CHAPTER 6

Education in the Neoliberal Period (1983–Present)

Abstract This chapter details simplified versions of neoliberalism, existentialism, and postmodernism as a means of grounding the late twentieth century philosophically. It examines major shifts in public schools, including increasing security in post-Columbine schools, the increase in federal intervention with the No Child Left Behind and Every Student Succeeds Acts, and the Common Core movement. It concludes with a discussion on the educational legacies of this period and recommendations for further reading.

Keywords No Child Left Behind Act • Neoliberalism • Existentialism • Postmodernism • Hermeneutics • Logocentric • Liberation pedagogy • Praxis • Jean-Paul Sartre • Soren Kierkegaard • Martin Buber • Maxine Greene • Nel Noddings • Henry Giroux • Paulo Freire • Wide awakeness • Neoliberalism • Post-Columbine schools • Zero-tolerance policies • School-to-prison-pipeline • *A Nation At Risk* • America 2000 • Goals 2000 • Vouchers • Common Core State Standards • Next Generation Science Standards • *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* • Denominational schools • Charter schools • Home schooling • Districts of choice • At-risk youth • Alternative schools

Imagine that a consortium of jazz bands forms in the United States. In order to perform in any club or concert hall anywhere, a band must become a member of the consortium. Now imagine that one day the

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consortium decides to accomplish something unprecedented: every member band across the nation is going to play the same song at the same time. The consortium picks a jazz standard—say, for the sake of argument, "Birdland." In order to remain a member of the consortium, your band has to play that song on that given time at that given hour (adjusted for time zone differences, of course).

Your band gets excited and rehearses the piece until you have it down. You network with other bands and get excited about all the variations that groups are coming up with. Bands with vocalists are doing distinctly different versions than all-instrumental combos; trios are having their way with it compared to quintets who are doing radically different interpretations than the big bands. Every band in the consortium knows its strengths and weaknesses, as well as its audience preferences, and works up its own unique versions of the song that play to its strengths as an ensemble.

Now imagine that the day you are to perform the song, an email and letter arrives from the consortium containing the sheet music that every band across the country is to follow by rote. The letter informs you that since the majority of jazz musicians in the nation have proved their incompetence and have brought this on themselves.

Imagine the outcry that would arise, about the ignorance of differences in band size, in ability, in regionalisms, in audience desires. Imagine if you tried to refuse to play the sheet music as it was intended but were told that if you didn't, you would never be able to receive money for playing out ever again. If you are angered by this concept, and imagine that as a musician you'd find a way to rebel, then you can imagine the frustration felt by many public school teachers at the federal intervention in the **No Child Left Behind Act**.

Just as the Watergate scandal of the previous decade eroded American faith in their political system, the publication of *A Nation At Risk* report in 1983 triggered a national backlash against American schools. Report after report, book after book—*Why Can't Johnny Read?*, *The Shopping-Mall High School*, and the like—blasted American schools as wasteful, lackluster institutions. Worse, an unintended consequence of the teachers in the public schools unionizing and striking for a living wage and improved classroom conditions was an unfounded mistrust of teachers among many parts of the general population. Americans turned their eyes to the government to help resolve this "crisis." Piece after piece of federal legislation was rolled out and implemented. Each marked a higher level of federal intervention in the public schools.

What Are the Philosophical Roots of the Neoliberal Period?

- **Key terms**: neoliberalism, existentialism, postmodernism, hermeneutics, logocentric, liberation pedagogy, praxis
- **Key figures**: Jean-Paul Sartre, Soren Kierkegaard, Martin Buber, Maxine Greene, Nel Noddings, Henry Giroux, Paulo Freire

Neoliberalism is a reaction to the philosophical shifts of the period. While the period of the Five E's led to somewhat more concrete educational philosophies, the Neoliberal Period was greatly influenced by the more abstract thinking of the century: **existentialism** and **postmodernism**.

The existentialist credo is that the lonely, estranged, and alienated individual is caught up in a meaningless and absurd world. There is no meaning in the world, just the individual's perceptions of reality. Therefore, our perceptions define us and define our world. For example, if there are 26 people sitting in a room, there are 26 simultaneous realities coexisting at the same time. The Pledge of Allegiance is a good example of this concept. While the pledge means positive concepts such as freedom, independence, and pride in many individuals, to those who live in poverty or are of a marginalized culture, the phrase "one nation, indivisible" becomes stuck in their craw. To those who are orthodox in their religious beliefs, having to say or hear the phrase "under God" is tantamount to sinful behavior.

Since there is no one reality, language becomes the most critical skill—we must be able to define and express our perceptions in order to successfully interact within it. However, existentialists remind us that how we interpret what happens makes a difference in what happens—a concept known as **hermeneutics**. Since all reality is personal, existentialists are very concerned with individual responsibility—we are responsible for who and what we are and how we express those concepts.

