosophers from earlier periods who might also be classified as pragmatists, such as Francis Bacon, John Locke, and Jean-Jacques Rousseau.

Pragmatism comes from the Greek word *pragma*, meaning work. Both George Sanders Peirce and William James are credited with having described pragmatism in part through the biblical phrase, "By their fruits ye shall know them." James specifically makes such a reference in his book, *Varieties of Religious Experience* (James, 1978). That is, pragmatism is a philosophy that encourages people to find processes that work in order to achieve their desired ends. Although pragmatists do study the past, they generally are more interested in contemporary issues and in discovering solutions to problems in present-day terms. Pragmatists are action oriented, experientially grounded, and will generally pose questions such as "What will work to achieve my desired end?" A pragmatic schema might look like this:

problem → speculative thought → action → results

Pragmatists might then ask "Do the results achieved solve the problem?" If the question is answered in the affirmative, then the solution may be judged as valid.

Pragmatism's roots, as well as modern realism's roots, may be traced to the English philosopher and scientist, Francis Bacon (1561–1626), who we have previously discussed. Troubled with the Aristotelian legacy of deductive reasoning through the syllogism, Bacon sought a way of thinking in which people might be persuaded to abandon the traditions or "idols" of the past for a more experiential approach to the world. Because Bacon emphasized experience posited firmly within the world of daily existence, he can be thought of as a pioneer in the pragmatic school of philosophy. Furthermore, the method of reasoning he emphasized was *inductive*, which became the foundation of observational method in educational research.

Another modern realist, political philosopher John Locke (1632–1704), also followed in the pragmatic tradition. Locke was particularly interested in the ways in which people come to know things. He believed that the mind was a *tabula rasa*, a blank tablet, and that one acquires knowledge through one's senses (in opposition to Plato who, centuries earlier, had supported the notion of innate ideas). Locke believed that people can have ideas, that people can obtain these ideas through their senses but that they never verify them through the material or natural world. Locke's emphasis on the world of experience is particularly important for later developments in the philosophy of education.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712–1778), a French philosopher, wrote mainly in France during the years preceding the French Revolution. Rousseau believed that individuals in their primitive state were naturally good and that society corrupted them. Society was harmful, for it led people away from pure existences. For Rousseau, the good life meant, simply stated, "back to nature." Thus, the Queen of France, Marie Antoinette, and her court at Versailles, influenced by Rousseau's ideas, attempted to return to nature by dressing as milkmaids, shepherds, and shepherdesses.

Rousseau placed an important emphasis on *environment* and *experience*, which makes him important to subsequent pragmatic thinkers. He is mainly known to educators for his book *Emile*, which centers on a young boy who is removed from society to the country and learns experientially, through his environment, with the help of a tutor. Two points of interest are (1) *Emile* does not read books until he reaches 12 years of age and (2) there is little regard for the education of women in Rousseau's scheme other than two chapters on Sophie, who eats sweets and cakes and plays with dolls, and whose *raison d'être* is to be *Emile*'s companion.

Rousseau is thought to be a romantic due to his preoccupation with individuals in their natural state. Nevertheless, his emphasis on experience and on the child in a state of nature, constantly growing and changing, paved the way for thinkers such as John Dewey.

John Dewey (1859–1952), intellectually, was heir to Charles Darwin, the British naturalist, whose theory of natural selection emphasized the constant interaction between the organism and its environment, thus challenging the Platonic and Aristotelian notions of fixed essences. Unlike the static, ordered world of the eighteenth-century philosophers, nineteenth-century pragmatists saw the world as dynamic and developing. Although Dewey acknowledged his intellectual debt to Hegel, an early nineteenth-century idealist, the idea of the dynamic quality of life was, to Dewey, of overriding importance. It could not have existed without the work of Charles Darwin.

Dewey, originally from Vermont, taught philosophy at the Universities of Minnesota, Michigan, Chicago, and Columbia. During this time, he formulated his own philosophy, introducing the terms *instrumentalism* and *experimentalism*. Instrumentalism refers to the pragmatic relationship between school and society; experimentalism refers to the application of ideas to educational practice on an experimental basis. While at the University of Chicago, he opened the Laboratory School (with his wife Alice Chapman Dewey), in which his ideas about education were applied.

