CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

BACK TO BASICS

When citizens rule in a democracy, they determine, among other things, how future citizens will be educated. Democratic education is therefore a political as well as an educational ideal. Because being educated as a child entails being ruled, "you cannot be a ruler unless you have first been ruled."[1] Because being a democratic citizen entails ruling, the ideal of democratic education is being ruled, then ruling. Education not only sets the stage for democratic politics, it plays a central role in it. Its dual role poses one of the primary moral problems of politics: Who should share the authority to influence the way democratic citizens are educated?

To answer this question, I develop in considerable detail a democratic theory of education. But before developing that theory, I must answer three challenges to the idea that a democratic theory of education is worth developing. First: Why rely on a *theory* to decide who should exercise authority over education? Second: Why a *democratic* theory? Finally: Why focus on *education*?

WHY A THEORY?

"There are two human inventions which may be considered more difficult than any others—the art of government, and the art of education; and people still contend as to their very meaning."[2] We can exercise the art of education, Kant argued, either unreflectively, "without plan, ruled by given circumstances,"[3] or theoretically, with the aid of principles. Must educational policy rest on a principled theory? Why not settle for making educational policy less reflectively, as we often have in the past? Without any principled plan, we could strengthen our science and math curriculum in reaction to Sputnik, desegregate some schools and fund more compensatory education in reaction to the civil rights movement, and go "back to basics" in reaction to declining SAT scores.

Consider the recent back-to-basics movement in American educa-

[1] Aristotle, *The Politics of Aristotle,* trans. Ernest Barker (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 105 (1277b).

[2] Immanuel Kant, *Kant on Education (Ueber Padagogik),* trans. Annette Churton (Boston: D. C. Heath and Co., 1900), p. 12.

[3] Ibid., p. 13.

tion. In the absence of a theory, how might the call to go back to basics be defended? The most common and direct defense is that schools will better educate children by concentrating on reading, writing, history, mathematics, and science rather than on music, art, sex education, and so on. Having invoked the concept of a "better" education, we must ask "better" with respect to what purposes? Without a principled theory of education, an answer is not obvious. Neither, therefore, is the rationality of going back to basics.

This point is not simply academic. Consider the widely publicized recommendation by the National Commission on Excellence in Education for instituting the "New Basics." In making its recommendation, the Commission noted that "if only to keep and improve on the slim competitive edge we still retain in world markets, we must dedicate ourselves to the reform of our educational system for the benefit of all—old and young alike, affluent and poor, majority and minority."[4] Although the tone of the report is set by this statement, the Commission also notes that our concern for education "goes well beyond matters such as industry and commerce … [to include] the intellectual, moral, and spiritual strengths of our people which knit together the very fabric of our society."[5] If our educational purposes are this broad, it is not clear why the new basics do not also include art history, sex education, racial integration, and the avoidance of academic tracking. A rigorous course in high-school chemistry may not contribute more to the moral and spiritual strength of students than a racially integrated classroom or an equally rigorous course in art history. The problem is not that the reforms recommended by the Commission are necessarily wrong, but that we cannot judge them without a more principled understanding of our educational purposes.

The Commission may have had a political reason for not engaging in a more principled analysis: the desire to achieve public consensus. The "basics" appear to provide a least common denominator for agreeing on a national agenda for education. If we agree on the basics, we can temporarily set aside our deeper disagreements on more controversial issues, such as racial integration and sex education, and get on with the work of improving our schools. But do we agree on the basics? A greater proportion of citizens may approve of teaching American history than sex education in schools (although 82 percent of the Ameri-

[4] National Commission on Excellence in Education, *A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, April 1983), p. 7.

[5] Ibid.

can public approves of sex education[6]), but *how* schools teach sex education and American history matters more to most citizens than *whether* schools teach these subjects, and there is no consensus on how either American history or sex education should be taught. There is, in this crucial sense, no consensus on teaching even the "basics."