Many say that the father of the existential movement was the novelist and playwright **Jean-Paul Sartre**, founder of theater of the absurd. To Sartre, consciousness created a being for itself, not interactively. All people are both a reflection and negation of outside world. Dismissing the idealists, Sartre argued that trying to be perfection always leads to failure. Believing that existence precedes essence, Sartre posited that the world is what we make of it.

Soren Kierkegaard was an existentialist who focused on the individual versus the scientific world. We need to both become and, particularly as teachers, develop subjective individuals. Our personal choices make us

who we are. However, to Kierkegaard the scientific method is not the be-all, end-all of knowing, either; he eschewed scientific demand for objective proof. There are three stages of development: the aesthetic (lives in sensuous enjoyment in which emotions are dominant); the ethical (in which we strive to understand the universality of humanity and coming to understand our place in life); and the religious (how one stands alone before God).

Martin Buber was a theological existentialist whose ideas about coming to know God can be applied to our interactions with anyone who is different (i.e. ethnicity, religion, sex, affectional orientation, geography) than us. Since, applying hermeneutics, how we interact with things also influences those things, we must be aware of the level of interactions in which we engage—especially with people. Buber argued that we have two levels of relationships: **I-it** relationships, which are objective (seeing the other as an object, condition, or trait) and **I-thou** relationships, which are subjective (genuinely having a true relationship). We should have I-it relationships with objects and I-thou relationships with people. To do so, we must recognize that everyone is an individual, not just a "sum of parts."

True I-thou relationships are much more difficult to have than what it seems. Any time we see someone for what they are, not who they are, we objectify them. Any time someone has used a phrase such as "I'm not a homophobe, I have a gay friend" or "I'm not racist, I have a _____ friend" they are engaging in an I-it, not an I-thou relationship. It's a very fine line to dance upon: people's cultures define who they are and we cannot be ignorant of this; however, it is not our place to see them for their culture instead of for their humanity. Today's public schools make true I-thou relationships with our students almost impossible; before a teacher lays eyes on a class, they have been provided sex, age, and ability levels, as well as in many cases discipline histories, test scores, and a wealth of other information that perpetuates the objectification of our students.

Applying existential concepts directly to education, the American philosopher **Maxine Greene** came up with the concept of "wide awakeness." Greene was concerned for the quality of existence; therefore the best education is humanistic education, which teaches people to choose their freedom. There are some fundamental purposes of education: to find alertness about ourselves and others; to discover the possibilities within and without us; to grow cognitive perspectives (expanding our perspectives) and perceptual ground (expanding how we come to know); and to counter cynicism and privatism. Greene argues that we must fight the technological, cold, impersonal world we are creating; we must be aware of our biases,

attitudes, and actions; we should strive to be community aware, not just self-aware; and we must understand the forces that manipulate, oppress, and deform us as individuals and as a society.

Another thinker applying existential beliefs to education is **Nel Noddings**, who argued that we are free to choose what we become, so we need to find our own existence. We come to know through dialogue and the power of the narrative; the key to effective dialogue is not giving up our own principles, but using it as a means of discovering what we know, how we know, what we care about, and whom we care about. Noddings argued that humans by nature are storytellers, and that the narrative is the natural way of knowing. We all are capable of having caring relations—the self is given meaning and formed in the context of its relations with others. We should have engrossment—sympathy—we feel their feelings, and measure and interpret reactions, which are different in each situation. Noddings argues that in life, the ends are fixed but the means are always changing—therefore critical thinking is essential. Since the means are changing, we should not fear failure—it is healthier than the denial of failure.

In general, existential educators believe we should focus on human reality—the being, not the becoming. We should teach students to "be their own people"—make their own realities. Since existentialists value all points of view and recognize there are no absolutes, existentialist teachers use multiple resources to present multiple perspectives on all issues covered. Of primary importance are developing analytic and linguistic skills in order to understand, interpret, and clearly express their own realities. Rather than combating or denying, existentialist teachers foster understanding of anxiety and frustration. Teachers and students are all learners in the classrooms which primarily focus on language and creative arts as means of self-expression.

There are two primary, relatively obvious, critiques of existentialism in the classroom. First of all, isn't there a definable reality outside individual perceptions? Isn't there a time when hard facts must be taught rather than expressions of perceptions? Second, what of the more practical concerns? Isn't there room for both individual identification of reality and the vocational arts, for example?

Influenced by the existentialists were the **postmodernists** who argued in a **logocentric** society—western civilization centers on rationality and word usage, but this center has not led to accurate representations of anything. Instead, western society has generated multiple discourses, writings, or texts, all of which reflect the power dynamics between the

dominant culture that shapes the definitions and subjugated cultures which exists within them. There is no one absolute truth, but rather regimes of truth—all knowledge is defined by the society that produces it, and is man-made constructs within specific historical contexts. We discover individual truths through negotiation with others.