Dewey's philosophy of education was the most important influence on what has been termed *progressive education*. Actually, progressive education from Dewey to the present has included a number of different approaches. Historically, the two most important have been child-centered progressivism, influenced by Dewey, and social reconstructionism, a radical interpretation of Dewey's work. Social reconstructionists, such as George Counts (1932) and Theodore Brameld (1956), viewed the schools as vehicles for improving and changing society. As we will suggest in Chapter 7, although social reconstructionists had some effect on curriculum, it has been Dewey's work that had the most profound intellectual and practical influence on U.S. progressive education. Our discussion of the progressive educational philosophy based on pragmatism therefore concentrates on Dewey's work.

### **Dewey's Pragmatism: Generic Notions**

Dewey's form of pragmatism—*instrumentalism* and *experimentalism*—was founded on the new psychology, behaviorism, and the philosophy of pragmatism. Additionally, his ideas were influenced by the theory of evolution and by an eighteenth-century optimistic belief in progress. For Dewey, this meant the attainment of a better society through education. Thus, the school became an "embryonic community" where children could learn skills both experientially as well as from books, in addition to traditional information, which would enable them to work cooperatively in a democratic society.

Dewey's ideas about education, often referred to as *progressive*, proposed that educators start with the needs and interests of the child in the classroom, allow the child to participate in planning his or her course of study, employ project method or group learning, and depend heavily on experiential learning.

Dewey's progressive methodology rested on the notion that children were active, organic beings, growing and changing, and thus required a course of study that would reflect their particular stages of development. He advocated both freedom and responsibility for students, since those are vital components of democratic living. He believed that the school should reflect the community in order to enable graduating students to assume societal roles and to maintain the democratic way of life. Democracy was particularly important for Dewey. He believed that it could be more perfectly realized through education that would continually reconstruct and reorganize society.

#### *Goal of Education*

Dewey's vision of schools was rooted in the social order; he did not see ideas as separate from social conditions. He fervently believed that philosophy had a responsibility to society and that ideas required laboratory testing; hence, he stressed the importance of the school as a place where ideas can be implemented, challenged, and restructured, with the goal of providing students with the knowledge of how to improve the social order. Moreover, he believed that school should provide "conjoint, communicated experience"—that it should function as preparation for life in a democratic society.

In line with the progressive political atmosphere of the turn of the century, Dewey viewed the role of the school within the larger societal conditions of which it was a part. As such, Dewey's vision of schooling must be understood as part of the larger project of social progress and improvement. Although Dewey was certainly concerned with the social dimensions of schooling, he also was acutely aware of the school's effects on the individual. Thus, Dewey's philosophy of education made a conscious attempt to balance the social role of the school with its effects on the social, intellectual, and personal development of individuals. In other words, Dewey believed that the schools should balance the needs of society and community on one hand and the needs of the individual on the other. This tension, or what the philosopher of education Maxine Greene (1988) termed the "dialectic of freedom," is central to understanding Dewey's work.

Dewey, like his contemporary, the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, saw the effects of modernization and urbanization on the social fabric of Western society. The rapid transformation in the nineteenth century from a traditional, agrarian world to a modern industrial one shattered the traditional bonds of solidarity and cohesion that held people together. Combined with the mass immigration to the United States in the late nineteenth century, the urban worlds of Chicago and New York City where Dewey spent his adult life were often fragmented and, in Durkheim's words, *anomie* (without norms). For both Durkheim and Dewey, the schools had to play a key role in creating a modern form of cohesion by socializing diverse groups into a cohesive democratic community.

The key to Dewey's vision is his view that the role of the school was to integrate children into not just any type of society, but a democratic one. Therefore, Dewey's view of integration is premised on the school as an embryonic democratic society where cooperation and community are desired ends. Dewey did not believe, however, that the school's role was to integrate children into a non-democratic society. Rather, he believed that if schools instilled democratic and cooperative values in children, they would be prepared as adults to transform the social order into a more democratic one. Although he located this central function of schools, he never adequately provided a solution to the problem of integrating diverse groups into a community without sacrificing their unique characteristics. This is a problem still hotly debated.