Were there a consensus, it would not constitute a decisive reason for dispensing with a principled analysis of our educational problems. The charter of the Commission "directed it to pay particular attention to teenage youth."[7] The Report therefore focuses on high-school education, yet it makes no mention (for example) of the educational problems created by a rapidly rising pregnancy rate among unmarried teenage girls,[8] and therefore totally neglects the question of how schools might best deal with the problem. Although the teenage pregnancy rate has risen more rapidly in recent years than SAT scores have fallen, the Commission concentrated exclusively on the latter problem. If public commissions put avoidance of political controversy ahead of principled analysis, they are bound to fail in the task for which they are best equipped: improving the quality of American education not directly by changing school policy, but indirectly by improving the quality of our public deliberations over education.

In a democracy, political disagreement is not something that we should generally seek to avoid. Political controversies over our educational problems are a particularly important source of social progress because they have the potential for educating so many citizens. By not taking principled positions, commissions may avoid converting some of our disagreements into full-fledged political controversies. But we pay a very high price for their avoidance: we neglect educational alternatives that may be better than those to which we have become accustomed or that may aid us in understanding how to improve our schools before we reach the point of crisis, when our reactions are likely to be less reflective because we have so little time to deliberate.

Some members of the Commission may have had another reason for avoiding a principled analysis of our educational problems. They may have believed that the government's legitimate educational role does not extend to what might be called "moral education." On this view, the government should stay away from subjects such as sex education, since courses in sex education cannot possibly be neutral with regard to

[6] Reported in Joel H. Spring, *American Education: An Introduction to Social and Political Aspects* (New York: Longman, 1985), p. 133.

[7] *A Nation at Risk*, p. 2.

[8] For a discussion of the dimensions of the problem, see Hyman Rodman, Susan Lewis, and Saralyn Griffith, *The Sexual Rights of Adolescents* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1984).

morality, and moral education is properly a private, not a public, concern.[9] Sex education should therefore be provided by parents, not by public schools. Whatever one thinks of this conclusion, it clearly presupposes a theory, a principled political theory, about the legitimate role of government in education. Unless the theory is articulated, citizens cannot assess its principled merits or its policy implications. Even a brief account of the theory suggests a problem with this rationale for the Commission's recommendations. If one embraces the principle that moral education is the domain of the family rather than the state, then the basics must not include the teaching of history or biology (insofar as it includes evolution) any more than sex education or racial integration. States cannot even support schools without engaging in moral education.

All significant policy prescriptions presuppose a theory, a political theory, of the proper role of government in education. When the theory remains implicit, we cannot adequately judge its principles or the policy prescriptions that flow from them. The attractions of avoiding theory are, as we have just seen, superficial. We do not collectively know good educational policy when we see it; we cannot make good educational policy by avoiding political controversy; nor can we make principled educational policy without exposing our principles and investigating their implications.

WHY A DEMOCRATIC THEORY?

To defend the need for a theory of education, however, is not to defend any particular theory. Why a *democratic* theory of education? It will take an entire book to defend a democratic theory in detail. But by extending the example of sex education, I can briefly explain the rationale for developing a democratic theory.

For many years, the teachers in Fairfax County, Virginia, were not permitted to discuss contraception, abortion, masturbation, homosexuality, or rape (the "Big Five," as they were called) in their classrooms. Student were required to submit any questions about these topics in writing. The policy provoked "five years of turbulent debate" in Fairfax County. In 1981, the Fairfax County School Board changed the policy by an 8-to-2 vote, authorizing the introduction of a new elective biology course that discusses the previously prohibited issues, along with other topics related to "family life." The school board's decision

[9] See, for example, "Sex Education in Public Schools?—Interview with Jacqueline Kasun": "Q: Why shouldn't schools teach about sexual choices? A: Because such choices pertain to values, and schools should leave the teaching of values to the family and the church." *U.S. News and World Report*, vol. 89, no. 14 (October 1980): 89.

gave parents "the right to choose whether their children will take either the new sex education course or one or two other courses designed as alternatives" (which do not discuss the "Big Five"). The controversy over sex education in Fairfax County has not ended, but a school survey found that 75 percent of parents and an even greater majority of students favored the new elective course.[10]

Existing theories of education suggest different reactions to this example that either neglect the problem of authority that it poses or denigrate the democratic authority that it exemplifies. Conventional philosophical approaches typically neglect the problem of authority. Utilitarianism, which assumes that the purpose of education is to make the mind "as far as possible, an operative cause of happiness," provides an indeterminate standard for deciding whether sex education is conducive to the pursuit of happiness.[11] Rights theories can more straightforwardly support sex education as a means of preparing children for choice among competing conceptions of the good life, although they have difficulty accounting for the greater value we typically accord to quality rather than quantity of choice.[12] Conceptual approaches, which derive standards (such as rationality, openness to criticism, and so on) from the very meaning of the term "education," can defend sex education courses insofar as they are, properly speaking, educational, and criticize opponents of such courses as opposed not just to sex education but to education per se.[13] These philosophical approaches can aid us in articulating a moral ideal or a conceptual understanding of education,[14] but they give us no guidance in answering the question of who should make educational policy.