Since truth and knowledge are social constructs, language defines reality—and, therefore, to redefine language is to redefine reality. The truth is unstable—we only know what we don't know. There exists a politics of difference—we all have our own texts; in order to be a genuine community, we need to hear and value all texts, not silence them. Accordingly, we should base politics (relationships, interactions, all levels of social discourse) on divergence, not commonalities.

The postmodern aims of education are suitably abstract. **Henry Giroux** argued that teachers are transformative individuals and intellectuals—we can make everything different, primarily by promoting marginal knowledge and discourses of difference. Teaching should be rethought as a conjunction between modernism's universalistic tendencies with a refined sense of critical analysis. Ultimately, we should teach students to express themselves—language sensitivity helps shape the way students think and conceptualize.

Postmodern curriculum involved studies of power, history, cultural politics, and social criticism, including narratives from the margins of culture, rather than simple discrete content transmission. Though not expressly postmodern, the most influential thinker in this realm was **Paulo Freire** who taught a **liberation pedagogy**. Friere encourages teachers and students alike to question their own power and privilege in a society and challenge the dominant culture's beliefs and practices which often subordinate others. Freire argued that teachers should strive for **praxis**—merging theory and practice in the belief that if something is to truly be learned, people must act upon it. It's ironic that a standardized test used to assess teacher preparation is so named.

Freire reminds teachers that education is *knowing*—based on shared experiences, critical reflection—and is not *schooling*, as posited in the first chapter of this work. While education and schooling can work together, more often they work separately. True liberation pedagogy rests on the following assumptions: that education has historically been used to exploit the poor; that teachers must befriend those we teach; teachers should make our students aware of the forces that exploit them; and that teachers

must teach students how they can use education and knowledge as a means to improve their lives.

As abstract and grandiose as it is, postmodernism leads to some significant critiques and sets itself up for mockery (such as websites devoted to "how to speak postmodern"). Many teachers believe postmodern fascination with redefining language is a bit too petty and ignores the reality of world. Others ask if there aren't some universal truths—every now and then isn't it okay to teach that 2 + 2 = 4 just as fact? Many others complain that in our fascination to deconstruct language we have forgotten to teach the basic skills necessary to our youth and, in fact, tend to miss some substantive problems.

What Is Neoliberalism?

While many educators were becoming more attuned to postmodern thinking, society began to push back against many of its tenets—particularly as they impacted the nation's public schools. Initially developed by economists but quickly adopted by politicians, soon the concept of **neoliberalism** impacted many facets of public life. At their core, neoliberals believe that the free markets should be favored; that consumer choice and entrepreneurial initiative can help move the country forward; and that any governmental intervention that might possibly hold back entrepreneurship is a problem that needs to be removed.

To get to those beliefs, neoliberalism rests on a set of core assumptions. First, it assumes that individuals are guided by self-interest, and that this self-interest will make them rational thinkers. To be otherwise would hurt themselves. Second, it assumes that given complete and accurate information, people will make decisions that are in their own best interest. Third, it assumes that people need to be given a variety of options in all transactions in order to be able to make the best choice—including in areas of social service such as education and health care. Ultimately, neoliberals believe in the elimination of values such as "public good" and "community," to be replaced with values of "individual responsibility," "individual liberty," and "entrepreneurship." To achieve this end, neoliberals argue that there must be absolute rule of free markets—that there should be total freedom of the movement of capital, goods, and services. Society should eliminate public support of all social services in favor of privatized versions thereof. Neoliberals believe in deregulation—eliminating government regulations that inhibit profit.

As the neoliberal agenda has taken political control in the United States, there have been two significant, if unintended, consequences. First, a handful of private interests have come to control much political and social life in order to maximize their own personal profit. Second, a handful of wealthy investors and large corporations have become hugely influential in defining social, political, and economic policy for the nation. The nation's public schools are not immune from this influence.

The neoliberal agenda has impacted the nations' schools financially in terms of programs such as vouchers and charter schools. Schooling is a $1 trillion per year enterprise, and corporate America is eager to be able to reap profit. Other neoliberal reforms include reducing the financial footprint of schools (reduced funding for public universities, consolidation of public schools) and raising curriculum standards coupled with accountability. These foci result in an increasing demand on teachers to expand their roles with minimal increases in pay.

What Is Meant by Post-Columbine Schools?