For Dewey, the primary role of education was growth. In a famous section of *Democracy and Education*, Dewey (1916) stated that education had no other goals than growth—growth leading to more growth. As Lawrence Cremin (1990) noted:

John Dewey liked to define the aim of education as growth, and when he was asked growth toward what, he liked to reply, growth leading to more growth. That was his way of saying that education is subordinate to no end beyond itself, that the aim of education is not merely to make parents, or citizens, or workers, or indeed to surpass the Russians or Japanese, but ultimately to make human beings who will live life to the fullest, who will continually add to the quality and meaning of their experience and to their ability to direct that experience, and who will participate actively with their fellow human beings in the building of a good society. (p. 125)

Historian of education Diane Ravitch (1983, pp. 43–80) noted that Dewey's philosophies of education were often misunderstood and misapplied. As we discussed in Chapter 3, it was often misapplied as "life adjustment education" and learning through experience as vocational education; it was often misapplied with regard to freedom, with individual freedom often confused with license and becoming far more important than other processes; and it was often totally distorted by providing social class appropriate education (i.e., vocational education for the poor). Despite these distorted applications, Dewey's philosophy of education, often referred to as *progressive education*, was central to all subsequent educational theory. For Dewey, the role of the school was to be "a lever of social reform"—that is, to be the central institution for societal and personal improvement, and to do so by balancing a complex set of processes.

#### *Role of the Teacher*

In a progressive setting, the teacher is no longer the authoritarian figure from which all knowledge flows; rather, the teacher assumes the peripheral position of facilitator. The teacher encourages, offers suggestions, questions, and helps plan and implement courses of study. The teacher also writes curriculum and must have a command of several disciplines in order to create and implement curriculum.

#### *Methods of Instruction*

Dewey proposed that children learn both individually and in groups. He believed that children should start their mode of inquiry by posing questions about what they want to know. Today, we refer to this method of instruction as the *problem-solving* or *inquiry method*. Books, often written by teachers and students together, were used; field trips and projects that reconstructed some aspect of the child's course of study were also an integral part of learning in Dewey's laboratory school. These methods in turn became the basis for other progressive schools founded in the Deweyan tradition.

Formal instruction was abandoned. Traditional blocks of time for specific discipline instruction were eliminated. Furniture, usually nailed to the floor, was discarded in favor of tables and chairs that could be grouped as needed. Children could converse quietly with one another, could stand up and stretch if warranted, and could pursue independent study or group work. What at first glance to the visitor used to formal pedagogy might appear as chaotic was a carefully orchestrated classroom with children going about learning in nontraditional yet natural ways. Lockstep, rote memorization of traditional schools was replaced with individualized study, problem solving, and the project method.

### **Curriculum**

Progressive schools generally follow Dewey's notion of a core curriculum, or an integrated curriculum. A particular subject matter under investigation by students, such as whales, would yield problems to be solved using math, science, history, reading, writing, music, art, wood or metal working, cooking, and sewing—all the academic and vocational disciplines in an integrated, interconnected way. Progressive educators support starting with contemporary problems and working from the known to the unknown, or what is now called in social studies education, "the curriculum of *expanding environments*." Progressive educators are not wedded to a fixed curriculum either; rather, curriculum changes as the social order changes and as children's interests and needs change.

There is some controversy over Dewey's ideas about traditional discipline-centered curriculum. Some contemporary scholars (Egan, 1992, pp. 402–404) have stated that Dewey's emphasis on the need for the curriculum to be related to the needs and interests of the child suggests he was against traditional subject matter and in favor of a child-centered curriculum based on imagination and intuition. Others, including Howard Gardner (1992, pp. 410–411), felt that Dewey proposed a balance between traditional disciplines, and the needs and interests of the child. We concur with Gardner's reading of Dewey and believe that Dewey thought that an integrated curriculum provided the most effective means to this balance.

### **Existentialism and Phenomenology**

Like pragmatism, existentialism is a rather modern philosophy. Although its roots can be traced back to the Bible, as a philosophy that has relevance to education, one may date existentialism as beginning with the nineteenth-century European philosopher Soren Kierkegaard (1813–1855). More recent philosophers who work in this school include Martin Buber (1878–1965), Karl Jaspers (1883–1969), Jean Paul Sartre (1905–1986), and the contemporary philosopher Maxine Greene.

Phenomenology was primarily developed by Edmund Husserl (1859–1935), Martin Heidegger (1889–1976), and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908–1961). Since both existentialism and phenomenology have much in common, and since many phenomenologists are existentialists as well, we have chosen to combine our discussion of these two schools here.