[10] *The Washington Post,* May 15, 1981, pp. A1, A28.

[11] W. H. Burston, ed., *James Mill on Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 41. For a contemporary utilitarian approach to education, see R. M. Hare, "Opportunity for What?: Some Remarks on Current Disputes about Equality in Education," *Oxford Review of Education,* vol. 3, no. 3 (1977): 207-216.

[12] For a more thorough critique of utilitarian and rights theories of education, see Amy Gutmann, "What's the Use of Going to School?: The Problem of Education in Utilitarian and Rights Theories," in Amartya Sen and Bernard Williams, eds., *Utilitarianism and Beyond* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 261-77.

[13] The purest conceptual approach is John Wilson, *Preface to the Philosophy of Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979). See also P. H. Hirst and R. S. Peters, *The Logic of Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1970); R. S. Peters, *Ethics and Education* (London: Alien and Unwin, 1966); R. S. Peters, ed., *The Concept of Education* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967); P. H. Hirst, "Liberal Education and the Nature of Knowledge," in *Education and the Development of Reason,* ed. R. F. Dearden, P. H. Hirst, and R. S. Peters (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972), pp. 391-414.

[14] There is, for example, a large but perhaps not very fruitful debate between conceptual and normative analysis. One need not claim that a conceptual analysis of education

Conventional political approaches often give us the wrong guidance. Conservative theories of education object in principle to courses on sex education on grounds that the state should stay out of those aspects of moral education that directly affect the private realm of the family.[15] Because parents are the appropriate educational authorities in that realm, they should decide how their children are sexually educated. What if a majority of parents want public schools to teach their children about sex, as apparently was the case in Fairfax County, at least in 1981? The conservative position on parental authority must then support a more expansive role for democratic authority, even over sex education, than is commonly acknowledged, provided the majority does not force students to take courses against their parents' wishes (as the Fairfax County School Board did not). Conservative theories of education therefore cannot consistently support the view that a *democratic* state must stay out of moral education, even as it directly affects the family. This apparent inconsistency in conservative theories of education points toward the need for a more subtle specification of the realm of legitimate democratic authority.[16]

Liberal theories of education, which aim at developing individual autonomy, would criticize just that part of the new policy of the Fairfax County School Board that conservatives could applaud.[17] Under the new policy, parents are permitted to restrict what their children learn about sex in school. By liberal standards, the School Board should have voted to give *all* teenagers, not just those who received parental permission, the opportunity "to begin to assume responsibility for the course of their own lives, and to understand that responsibility goes far further than the pleasures of the moment."[18] If all future citizens must be taught to assume responsibility for their lives, sex education courses should not be limited to only those students whose parents approve of it or to only those schools whose boards are educationally enlightened.

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is wrong to recognize that it is not enough to invoke the concept to criticize (so-called) educational practices that are repressive. One must argue the case for why such practices should not be repressive, and why repressive practices should not be authorized, even by (otherwise) legitimate political authorities.

[15] Some conservatives focus on the specific objections of the parents who oppose the courses. Parents who oppose sex education often argue that it "encourage[s] pregnancies by implying that sexual activity is acceptable." (*The Washington Post*, May 15, 1981, p. A28.) There is no empirical evidence to support this claim and some evidence to doubt it. I therefore concentrate on the more plausible and principled version of conservative theory.

[16] See Chapter Four on "Sex Education and Sexist Education."

[17] For such a theory, see Bruce Ackerman, *Social Justice in the Liberal State* (New York and London: Yale University Press, 1980), esp. pp. 139-67.

[18] *The Washington Post*, May 15, 1981, p. A28.