The neoliberal agenda is not the only thing that has shaped US schools since 1983. On April 20, 1999, what was at the time one of the worst tragedies in the history of American schooling took place at Columbine High in Littleton, Colorado, a suburb of Denver. Two middle class white students brought heavy armaments to school and opened fire. While many groups claim members of their own were singled out—athletes, bullies, Christians, and students of color—the shooters were fairly indiscriminate in their slaughter. Because of its close proximity to a major media outlet (Denver), the media savvy of the students involved (some of whom were on the phone with news networks while the shooters were still in the midst of their rampage), and the demographics of the school (suburban middle/upper class, almost all white), it captured the attention of the nation—and became a new rallying cry for school reform. This time, it was not pedagogical or curricular reform but security measures society as a whole demanded.

The public schools tend to be reactive rather than proactive, and the Columbine Massacre gave fodder for schools across the nation to ramp up their security to (some would argue unreasonably) unprecedented high levels. Suddenly, parents demanded that their schools have more thorough security than many American prisons, and the daily lives of students changed dramatically. In the post-Columbine schools, students had to be driven through chain-link fencing topped with barbed wire to arrive at

their building; these gates would be locked after homeroom and remain secure until the end of the school day. Upon arrival, students had to carry their mesh or clear plastic backpacks through metal detectors past security guards or resource officers, members of local law enforcement stationed in the schools. Students and faculty alike wear name tags; visitors who enter the only door unlocked during the school day (or the one monitored by a school employee to "buzz" visitors in) receive a tag and are escorted through the building.

Young children receive lessons in "stranger danger" or other similar curricula, taught to make everyone aware if they see someone without proper identification. Students today participate in fire drills, bad weather drills (depending on where they're located in the nation), lockdown drills (for when an unidentified stranger is spotted in the building), and active shooter drills/ALICE training where students are taught to hide, but if discovered run around screaming confusedly to avoid providing an easy target to shooters. Preservice teachers have to grapple with the question of whether they will take a bullet for their students, and how to best provide psychological first-aid in the aftermath of a shooting. Most recently and perhaps most extreme, corporations have innovated to meet this unfortunate "need," developing and marketing items such as bullet-proof backpacks for students.

Most districts implemented anti-bullying, anti-teasing curricula in the classrooms while most school boards implemented **zero-tolerance** policies—any example of harassment, violence, weapons, or similar actions result in immediate suspension and/or recommendation for expulsion. While such policies do help schools deal with students prone to violence, sadly zero-tolerance policies have taken any discretion away from the schools, just as the teacher-proof curricula did a generation ago. Zero-tolerance policies have contributed to issues of race, as urban schools with staffed corrections officers enforce strict standards of behavior which contribute to the **school-to-prison-pipeline** phenomena that reflects larger issues of mass incarceration for people of color. Incidents of a kindergarten student being suspended for kissing a classmate or an elementary student being suspended over bringing silverware from home to eat lunch are becoming more common. The latest irony occurred in Colorado, a state in which students in many rural districts are encouraged to bring rifles to school to take part in National Rifle Association supported shooting and safety lessons, in which a member of the drill team was suspended for carrying her team's wooden rifles—which are unfireable and never left her car's back seat.

How Did Federal Intervention Increase?

With the 1983 exposé *A Nation At Risk*, many Americans stopped believing in their local schools—more specifically, they stopped believing that education should be left to local initiative. Since that report, the public has supported more and more federal intervention, no matter the provisions. One of the more substantive, if short-lived, was the 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act which developed vocational education in a way not seen since Smith-Hughes. This act demanded local schools create school-business partnerships and internship opportunities, reinforced funding from the Smith-Hughes Act, provided more federal funding for vocational curriculum (particularly high-level science and math-based projects), and fostered the integration of academics and vocational coursework.

In an attempt at eliminating the general track from schools, School-to-Work set minimal graduation standards for vocational completers and encouraged schools to move from a multi-track system to a dual-path system. In other words, students in high schools selected one of two levels of coursework, technical preparation or collegiate preparation, rather than the multitude of levels previously offered (basic, general, technical, collegiate, advanced, honors, etc.). Leading the charge in this area was the grassroots organization the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) who had, at their apex, member schools in 28 states.

As time went on, education became a political talking point; Congress passed the **America 2000** initiative. Originally drafted under first President George H.W. Bush, the act established federal guidelines and standards for schools; however, after meeting Congressional resistance (mainly from liberals who believed it relied too much on religion, not enough support for race and poverty equity issues), most of the provisions became voluntary.

The Clinton administration sought their own stamp on educational legislation, leading to a bill known as **Goals 2000**. This bill set forth some noble, if arguable, goals, saying that by the year 2000: all students in America would start school ready to learn; the high school graduation rate would increase to at least 90%; American students would leave grades 4, 8, and 12 having demonstrated competency over challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, foreign languages, arts, history, and geography (as measured by national assessments); America would be first in the world in mathematics and science achievement; every adult American would be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global society; and every school in America would be free of drugs and

violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. Enacted in his first term, this bill met a Congressional buzzsaw as well, with liberals dragging out the same arguments as against America 2000 and conservatives arguing it resulted in too much federal intervention. Eventually, Congress added bills that made the testing "voluntary" (even calling them voluntary national tests, or VNTs); the bill frittered away to nothing.