### **Generic Notions**

Because existentialism is an individualistic philosophy, many of its adherents argue that it is not a particular school of philosophy at all. However, there are certain notions to which a majority of existentialists adhere. So, for our purposes, we will consider it as a particular philosophical movement that has important implications for education.

Unlike traditional philosophers, such as Plato and Aristotle, who were concerned with posing questions about epistemology, axiology, and metaphysics, existentialists pose questions as to how their concerns impact on the lives of individuals. Phenomenologists focus on the phenomena of consciousness, perception, and meaning, as they arise in a particular individual's experiences.

Basically, existentialists believe that individuals are placed on this earth alone and must make some sense out of the chaos they encounter. In particular, Sartre believed that "existence precedes essence"—that is, people must create themselves, and they must create their own meaning. This is done through the choices people make in their lives. Thus, individuals are in a state of constantly becoming, creating chaos and order, creating good and evil. The choice is up to the individual. The amount of freedom and responsibility people have is awesome, since they can, according to Sartre, make a difference in a seemingly absurd world. Although Sartre rejected the idea of the existence of God, other existentialists, especially its founder Soren Kierkegaard, were devout

Christians who, while attacking contemporary Christianity, proposed "a great leap to faith" through which individuals might accept the existence of God. Whereas Kierkegaard was rallying against the scientific, objective approach to existence, Sartre was attempting to sort out meaning in a world that supported gross inhumane behavior—in particular, World War II and the Holocaust.

Phenomenologists are concerned with the way in which objects present themselves to people in their consciousness, and how people order those objects. Hermeneutics, an outgrowth of phenomenology, seeks to discover how people give objects meaning. Language is important here, since language is used to describe the various phenomena in life.

### **Goal of Education**

Existentialists believe that education should focus on the needs of individuals, both cognitively and affectively. They also believe that education should stress individuality; that it should include discussion of the non-rational as well as the rational world; and that the tensions of living in the world—in particular, anxiety generated through conflict—should be addressed. Existential phenomenologists go further; they emphasize the notion of *possibility*, since the individual changes in a constant state of becoming. They see education as an activity liberating the individual from a chaotic, absurd world.

### **Role of the Teacher**

Teachers should understand their own "lived worlds" as well as that of their students in order to help their students achieve the best "lived worlds" they can. Teachers must take risks; expose themselves to resistant students; and work constantly to enable their students to become, in Greene's (1978) words, "wide awake." Introspection is useful in order to enable students to become in touch with their worlds and to empower them to choose and to act on their choices. Thus, the role of the teacher is an intensely personal one that carries with it a tremendous responsibility.

### **Methods of Instruction**

Existentialists and phenomenologists would abhor "methods" of instruction as they are currently taught in schools of education. They view learning as intensely personal. They believe that each child has a different learning style and it is up to the teacher to discover what works for each child. Martin Buber, an existentialist, wrote about an I-thou approach, whereby student and teacher learn cooperatively from each other in a nontraditional, nonthreatening, "friendship." The teacher constantly rediscovers knowledge, the student discovers knowledge, and together they come to an understanding of past, present, and future, particularly a future ripe with possibilities. Thus, the role of the teacher is to help students understand the world through posing questions, generating activities, and working together.

### **Curriculum**

Existentialists and phenomenologists would choose curriculum heavily biased toward the humanities. Literature especially has meaning for them since literature is able to evoke responses in readers that might move them to new levels of awareness, or, in Greene's (1978) words, "wide awakening." Art, drama, and music also encourage personal interaction. Existentialists and phenomenologists believe in exposing students at early ages to problems as well as possibilities, and to the horrors as well as accomplishments humankind is capable of producing.

### **Neo-Marxism**

Neo-Marxist philosophies of education are those approaches that trace their intellectual roots and theoretical assumptions to the nineteenth-century economist and philosopher Karl Marx (1818–1883). Based on the radical critique of capitalism, these theories argue that the role of education in capitalist society is to reproduce the ideology of the dominant class and its unequal economic outcomes; and conversely, that the role of education ought to be to give students the insight to demystify this ideology and to become agents of radical educational and social change.

The neo-Marxist perspective is more an overall theory of society than a particular philosophy of education. That is, while its proponents suggest specific philosophical approaches to educational issues, they are a part of the longer critique of capitalist society and capitalist education. The neo-Marxist approach includes the political-economic analysis of education, such as the works of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976), the curriculum theories of Michael Apple (1978, 1979a, 1982a, 1982b), the pedagogical work of Paulo Freire (1972), and the critical educational theory of Henry Giroux (1983b). To understand the neo-Marxist philosophy of education, it is important first to understand some basic background issues.