The federal government should mandate the permissive policy for all students in all schools, public and private. When liberals authorize the federal government to make educational policy for local communities if but only if its views are right, they do not take democracy seriously, at either the local or the federal level.

Liberal political theories might become more philosophical, and simply avoid the question of authority, arguing only for the best educational policy "in principle" or the policy most recommended "by reason." Liberal theories may thereby guide individuals in formulating their own educational ideals, but they cannot give adequate guidance to communities in deciding what educational policies to pursue. The more philosophical liberal theories become, the less they face up to the facts of life in our society: that reasonable people disagree over what forms of freedom are worth cultivating, and therefore over what constitutes the best education, in principle as well as in practice.[19]

Functionalist theories of education pride themselves on facing up to the facts of social reproduction. One of the most prominent functionalist theories suggests that schooling in a capitalist society serves to reproduce the social inequalities necessary to maintain the capitalist mode of production.[20] Viewed in this theoretical light, the Fairfax County School Board's new policy (that made sex education an elective course, based on parental preference) is one among several educational means to reproduce existing class divisions, in this case, between middle-class women, who must defer childbearing to compete in the professional workforce, and working-class women, who must bear

[19] Liberal theories can also become more democratic and defend those educational policies for a community that are necessary for democratic deliberation. Such a liberal theory, fully developed, would converge with the democratic theory that I shall defend. For a suggestion of such a theory, see Israel Scheffler, "Moral Education and the Democratic Ideal," in *Reason and Teaching* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 142.

[20] See Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976), e.g., p. 48: "The educational system serves—through the correspondence of its social relations with those of economic life—to reproduce economic inequality and to distort personal development. … It is precisely because of its role as producer of an alienated and stratified labor force that the educational system has developed its repressive and unequal structure. In the history of U.S. education, it is the integrative function which has dominated the purpose of schooling, to the detriment of the other liberal objectives." See also Joel H. Spring, *Education and the Rise of the Corporate State* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1972), esp. p. 151: "Schools tend to reinforce and strengthen existing social structures and social stratification." Other functionalist analyses of schools include Colin Greer, *The Great School Legend* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); Clarence Karier, Paul Violas, and Joel H. Spring, *Roots of Crisis: American Education in the Twentieth Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1973); and Michael B. Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools: The Illusion of Educational Change in America* (New York: Praeger, 1971).

children early to maintain the reserve army of the unemployed. Functionalist theories do not claim that educational authorities intended these outcomes, nor do they specify the mechanism by which the unintended outcomes are produced.[21] The primary evidence supporting the claims of functionalism is the stability of the system (in this case, capitalism) that educational policy (intentionally or unintentionally) supports.

Whereas liberal and conservative political theories assume that the best educational policies *must* be implemented, functionalist theories assume that they *cannot* be, regardless of the results of democratic deliberations. The latter assumption is no more plausible than the former. The demands of the capitalist economy did not change sufficiently between 1976 and 1981 to explain the different outcomes of the Fairfax County School Board's deliberations, nor can the equally great differences between the policies of Fairfax County and other school boards be explained by the differing regional demands of capitalism. Even if the School Board's decisions did serve to stabilize the capitalist economy, this fact would not suffice as an explanation either of why the Board passed these specific policies or of what the primary purpose of their policies were. If one assumes that all educational policies that do not result in the overthrow of capitalism function to preserve it, then virtually any educational policy can fit into this functional explanation, but at the price of misunderstanding the significance of most educational policies to the people who supported them.[22] Alternatively, functionalist theories could treat local controversies over school curricula as insignificant, epiphenomenal episodes in the making of educational policy, but only at the price of converting the theory into a tautology.[23]

Despite appearances, functionalist theories are similar to conventional philosophical theories in being profoundly apolitical. By invok-

[21] For a general critique of functionalism, see Jon Elster, "Marxism, Functionalism, and Game Theory," *Theory and Society*, vol. 11 (1982): 453-82; and Elster, *Sour Grapes: Studies in the Subversion of Rationality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 101-108. For a more specific critique of functionalist analyses of schools, see David K. Cohen and Bella H. Rosenberg, "Functions and Fantasies: Understanding Schools in Capitalist America," *History of Education Quarterly* (Summer 1977): 113-37. For two recent sympathetic critiques of Bowles and Gintis, see Ira Katznelson and Margaret Weir, *Schooling for All: Class, Race, and the Decline of the Democratic Ideal* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), esp. pp. 17-23, 46-48; and Martin Carnoy and Henry M. Levin, *Schooling and Work in the Democratic State* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1985), esp. pp. 18-22.