With the swearing in of the second President Bush, it was time to reauthorize the Elementary and Secondary Education Act first passed under President Lyndon Johnson as part of his War on Poverty. Learning their lessons from past failures, members of Congress from both sides of the aisle got involved. The tragedy of 9/11 renewed American faith in their nation, lost since Watergate, and this was one of the first bills considered by Congress in the aftermath. Re-titled **No Child Left Behind** (NCLB) and enacted in 2002, it set the stage for neoliberal education in the United States. It contains much more expansive funding, but with that funding comes much more mandated assessment for accountability purposes. In addition, NCLB examines more diverse areas such as teacher certification for the first time. Also, there were several riders to the bill that many argue have no place in a piece of educational legislation.

There were four fundamental premises to NCLB. The first was accountability—holding schools accountable for student performance along racial and sex lines rather than as an aggregate. The second was more local freedom—NCLB allows schools to use federal dollars in a wider variety of ways than previous. The third was proven methods—curricula recommended have scientific research backing them up. The fourth was choices for parents—tutoring for students and vouchers to go to high-achieving schools.

NCLB brought about several good things. First, districts were no longer allowed to hide behind numbers when reporting performance. While a school with a solid cadre of highly advanced students used to be able to use those high scores on standardized tests to make themselves look good, NCLB demanded disaggregated data. Another positive was the change in teacher certification at the middle grades. Whereas elementary-certified teachers used to be able to teach middle grades, now those teachers must have secondary certification (highly qualified in their content area). This means elementary teachers can return to what they have been trained to do best that their secondary counterparts would find impossible: teaching young children. More generally, NCLB greatly increased federal funding

in the public schools to their highest dollar amount ever. However, many of these dollars circumvented our public schools, as federal dollars could be used for students to attend private schools thanks to the mandated vouchers.

Strengths duly noted, there were some strong criticisms of NCLB, the bulk surrounding the accountability plank. Why is it that schools were being measured using standardized testing, which every source imaginable will tell you is the most unreliable? Why were states mandated to assess in one set of grade levels when they historically used another? Language in the bill specifically addressed that one cultural group NCLB was meant to help, American Indians; however, the National Intertribal Council spoke out against the act as culturally exclusive and detrimental to Indigenous populations. The National Education Association (NEA) spearheaded a lawsuit not over whether it is an unfunded mandate, but whether an underfunded mandate—the federal government did not provide enough funding for states with large student populations to properly assess.

Beyond accountability, there were some substantive questions about other provisions in the act. NCLB called for the implementation of "scientifically proven" methods, a throwback to progressivism. However, there was some question about whether the methods recommended in the act were best practice or those with the best lobbyists. Also, as any teacher will tell you, what works for one population is not going to work for another; no one piece of legislation should mandate one method across the nation. The idea of **vouchers**—requirements that school districts pay other schools (i.e. parochial, private) their share of government money received for a pupil to defray that pupil's tuition at another school—run counter to our public schools truly being public as well. When the vouchers go to a parochial school, there are some church-state questions brought up as well.

In 2015, NCLB was re-authorized and re-titled the **Every Student Succeeds Act** (ESSA). It essentially kept the main neoliberal planks of NCLB; however, it did allow states more flexibility in demonstrating student success, as opposed to mandated testing in certain grade levels. It also put more emphasis on high curricular standards.

What Are the Common Core Standards?

By emphasizing curriculum, ESSA was simply building on momentum surrounding standards-based education. Throughout the 1980s, states and professional organizations began developing benchmarks, frame-

works, and standards to govern student learning; however, these were highly individualistic efforts. Beginning in 2007 the National Governor's Association, in conjunction with the Council of Chief State School Officers, announced a new initiative: the **Common Core** State Standards. These were a nationwide set of K-12 standards for education currently adopted by 41 states, 4 territories, Washington, DC, and the Department of Defense Schools. During the draft process, the standards were vetted by groups ranging from the NEA, to the National Council of Teachers of English and National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, to the American Federation of Teachers. Classroom teachers and faculty in colleges of education were encouraged to provide feedback on the draft standards.

The Common Core standards are set in two areas: mathematics and English language arts/literacy. The math standards are broken out into grades K-8, then high school is broken out into disciplines (number and quantity, algebra, functions, modeling, geometry, and statistics and probability). The English-Language Arts standards include reading literature, informational texts, and foundational skills; writing; speaking and listening; and language. They also include standards in "Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, & Technical Subjects" which encourage subject-area reading skills.