#### **Generic Notions**

The intellectual, theoretical, and methodological foundations of neo-Marxism are all found in the works of Karl Marx. Marx was an economist, sociologist (before the discipline of sociology was officially founded), and philosopher who left his native Germany in 1842, first for Paris and then to London, where he spent the remainder of his life. Marx is usually associated with the worldwide movement he inspired—communism—but his writings were the foundation for a radical critique of capitalism throughout the twentieth century.

Although critics have pointed to problems with his theories (e.g., that socialism always proceeds out of the collapse of capitalism, which it has not; that capitalism is destined to collapse, which it has not), it is unfair to blame the problems and apparent failures of communist and socialist societies (e.g., in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe) on Marx himself, for he wrote very little on what socialism would look like. Rather, the bulk of his voluminous life's work concerned the understanding of capitalism.

Marx's works may be divided into two periods. The early philosophical works, including *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844* (1844), *The German Ideology* (1846), and *The Communist Manifesto* (1848) (the later two written with his lifelong friend and collaborator Frederick Engels), were concerned with philosophical and political issues such as alienation, freedom, ideology, and revolution. His later economic works, including the three volumes of *Das Kapital* (1867–1894), are concerned with the economic laws of capitalism and the contradictions (a Marxian term meaning “irreconcilable differences”) that make its collapse inevitable.

Marx's theories are far too complex to do justice to in these brief pages. However, it is necessary to understand those parts of his theories that form the basis of neo-Marxist philosophies of education. Simply stated, Marx believed that the history of civilization was defined by class struggle—the struggle between the dominant economic group and subordinate economic groups. Although every society defined such groups according to its own economic system (e.g., under feudalism, the serfs and the nobility; under capitalism, the proletariat (workers) and the bourgeoisie (the capitalist owners)), it was the domination of subordinate economic groups by those who controlled the economy (or means of production) that marked each historical period and the revolution by subordinate groups that marked the collapse of an outmoded economic system and its replacement by a new and superior one.

For Marx, each new economic system moved civilization closer to his ideal: a society that would produce sufficient economic resources to allow all of its citizens to live productive and decent

lives. Capitalism, for Marx, with its vast productive capacity, would have the potential to render economic scarcity and human misery obsolete. The problem, however, is that Marx believed that the laws of capitalist accumulation that give the bulk of its productive resources to those who own the means of production (capitalists) would make such a just society impossible. Therefore, Marx asserted that it was necessary for those who produced the resources (the workers) to recognize that it is in their collective interest to change the system to what he saw as the next logical stage in history: socialism, a society where the means of production are owned by the state in trust for the entire public. Marx believed that the laws of capitalism would lead to increasing economic crises (e.g., inflation, recession, depression), increasing poverty of the working class side by side with increasing wealth on the part of the small capitalist class. Thus, Marx believed that the working class would unite (class consciousness) and rebel (class struggle) to create a more just socialist society.

Numerous historical problems are evident with this theory. For instance, Marx did not foresee the rise of the welfare state to partially ameliorate such social problems, nor the success of labor unions in working within the system to gain significant economic rewards for workers. Theoretical problems also abound, such as the view of dominant and subordinate groups in narrow economic terms, rather than in broader social, political, and cultural terms. However, the general conflict theory of society (discussed more fully in Chapter 4) is central to understanding modern neo-Marxist philosophies of education.

The key component to this conflict theory is Marx's theory of social order and change. Although Marx indeed believed that economic laws are the foundation of any society, it is people, through conflict and struggle, who make history. Thus, the dominant group in any society must preserve order either through force and coercion, that is inherently unstable, or by convincing the subordinate groups that the system is fair and legitimate. For Marx, this is accomplished through *ideology*, or the ideas or belief system of the ruling class (Marx & Engels, 1848). Conversely, in order for change to take place, the subordinate group must see through this ideology and become conscious of its own interests (to change society). Thus, the subordinate groups must demystify the illusions of the dominant ideology and work toward change. It is education's role in transmitting this dominant ideology and its potential in allowing students to demystify it that is the main thrust of neo-Marxist philosophies of education.