[22] For such a criticism on historical grounds, see Rush Welter, "Reason, Rhetoric, and Reality in American Educational History," *The Review of Education*, vol. 2 (January/February 1976): 94-96.

[23] See Diane Ravitch, *The Revisionists Revised: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1978), pp. 146-47.

ing an intuitively implausible and empirically unverified form of determinism, functionalist theories never pose, let alone answer, the question of how citizens should resolve their disagreements over educational policy. Liberal theories, in their more political version, are profoundly undemocratic: they answer the question by suggesting that we need a philosopher-king (or a philosopher-queen, if they are truly liberal) to impose the correct educational policies, which support individual autonomy, on all misguided parents and citizens. Conservative theories suffer from a variant of both problems. They depoliticize education by placing it as much as possible in the province of parental authority, and at the same time they deny parents the democratic authority to implement educational policies that require state support. In contrast to these theories, a democratic theory faces up to the fact of difference in our moral ideals of education by looking toward democratic deliberations not only as a means to reconciling those differences, but also as an important part of democratic education.

The most distinctive feature of a democratic theory of education is that it makes a democratic virtue out of our inevitable disagreement over educational problems. The democratic virtue, too simply stated, is that we can publicly debate educational problems in a way much more likely to increase our understanding of education and each other than if we were to leave the management of schools, as Kant suggests, "to depend entirely upon the judgment of the most enlightened experts."[24] The policies that result from our democratic deliberations will not always be the right ones, but they will be more enlightened—by the values and concerns of the many communities that constitute a democracy—than those that would be made by unaccountable educational experts.

The primary aim of a democratic theory of education is not to offer solutions to all the problems plaguing our educational institutions, but to consider ways of resolving those problems that are compatible *with* a commitment to democratic values. A democratic theory of education provides principles that, in the face of our social disagreements, help us judge (a) who should have authority to make decisions about education, and (b) what the moral boundaries of that authority are.

A democratic theory is not a substitute for a moral ideal of education. In a democratic society, we bring our moral ideals of education to bear on how we raise our children, on who we support for school boards, and on what educational policies we advocate. But we cannot simply translate our own moral ideals of education, however objective they are, into public policy. Only in a society in which all other citizens

[24] Kant, K*ant* on *Education,* p. 17.

agreed with me would my moral ideal simply translate into a political ideal. But such a society would have little need for politics as we now know it. The administration of persons would, as Engels (and later Lenin) imagined, be replaced by the administration of things. To create such a society, someone would have to establish an educational tyranny, a tyranny that would be unworkable without the simultaneous creation of a political tyranny as well. There is no morally acceptable way to achieve social agreement on a moral ideal of education, at least in our lifetimes. We can do better to try instead to find the fairest ways for reconciling our disagreements, and for enriching our collective life by democratically debating them. We may even find ourselves modifying our moral ideals of education in the process of participating in democratic debates and of publicly reconciling our differences.

This separation between a moral and a political ideal of education is often hard to accept. It is hardest to accept when we are convinced not only of the correctness of our moral ideal but also of the beneficial social consequences that would follow from its implementation. Many feminists, myself included, are firmly committed to the ideal of an egalitarian division of labor between parents with regard to childrearing. We have, moreover, good reason to believe that women, men, and democratic politics would benefit were the nuclear family to become more egalitarian in this respect. One might therefore argue that the ideal of an egalitarian family is a political as well as a moral ideal. But it is not a political ideal in the stricter sense that I identified above: the moral ideal of an egalitarian family does not simply translate into a political ideal that sanctions state intervention into the family for the sake of making it more egalitarian.