In reaction to science being excluded from the Common Core as a stand-alone discipline, the National Science Teachers Association partnered with many other agencies to write the **Next Generation Science Standards** (NGSS). These revolve around three dimensions of learning science: crosscutting concepts (connecting the four domains physical science, life science, earth and space science, and engineering); science and engineering concepts (teaching the scientific method through inquiry learning and hands-on practice); and disciplinary core ideas (key ideas that cut across the four domains). These standards include all grades K-12.

What Were the Sources and Purposes of Schooling?

Vouchers are one reason among many that we are returning to an expanded system of schooling unlike any since the common school era. The 2002 Supreme Court case *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* ruled that vouchers are constitutional, paving the way for an explosion in the so-called alternative schooling.

Denominational schools are making a comeback in a big way. While they have been around since Colonial times, they have been the primary

alternate to the public schools since the 1840s. The government has given them the necessary assistance: the 1925 Supreme Court case *Pierce v. Society of Sisters* ruled that states cannot mandate children attend public schools instead of parochial schools. As the nation has escalated their culture wars since the 1980s, the schools have been the primary battlegrounds; in fact, Protestant parochial schools have emerged alongside Catholic schools as the primary alternative education.

Charter schools have grown, although to what extent greatly relies upon in what state for each state has crafted fairly unique laws of establishment and governance. In 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter school legislation in the nation, but it was quickly followed by almost all others, each with different regulations to follow. Charter schools are public schools in the sense that they must meet all of the same standards of learning for their students and are open to all students, tuition free; however, they are exempt from much of the bureaucracy and governmental oversight to which public schools are subject. At their best, charter schools provide a variety of alternative environments for students ranging from electronic schools (a variation on homeschooling, see next) to dropout recovery programs to schools geared around an interest such as environmental education or the arts.

At their inception, there was much criticism rightly levied against charter schools for, among other things, being too exclusive and selective in their student populations. For example, many charters opted to not provide services to students with disabilities and had parents sign waivers. Others discriminated against students based on socioeconomic status. However, as more states have cracked down on charter schools, many of these criticisms are no longer valid; nationally, charter schools now serve majority-minority populations and offer the same, if not more, opportunities for students with disabilities as their traditional public school counterparts.

Thanks to a combination of culture wars, judicial support, concerns over school violence, and the internet, **home schooling** has taken off in recent years as a primary means of alternative education. While every state has different regulations on this, essentially parents keep their children home and educate them as they best see fit; however, students are still subject to the same accountability assessments as their public school peers. Parents, fed up by either what they perceived to be dumbed-down statistics or removal of parochialism, fled the schools. In this period, homeschool associations have sprung up more rapidly than Parent-Teacher Associations, and the internet has allowed an accredited, reliable curricu-

lum to be piped directly into anyone's home. Public schools by law have to allow homeschool students to participate in extracurriculars, removing much of the socialization question.

The public schools are not exempt from this trend either; in order to try and remain relevant (though whether this is an issue is debatable), many public school districts are adopting a variety of approaches, if not school types. NCLB mandated all school districts be **districts of choice**—meaning students have the choice to attend from any elementary, middle, or secondary school within district boundaries. Beyond that, many districts have implemented a system of magnet schools, particularly at the middle and secondary levels—meaning schools focus on one area of strength (i.e. Performing Arts Academies, Technical/Vocational Centers, Science and Math Schools) and recruit students from across the district. While this has been effective in some school districts, in others it serves as a tool to further segregate schools along class and racial lines.

Public schools are not only mandated to provide accommodations to students with special needs but now also to identify and assist **at-risk youth**—children who have any of a wide variety of personal, economic, or social characteristics that research says leads to low performance or dropping out. One means of reaching such youth, as well as a means to handle students that don't quite fit within a traditional school (due to learning style, behavior issues, et cetera) many districts have opened **alternative schools**—small public schools that use a variety of nontraditional means to reach these students. Unfortunately, boys and students of marginalized cultures are disproportionately represented in these schools.

What Will Be the Legacies of the Period?

Since we're in the midst of this period, it is difficult yet to determine which policies will stick and which will fall to the wayside. Particularly since the trend in schooling since the Five E's has been rapid and large swings on the pendulum from extremely liberal movements (i.e. open schools) to extremely conservative movements (i.e. Coalition of Essential Schools) and back again, it will be curious to read in 20 years which of the extremes this period will be remembered—or if it will be remembered as a whiplash/boomerang period instead.

It is a safe assumption that the added security measures in the post-Columbine schools will remain as permanent features. Unfortunately, schools are no longer the community centers they once were, but holding

pens due to their increased security and zero-tolerance policies. Indeed, it is often easier to get into a government building or prison than into a public school today. The growth of alternative education models—charter schools and homeschooling in particular—are also likely to become permanent fixtures on the public school front.