#### **Goal of Education**

Modern neo-Marxist theories include what may be termed *reproduction theories* (Bowles & Gintis, 1976) and *resistance theories* (Freire, 1978; Giroux, 1983b). Reproduction theories argue that the role of education in capitalist societies is to reproduce the economic, social, and political status quo. More specifically, the school, through its ideology and curriculum (Apple, 1978, 1979a, 1982a, 1982b) and pedagogic practices (McLaren, 1989), transmits the dominant beliefs to children and serves to legitimate the capitalist order. Resistance theories, while agreeing that schools often reproduce the dominant ideology, state they also have the potential to empower students to question it.

Therefore, resistance theories question the overly deterministic view of reproduction theories and state that such approaches deny what they call “human agency”—that is, the power of individuals to shape their own world and to change it. In this respect, resistance theories have a great deal in common with existentialists, as they believe that the process of education contains the tools to enable individuals both to understand the weaknesses in the dominant ideology and to construct alternative visions and possibilities. Further, what are termed *postmodernist* (Cherryholmes, 1988; Giroux, 1991) and *feminist* (Ellsworth, 1989; Laird, 1989; Lather, 1991; Martin, 1987) theories of education are closely related to this aspect of neo-Marxism, although not all postmodernists and feminists are neo-Marxists.

What all of these theorists have in common is the view that education should transform the dominant culture (for a complete discussion of postmodernism and feminism, see Giroux, 1991, and Sadovnik, 1995b). Postmodernists and feminists disagree with neo-Marxists about who exactly comprises the dominant culture. Feminists argue that male domination is the problem; postmodernists are skeptical of any one theory that explains domination and therefore rejects the neo-Marxist emphasis on economic domination as too one-dimensional (Lyotard, 1984).

### *The Role of the Teacher*

The neo-Marxist philosophy of education concentrates on the teacher and student as part of a critical pedagogical process. The teacher, from this vantage point, must become a "transformative intellectual" (Giroux, 1988) whose role is to engage his or her students in a critical examination of the world. The student thus becomes part of an educational process that seeks to examine critically the society and its problems and to seek radical alternatives.

In some respects, this view of education is similar to the existential phenomenology of Greene (1978, 1988) in that it views the purpose of education as "wide awakeness." The difference is that Greene is less committed to an objective truth that constitutes such a state (that is, one reality that is true), whereas neo-Marxists believe that "wide awakeness" requires an objective truth that includes a critique of capitalism. Such a conclusion is open to considerable debate, even among those sympathetic to neo-Marxism. However, its idea that education ought to result in critical awareness of self and society is a view that goes well beyond neo-Marxist philosophy and is shared by many of the other philosophies discussed here, including pragmatism, existentialism, phenomenology, postmodernism, and feminism.

### *Methods of Instruction*

Given their emphasis on education as transformation, neo-Marxists favor a dialectical approach to instruction, with the question-and-answer method designed to move the student to new levels of awareness and ultimately to change. Through rigorous analysis of the taken-for-granted aspects of the world, the goal of instruction is to reveal underlying assumptions of society and to help students see alternative possibilities.

### *Curriculum*

The neo-Marxist view of curriculum is that the curriculum is not objective or value free but is socially constructed (Apple, 1978, 1979a, 1982a, 1982b; Young, 1971). This view suggests that the curriculum is the organized and codified representation of what those with the power to shape it want the children to know. Such a critical stance requires that teachers understand the ways in which curriculum represents a particular point of view and to become critical curriculum constructors—that is, individuals who can reshape the curriculum to represent a fairer view of the world (although for neo-Marxists, this fairer view of the world means a curriculum that is critical of capitalism).

As we will discuss in Chapter 7, this view of the curriculum is shared by feminist curriculum theorists (Macdonald & Macdonald, 1981; Miller, 1982; Mitrano, 1979) and postmodern theorists (Giroux, 1991). The difference, however, is that feminists and postmodernists often disagree about whose interests the curriculum represents. Feminists, for example, argue that it is patriarchal interests rather than capitalist interests that affect the curriculum. The view of curriculum shared by these theorists leads them to support more multicultural and feminist curricula, which emphasize those social groups who are not in power.