Although few feminists explicitly defend direct political intervention into the family, some suggest that until we achieve an egalitarian family structure, neither democratic education nor democratic politics is possible. This position may seem more benign, but it has a similarly troubling implication: that until the family is transformed into our moral ideal, deliberative political processes and their results possess no democratic authority. The feminist view of the family properly serves as a moral ideal not over but within democratic politics, an ideal that should lead us to support policies (such as subsidized childcare and sexually unstereotyped schooling) that stimulate the creation of more egalitarian families. Democratic principles give parents a great deal of room to exercise discretion in structuring their families and educating their children. Of course, room still remains for scholars and citizens to discuss how parents should raise their children. I give no such advice, not because it would be wrong to give it, but because I wish to concentrate on questions concerning how democratic governments should

furnish the educational room unoccupied by parental discretion. Among those questions is what democratic governments should do to overcome gender biases in the content and structure of schooling and culture.

We need to theorize about education, and the theory we need is democratic, but why do we need a *new* democratic theory of education? The most influential theory of this century—John Dewey's—is itself explicitly democratic. The democratic theory that I develop is inspired by Dewey, but it also diverges from Dewey in at least one way. Dewey correctly emphasized the need to enlarge the range of our outlook on education beyond "an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent." But what should that broader, presumptively democratic standpoint be? In a sentence more often quoted than questioned, Dewey concluded that "what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children."[25] The idea that a community should not settle for less than the best education for all its children is, and should be, intuitively appealing. A democratic society is responsible for educating not just some but all children for citizenship. But "must" the community want for all its children "what the best and wisest parent wants for his own child"?

Consider what the best and wisest parents, on one understanding, would want for their child. They would want her:

> to read and write fluently; to speak articulately, to listen carefully; to learn to participate in the give-and-take of group discussion; to learn self-discipline and to develop the capacity for deferred gratification; to read and appreciate good literature; to have a strong knowledge of history, both of our own nation and of others; to appreciate the value of a free, democratic society; to understand science, mathematics, technology, and the natural world; to become engaged in the arts, both as a participant and as one capable of appreciating aesthetic excellence.... [S]uch parents would also want a good program of physical education and perhaps even competence in a foreign language.[26]

Must every local community want this and only this curriculum for its children? Although Dewey's aim is admirable, translating what the best and wisest parents want into what a community *must* want is not an acceptable way to enlarge our outlook on education, to be less individ-

[25] John Dewey, "The School and Society" [1900] in "*The Child and the Curriculum*" *and* "*The School and Society*" (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1956), p. 7.

[26] Diane Ravitch, "A Good School," in *The Schools We Deserve: Reflections on the Educational Crises of Our Time* (New York: Basic Books, 1985), p. 277.

ualistic. Would any other ideal, acted upon, destroy democracy, as Dewey goes on to argue? If democracy includes the right of citizens to deliberate collectively about how to educate future citizens, then we might arrive at a very different conclusion: that the enforcement of any moral ideal of education, whether it be liberal or conservative, without the consent of citizens subverts democracy.

Yet this criticism is surely too simple. Problems—specifically, the threat of democratic repression and discrimination—remain. Citizens and public officials can use democratic processes to destroy democracy. They can undermine the intellectual foundations of future democratic deliberations by implementing educational policies that either repress unpopular (but rational) ways of thinking or exclude some future citizens from an education adequate for participating in democratic politics. A democratic society must not be constrained to legislate what the wisest parents want for their child, yet it must be constrained *not* to legislate policies that render democracy repressive or discriminatory. A democratic theory of education recognizes the importance of empowering citizens to make educational policy and also of constraining their choices among policies in accordance with those principles—of nonrepression and nondiscrimination—that preserve the intellectual and social foundations of democratic deliberations. A society that empowers citizens to make educational policy, moderated by these two principled constraints, realizes the democratic ideal of education.

WHY FOCUS ON EDUCATION?

The ideal helps define the scope of a democratic theory of education. A democratic theory of education focuses on what might be called "conscious social reproduction"—the ways in which citizens are or should be empowered to influence the education that in turn shapes the political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior of future citizens. Since the democratic ideal of education is that of *conscious* social reproduction, a democratic theory focuses on practices of deliberate instruction by individuals and on the educative influences of institutions designed at least partly for educational purposes.