It is an interesting debate in which to engage as to what the public schools will look like 30, 40, or 50 years from now. Will they remain much the same as they are currently, with the subsequent upkeep in technology? Will they return to the dormitory facilities of the pre-common school era, providing lodging and meals to students in efforts to save them from their families? Which students will be attending—will the public schools exclusively serve students with profound special needs and vocational qualifiers while collegiate-bound students attend private and charter schools? Or will we return to the Colonial era model of homeschooling, where it becomes the duty of each head of household to tutor their youth in certain curricula, where students simply sit down at their computers, spend an hour or two engaged in interactive, individualized "teaching" from online resources, then go about their days in relative leisure?

Beyond the debate between "brick and mortar" versus virtual schooling in terms of physical plant and technology, another great debate will take place of the curricula taught. Will there be a nationalized curriculum all schools follow, as is the case in many European and Asian nations, or will local control still rule the day? Will the National Governor's Council manage to continue to have their core curriculum approved and adopted (if not expanded into all 50 states), or will the teacher's groups stand up against it?

Educators are learning that nothing is sacred in education—and depending on how you spin an issue depends on whether this is a good thing or a bad thing. Even the *Brown* decision moved to the forefront of conversation when, in 2007, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School District No. 1* that public schools could not use race as a primary means of determining student attendance. Depending on who you read after, this decision either affirmed *Brown* by proving that *de jure* policies that use race are unconstitutional, or was the first step in dismantling *Brown* by no longer giving school districts much leeway to integrate. As in all issues, time will tell.

"Going Old School": For Further Reading

There are a great number of works that helped shape the information shared in this chapter that came together over years of teaching and reading. Many of these works are worth reading in their own right. What follows is a list of recommended works that both shaped the content of this chapter and extend it.

In light of the many debates taking place about the rights of people who are transgender in today's schools, Amara Chaudhry's "Lessons from Jim Crow: What Those Seeking Self-Determination for Transgender Individuals Can Learn from America's History with Racial Classification Categories"[1] provides an excellent reminder that we have been here before historically and legally. Chaudhry looks at the legal history of the dismantling of Jim Crow laws in the United States to draw lessons for the trans-community and its supporters. Ultimately the author argues that a key difference is the role of self-identification; while race was externally classified, gender should be an internal classification and legally recognized as such.

Among the latest in social reconstructive writings, Paulo Freire argues in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*[2] that schools are the primary means through which a society can improve itself. However, Freire also takes a more post-modern approach to the topic, examining power relationships and explaining how schools support—and can subvert—them. Friere talked about schools as potential sites of oppression or emancipation and created the banking concept of education. To Friere, dialogue in education could give rise to liberatory pedagogy.

A psychologist, Howard Gardner didn't intend on *Frames of Mind*[3] being so explicitly linked to education until the theory had been extensively tested—yet it is in education that his work has proved most fruitful. Essentially Gardner reframed the penultimate educational question from "how smart are you?" to "how are you smart?" Gardner's book laid out the theory of seven multiple intelligences—linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal—that dominated pedagogical approaches for decades. Gardner's work was later expanded to include a naturalistic intelligence, and some include existential and/or moral intelligence as well.

Karen Graves provides another historiographical article, "'So You Think You Have a History?': Taking a Q from Lesbian and Gay Studies in Writing Education History,"[4] which explores the literature on the history

of the LGBTQ+ community. Beyond a great survey of the field up to its publication, Graves concludes the article with four lessons that historians—particularly lesbian and gay historians—can take from queer theory. First, they should seek that is unspoken, silenced, or fractured; second, they should have a critical focus on identity, particularly sex and gender; third, they should focus on the resistance, not just the oppression; and fourth, there is a strong connection between what we think of as private and our social institutions.

Existentially concerned about the role of creativity and the arts in education, Maxine Greene's collection of essays *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*[5] pursues these, among many other topics. Greene's essays span topics ranging from curriculum to pedagogy, pursuing a social vision to incorporating multiple voices and realities. Throughout her career, Maxine Greene has been focused on using creativity to bring about wide awakeness in the population; this collection updates and expands on this theme.

Building on the work of Freire, bell hooks argues for schooling as a practice of freedom in *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*.[6] An active teacher and scholar, hooks' notion of transgression is teaching students to transcend their racial, gender, and class boundaries set out by society. Bringing in elements of liberatory pedagogy, feminist thought, and critical race theory, this work is a great example of praxis—the merging of theory and practice—as hooks calls on people to develop and foster their critical thinking skills in today's anti-intellectual age in a fully engaged pedagogy.