### *Postmodernist and Critical Theory*

#### *Generic Notions*

Postmodernism developed out of a profound dissatisfaction with modernism. Beginning with the poststructural writings of Derrida (1981, 1982) and Baudrillard (1981, 1984), social theorists, particularly in France, questioned the appropriateness of modernist categories for understanding what they saw as a postmodern world—a world that transcended the economic and social relations of the industrial world that modernist thought sought to understand. In particular, the work of Lyotard (1984) rejected the Marxist project, as well as the Enlightenment and modernist assumptions underlying Marxist theory, and sought to create a different theory of the late twentieth century.

There is a vast body of literature on the definition of *postmodernist theory* (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Giroux, 1991; Harvey, 1989; Jameson, 1982; Jencks, 1987; Lyotard, 1984), as well as a growing body of literature on postmodern approaches to education (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Cherryholmes, 1988; Ellsworth, 1989; Giroux, 1988, 1991; Lather, 1991; McLaren, 1991; McLaren & Hammer, 1989; Wexler, 1987).

Modernist social theory, in both sociology and philosophy, traces its intellectual heritage to the Enlightenment. From the classical sociological theory of Marx (1971), Marx and Engels (1846/1947), and Durkheim (1938/1977, 1947), to the pragmatist philosophy of Dewey (1916, 1927/1984), and to the social theory of Habermas (1979, 1981, 1982, 1983, 1987), what is usually referred to as modernist theories had a number of things in common. First, the theories were based on the belief in progress through science and technology, even if they were skeptical of positivist social science. Second, they emphasized the Enlightenment belief in reason. And third, they stressed Enlightenment principles such as equality, liberty, and justice.

Postmodernist thought consists of many interrelated themes:

1. Postmodernism insists on what Lyotard (1984) has labeled the rejection of all metanarratives. By this, Lyotard meant that the modernist preoccupation with grand, total, or all-encompassing explanations of the world needs to be replaced by localized and particular theories.
2. Postmodernism stresses the necessary connection between theory and practice as a corrective to the separation of them in much modernist thought.
3. Postmodernism stresses the democratic response to authoritarianism and totalitarianism. In particular, Aronowitz and Giroux (1991), Giroux (1991), and McLaren and Hammer (1989) call for a democratic, emancipatory, and antitotalitarian theory and practice, with schools seen as sites for democratic transformation.
4. Postmodernism sees modernist thought as Eurocentric and patriarchal. Giroux (1991), Lather (1991), Ellsworth (1989), and others provide an important critique of the racism and sexism in some modernist writings and the failure of modernism to address the interests of women and people of color.
5. Postmodernist theorists believe that all social and political discourse is related to structures of power and domination.
6. Postmodernism stresses what Burbules and Rice (1991) term "dialogue across differences." Recognizing the particular and local nature of knowledge, postmodern theorists call for the attempt to work through differences, rather than to see them as hopelessly irreconcilable.

Thus, postmodern theories of education call for teachers and students to explore the differences between what may seem like inherently contradictory positions in an effort to achieve understanding, respect, and change.

Although much of postmodern theory developed as a critical theory of society and a critique of modernism, it quickly became incorporated into critical writings on education, often called *critical theory*. Educational theory—which over the past two decades has involved an interdisciplinary mixture of social theory, sociology, and philosophy—has been profoundly affected by postmodernist thought. In particular, critical theories of education, which, from the late 1970s, attempted to provide an antidote to the overdeterminism of Bowles and Gintis (1976), by the 1980s regularly incorporated postmodern language and concerns. There have been numerous postmodern theories of education or applications of postmodernism to education. Critical and postmodern theories of education often draw heavily on the work of the Brazilian educator Paolo Freire (1972, 1985, 1987), whose influential work *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972) became the foundation for critical educational theory in the United States (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998; Macedo, 1990).

#### *The Role of the Teacher, Methods of Instruction, and Curriculum*

Postmodern and critical theories of education are similar to neo-Marxist theory with respect to curriculum and pedagogy. Critical pedagogy (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 1998, Chapter 1) stresses the classroom as a site for political action and teachers as agents of change.