Education may be more broadly defined to include every social influence that makes us who we are. The inclusiveness of the broad definition is intellectually satisfying. Almost every major political philosopher who wrote about education began with the broad definition, but few if any employed it in their subsequent analysis.[27] When one begins

[27] For example, see Rousseau's understanding in *Emile,* cited at the beginning of Chapter One. A contemporary example is Israel Scheffler, "Moral Education and the Democratic Ideal," in *Reason and Teaching,* pp. 139-40.

with the broad definition, it is much easier to extol the significance of education than it is to say anything systematic about it.[28]

Most political scientists who write about education subsume it under the concept of political socialization. Political socialization is typically understood to include the processes by which democratic societies transmit political values, attitudes, and modes of behavior to citizens.[29] Since many of these processes are unintended, political socialization studies tend to focus on what might be called "unconscious social reproduction." The focus of political socialization studies makes sense as long as their aim is to explain the processes by which societies perpetuate themselves. If one's aim is instead to understand how members of a democratic society should participate in consciously shaping its future, then it is important not to assimilate education with political socialization.[30] When education is so assimilated, it is easy to lose sight of the distinctive virtue of a democratic society, that it authorizes citizens to influence how their society reproduces itself.

On the other hand, when education is distinguished from political socialization, it is hard to resist the temptation to focus entirely on schooling, since it is our most deliberate form of human instruction. I try to resist this temptation without succumbing to the opposite, even more troubling one of regarding schools as an insignificant part of what American education is or should be. Among the many myths about American education in recent years has been the view that schooling

[28] But systematic analysis is not impossible. Historians of American education have made significant contributions to our understanding of the educative role of institutions other than schools, especially after Bernard Bailyn's critique of "an excess of writing along certain lines and an almost undue clarity of direction" in historical writing about schooling. See Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage, 1960), p. 4. Education, according to Bailyn, is "the entire process by which a culture transmits itself across the generations ..." (p. 14). Compare Lawrence Cremin (who has probably written more extensively and systematically about American education than any other contemporary historian): education is "the *deliberate,* systematic, and sustained effort to transmit, evoke, or acquire knowledge, attitudes, values, skill, or sensibilities, as well as any outcomes of that effort." (Emphasis added.) Lawrence A. Cremin, *Traditions of American Education* (New York: Basic Books, 1977), p. 134.

[29] Because its subject is so vast, the literature on political socialization defies simple summary. For a broad definition and overview of the field, see Fred I. Greenstein, "Socialization: Political Socialization," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 14: 551-55. See also Richard E. Dawson and Kenneth Prewitt, *Political Socialization* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1969); Kenneth P. Langton, *Political Socialization* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); and Roberta S. Sigel, *Learning About Politics: A Reader in Political Socialization* (New York: Random House, 1970).

[30] For another reason not to assimilate education and socialization, see David Nyberg and Kieran Egan, *The Erosion of Education: Socialization and the Schools* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1981), pp. 2-5.

does not matter very much—except perhaps for the pleasure it gives children while they experience it—because it makes little or no difference to how income, work, or even intelligence gets distributed in our society. Like most myths, this one has no apparent author but a lot of social influence.[31] Unlike some myths, the myth of the moral insignificance of schooling distorts rather than illuminates our social condition. Its prophecy—of inevitable disillusionment with even our best efforts to educate citizens through schooling—is self-fulfilling because it pays exclusive attention to the question of whether schools *equalize* and neglects the question of whether they *improve* the political and personal lives of citizens.

We can appreciate the centrality of schooling to democratic education and still recognize that there is much more to democratic education than schooling. Institutions other than schools—libraries, for example—can contribute to democratic education, and other institutions—television, for example—can detract from it. This much may be obvious, although the implications of the obvious are often avoided for the sake of making discussions of education more manageable. By focusing our inquiry beyond schooling on the central political question of how authority over educational institutions should be allocated in a democratic society, we can avoid perpetuating the false impression that democratic education ends with schooling.

TRANSLATING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

Authority over education is the theoretical issue that organizes this book.[32] The central question posed by democratic education is: Who should have authority to shape the education of future citizens? In Chapter One, I defend the principled outlines of a democratic answer to this question against three of the most influential nondemocratic theories of states and education.

The rest of *Democratic Education* is an attempt to explore the practical implications for educational policy in the United States today of

[31] The two works most often identified with this view are Christopher Jencks, et al., *Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1972); and James S. Coleman et al., *Report on Equality of Educational Opportunity* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1966). See esp. Jencks, pp. 29, 256.