Another work written by a non-educator, Kevin Kosar is a policy analyst who turned his attention to educational policy in *Failing Grades: The Federal Politics of Education Standards*.[7] Interestingly, Kosar's primary argument is that federal intervention in education has been unsuccessful not because it attempts too much—but that it attempts too little. Kosar presents a solid history of recent federal interventions in schooling through No Child Left Behind in a work that is relatively brief and very readable. Kosar's work tries to make the case for three arguments: that federally raising educational standards is a good thing; that politics has kept this from happening; and there are concrete strategies to accomplish this in the future.

While almost any of Jonathan Kozol's works could have made the list in various periods, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*[8] is the most relevant to today's teachers. In it, Kozol

encapsulates all of the themes of his previous works—the detailed sociopolitical critiques and clear explanations of how society impacts education—while looking at how schools have become re-segregated. The use of the phrase "apartheid schooling" is deliberate, as Kozol is comparing what the public schools in the United States do today in terms of curriculum and pedagogy to that of South Africa under its apartheid regime.

In 1995 David Berliner wrote *The Manufactured Crisis*, which explains why much of the negative press about and public attacks on public schools was wrong and false (worth a read in its own right). Over a decade later, Sharon Nichols partnered with Berliner in *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools*[9] which builds on these themes but focuses on the nature of high-stakes testing. Throughout, Nichols and Berliner present reason after reason why high-stakes testing has gotten out of control; most are rooted in Campbell's Law which states that the more any indicator is used for social decision making, the more the likelihood of corruption and distortion in the processes that the indicator was supposed to be monitoring. This book looks at the prevalence of cheating on tests/data reporting, the exclusion and removal of students, and the negative impact of testing and the narrative around it on both student and teacher morale.

Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education[10] is a seminal book by Peter McLaren that uses two voices—that of an early career teacher and a critical theorist—to explore new ways to understand the political, social, and economic issues impacting classrooms in the United States. McLaren presents a postmodern takedown of the current structures governing schooling in the United States. Any edition of this book works, though more recent editions continue his arguments in light of movements such as NCLB and Common Core.

Far too often, people levy harsh criticism against the Common Core standards without knowing the history of the movement or reading the content of the standards. The *Common Core State Standards Initiative*[11] website sets forth the explanation of the National Governors Association's process of developing and implement national K-12 standards. It includes links to an explanation of how the Common Core was created and to the math and language arts standards.

With all the negatively surrounding the entire educational enterprise during this period, some respite is needed. Nel Noddings provides a gentle reminder of the better purposes of education in *Happiness and Education*.[12] Noddings argues that the ultimate purpose of education is to

produce happy people—that part and parcel of being a good citizen is being happy with one's life. In something of a throwback to the progressive period, Noddings makes a case for educating for both personal life (home, nature, character, spirituality, interpersonal growth) as well as public life (work, community, democracy, public service).

It is rare when a scholar admits to an error in their work; it is even rarer for them to publish an entire volume that serves as apologetica and clarification. However, this is exactly what Diane Ravitch took up in *The Death and Life of the American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education*.[13] Ravitch served as Assistant Secretary of Education of the United States and in this role was one of the biggest supporters of NCLB and its high-stakes assessment demands. However, after spending years researching its implementation, Ravitch came to realize how harmful are such measures; this book is evidence against NCLB and apology for her role in making it happen.

The first of the Horace trilogy (also including *Horace's School* and *Horace's Hope*), Theodore Sizer's *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School*[14] introduces the reader to the fictional Horace Smith, a composite character of various high school English teachers. This book served as the catalyst for what would become the Coalition of Essential Schools. Through a series of anecdotes, Sizer details many of the ills facing the public schools of the time, and then presents a solution to these ills. It is a fairly realistic depiction of schooling in the 1980s (much of which is still sadly relevant) and makes a good case against bureaucracy in education in favor of localized reform efforts.

Notes

1. Amara S. Chaudhry, "Lessons from Jim Crow: What Those Seeking Self-Determination for Transgender Individuals Can Learn from America's History with Racial Classification Categories," *Temple Political and Civil Rights Law Review* 18, no. 2 (2009): 505–514.
2. Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum Books, 1993).
3. Howard Gardner, *Frames of Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
4. Karen Graves, "'So You Think You Have a History?': Taking a Q from Lesbian and Gay Studies in Writing Education History," *History of Education Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (2012): 465–487.
5. Maxine Greene, *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1995).

6. bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom* (New York: Routledge Books, 1994).
7. Kevin Kosar, *Failing Grades: The Federal Politics of Education Standards* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005).
8. Jonathan Kozol, *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2005).
9. Sharon Nichols and David C. Berliner, *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008).
10. Peter McLaren, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* (New York: Longman Books, 1989).
11. National Governor's Association, *Common Core State Standards Initiative* (Accessed at http://www.corestandards.org/).
12. Nel Noddings, *Happiness and Education* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).
13. Diane Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).
14. Theodore Sizer, *Horace's Compromise: The Dilemma of the American High School* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co, 1984).