Of all the postmodern writing in the United States, Henry Giroux's represents the most sustained effort to develop a postmodern theory of education and to connect it to previous critical theories, including neo-Marxism, critical theory, and resistance theory. Giroux (1991, pp. 47–59) outlined principles of critical pedagogy, which he stated are based on the insights of modernism, postmodernism, and feminism. Thus, he provided a synthesis of three of the important theoretical systems in the twentieth century, and from these he developed a critical pedagogy, whose function is to transform teachers, schools, and ultimately society:

1. Giroux has argued that education must be seen not only as producing knowledge, but political subjects as well (1991, p. 47). Thus, schooling must be linked to a critical pedagogy aimed at the development of democratic education.
2. Giroux has indicated that ethics need to be a central concern of postmodern theories of education and critical pedagogy.
3. Critical pedagogy should focus on postmodern concerns with difference in a politically transformative manner. According to Giroux, students need to understand the social construction of different voices and identities, how these are related to historical and social forces, and how they can be used as the basis for change. The incorporation of different voices into the curriculum and student reflection on these voices need to be connected to the conception of a democratic community.
4. The concern for difference needs to be translated into a critical language that allows for competing discourses and that rejects any master narratives or curriculum canons.
5. Critical pedagogy needs to create new forms of knowledge out of analysis of competing discourses and from voices historically absent from traditional canons and narratives. Thus, pedagogic practice is seen as a political activity, with curriculum development no longer a technocratic exercise concerned with educational goals and objectives, but rather with providing students with new forms of knowledge rooted in a pluralistic and democratic vision of society.
6. Building on his earlier work, Giroux suggested that a postmodern critical pedagogy must provide a sense of alternatives through a “language of critique and possibility” (1991, p. 52). Critical pedagogy as a critique of what exists and a development of what is possible is central to a project of social transformation.

7. Critical pedagogy must be related to a view of teachers as transformative intellectuals. In his work on postmodernism, Giroux developed a theme that was central to his earlier work and has connected it to a view of democratic public life. Giroux calls for teachers to be involved not only within schools, but to connect their voices to democratic politics in their communities and within society, in general. Critical pedagogy needs to engage students and teachers in the systematic discovery of alternatives to institutional racism, classism, and sexism through the inclusion of the voices of marginalized groups. Such an enterprise should not be, Giroux has warned, merely exercises in giving voice to the voiceless, but needs to connect their voices to political strategies aimed at social change.

Sadovnik (1995b) has pointed out a number of problems with postmodern and critical theories of education. First, postmodern theories of education are often written in a language that is difficult to understand. While this is problematic for all academic work, it is more so for a theory that purports to provide an agenda for critique and change in the school. Second, postmodern theories usually eschew empirical methods to study schools. Thus, they are sometimes long on assertion and short on evidence. Finally, and most importantly, postmodernist theories of education often fail to connect theory to practice in a way that practitioners find meaningful and useful. Although this does not suggest that postmodernists write exclusively for practitioners, if one of the stated aims of theorists such as Giroux is to develop teachers as transformative intellectuals and to provide a critical pedagogy for school transformation, then the problem of language use is of central importance. How can there be dialogues across difference if teachers are excluded from the dialogue?

#### **Conclusion**

In this chapter, we have presented some of the major philosophies of education. Through a discussion of how each school of philosophy views the goal of education, the role of the teacher, methods of instruction, and the curriculum, we have presented how philosophers of education view important educational issues. These schools of philosophy often overlap. As a teacher, you will, more often than not, make use of several approaches. It is important that you develop, clarify, and justify your own particular philosophical approach to teaching, as it will form the foundation of your practice. Moreover, as we suggest in Chapter 10, the successful school reforms at schools such as Central Park East in New York City are based on a sound philosophical foundation. Thus, school improvement depends on both teachers and schools having a clear sense of purpose, and a philosophy of education provides the basis for such a purpose.

The following selections illustrate some of the philosophies of education discussed in this chapter. In the first selection, “My Pedagogic Creed,” John Dewey presents the central aspects of the “new” or progressive education. Written in 1897, Dewey discusses his definition of education, the school, the curriculum, pedagogy, and the role of the school in social progress, and proposes a pragmatist philosophy of education.

In the second selection, “Wide-Awakeness and the Moral Life,” philosopher of education Maxine Greene presents an existentialist philosophy of education. Greene passionately argues for teachers to become critically aware of the world around them and to help students better understand their own lives. This understanding, according to Greene, is a necessary condition for social improvement.

“The Ideal of the Educated Person,” written by feminist philosopher of education Jane Roland Martin, examines what an educated person ought to be. Martin argues that traditional conceptions of the “educated man” have been gender-biased.