[32] I rely upon a common meaning of authority, "the right to command, or give an ultimate decision" (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Authority may or may not involve the "appeal to an impersonal normative order or value system which regulates behavior basically because of acceptance of it on the part of those who comply" (Peters, *Ethics and Education*, p. 239). Compare David Nyberg, *Power Over Power* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 63-91.

going back to theoretical basics. The method of translating theory into practice is akin to what John Rawls calls "reflective equilibrium," but it does not require us to separate ourselves from our particular interests or our moral convictions by entering an original position.[33] At the same time as we explore the implications of democratic principles for educational practice, we refine the principles in light of their practical implications.

Political theorists are likely to be as skeptical of the practical part of this enterprise as policymakers (and perhaps also historians[34]) are of the theory. The translation of political principles into practice, however, is no less essential to defending a political theory than to evaluating educational practices. The best defense of this theoretical claim also lies in practice rather than in theory. When we consider the liberal principle of equal educational opportunity, for example, we find that its practical implications conflict with some of our firmest convictions.[35] We then must either change our convictions or revise our understanding of the principle. In theory, it is possible that the liberal principle rests on foundations firm enough to withstand the force of our convictions. In practice, this is not the case. Our convictions here constitute the firmest foundations of our theoretical understanding. We therefore have no better alternative but to revise our principled understanding of

[33] See John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1971), esp. pp. 20 ff., 48-51.

[34] I am not sure how to account for the skepticism of many historians towards political theory. Perhaps the transhistorical and transcultural claims of many political theories engender the skepticism. I make no such claims for this theory of democratic education. I claim only that the principles of democratic education can aid Americans today in assessing the value of our educational practices by holding those practices up to a set of standards that we can publicly defend. I do not try (nor am I equipped) to contribute an account of the past successes and failures of democratic education in the United States. Yet most historical accounts of success and failure presuppose a set of normative standards, which need to be explicitly elaborated before they can be fully understood. I hope to help further this understanding. Historical accounts, on the other hand, can help theorists understand the practical implications of our normative standards. I have relied (often implicitly) on many historical accounts of past practices of American education in developing my understanding of democratic education. Among those that have most affected my thinking are: Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964); Cremin, *American Education: The National Experience, 1783-1876* (New York: Harper and Row, 1980); Paul E. Peterson, *The Politics of School Reform 1870-1940* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); Diane Ravitch, *The Great School Wars: New York City, 1805-1973* (New York: Basic Books, 1974); Ravitch, *The Troubled Crusade: American Education 1945-1980* (New York: Basic Books, 1983); and Rush Welter, *Popular Education and Democratic Thought in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).

[35] See Chapter Five on "Interpreting Equal Educational Opportunity."

equal educational opportunity. In general, we cannot understand a political theory or use its principles to evaluate existing practices until we engage in the process of formulating its principles, translating them into practices, and judging the practices against our convictions.

I begin this process with an extensive discussion of elementary and secondary ("primary") schooling in the United States. I consider its purposes in Chapter Two. An understanding of the democratic purposes of primary schooling provides the groundwork for discussions in the following three chapters of the dimensions of democratic participation (Chapter Three), the limits of democratic authority (Chapter Four), and the distribution of educational resources in school systems (Chapter Five).

Higher education is distinguished from primary education by its distinctive democratic purposes. Chapter Six considers those purposes and how universities should be governed consistently with them. Chapter Seven discusses the controversy over preferential admissions in the context of a broader discussion of university admissions and financial aid.

Chapter Eight considers the extent to which institutions other than schools—libraries and television in particular—can educate children. A central question, once again, is the relationship between the democratic purposes of these institutions and the way a democratic society should allocate authority over them.

Chapter Nine looks at three ways in which governmental authority can be enlisted to extend democratic education for adults: by more broadly distributing opportunities to influence and appreciate high culture, by increasing the access of adults to higher education, and by offering illiterate adults a second chance at primary education.

In the Conclusion, I show how a theory of democratic education makes sense of the claim that politics itself is a form of education. A more robust democratic politics, I argue, would render the concerns of democratic education not less but more important. Just as we need a more democratic politics to further democratic education, so we need a more democratic education to further democratic politics. If we value either, we must pursue both.

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