

Educational Foundations

Philosophical and Historical Perspectives

This educational foundations book offers a comprehensive overview of American education history and a variety of classical, Enlightenment, and contemporary educational philosophers. While *Educational Foundations* includes a history of American education, it also looks at numerous policies, constitutional law cases, events, and political, religious, and social conflicts for students to consider while learning their subject matter. The text is divided into two parts: the first is a look at a broad array of philosophical influences from the Western canon, while the second is an exploration of the history of American education, focusing on a few specific eras. With strong and helpful pedagogical features and resources, such as class activities, suggested films, chapter objectives, and sidebar questions, this textbook is an excellent resource for students. It is useful for undergraduate and graduate courses in foundations.

Brian Dotts is an associate professor of educational foundations at the University of Georgia. He is author of *The Political Education of Democratus*, and co-editor and contributor to his second book, *The Elusive Thomas Jefferson*.





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Philosophical and Historical Perspectives

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I dedicate this book to my wife Julie, and my two children Nathaniel and Abigail.





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Preface

In order to understand educational foundations as an academic field of study students need to comprehend the historical, philosophical, sociological, and political connections between education, schools, and society. Too often students enter higher education without a well-developed sense of how history influences and informs, and to a large extent circumscribes, their worldviews and cultural conceptions. As Karl Marx noted in the nineteenth century, "Men make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves, but under circumstances directly found, given and transmitted from the past" (The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte). Said differently, contemporaries are like sculptors who take up an unfinished statue from the past with the hopes of constructing a finished product. They build upon an already existing structure, which delineates to a degree the parameters for future work. However, the current generation can also reconstruct or deconstruct the unfinished product in their own unique ways, and future generations may re-sculpt the statue in newer ways yet. While history doesn't determine everything that happens in the present, it does affect the present in dramatic, albeit in often subtle, ways. Statues (or other artifices) are susceptible to change as individual and group agents intervene to re-sculpt existing structure inherited from the past. They do so in ways that distinguish it (and them) from the past.

The current generation may even begin something new, as Hannah Arendt desired, but even the construction of something novel is often tethered in some way to, and distinguished from, what came before. And William Faulkner concluded that the past weighs so heavily on the present that they are virtually indistinguishable. "The past is not dead, it is not even past," he declared, suggesting that the past bears on the present to such an extent that history is always with us; that it is always being constructed by those in the present. Finally, Voltaire concluded that "history is the lie commonly agreed upon" by contemporaries. What I think Voltaire meant to convey was that history can never be known exactly as it occurred. First, it is a history which we in the present are limited in knowing as a result of limited evidence. Second, history is always viewed through the refracted, that is blurry and ideological, perspectives that inform contemporaries whose values and worldviews are not shared by previous generations and other cultures. This latter problem is referred to as presentism in historiographical circles – judging the past and those who lived it based on contemporary values and customs.

This text's breadth of American history beginning with the Colonial Period helps students understand how the present has been sculpted, constructed, reconstructed, and



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deconstructed over time and how it informs and impacts the present. The text also illustrates for students the constant interplay between both structure and agency, historically, philosophically, and politically, to provide them with a better understanding of schooling as a social institution saturated in political conflict.

The section focusing on the history of American education is conceptually framed by a three-pronged approach. First, critical analyses of schooling as both a form of institutionalized control and as a form of liberation are considered. As a social institution created by the state, for example, formal public schooling serves a variety of functions, not the least of which include teaching basic literacy and allegiance to the state responsible for its existence. In this way, schooling serves (or is intended to serve) as a regulatory and functional instrument for the nation state. In short, public schooling in any country may provide many benefits, but it will nearly always seek to transmit the dominant culture in any society and create political allegiance to the state. On the other hand education, especially counter-education, has served emancipatory predilections when it critiques dominant ideologies. Critical thinking and ideology critique serve as important methods of liberating the mind and resisting oppression.

Second, because schooling is public, it inevitably serves as a site of political conflict wherein individuals and groups constantly attempt to impose their moral and ideological values onto schools, their purposes, their curricula, and in their organization and practices. Therefore, schools are constructed in ways that serve some interests over others and as institutions sculpted by political conflicts, the outcomes of which tend to reflect the interests of more powerful groups in society. While resistance may occur within or across schools, they serve as the functional means of distributing and legitimating a society's social and legal constructions of groups and subgroups, historical interpretations, philosophical worldviews, and ideological interests. This is not to say that schooling and education fail to emancipate individuals from oppressive ideologies. Education can also be utilized as a form of individual and group power to change existing circumstances by disrupting the status quo. However, as institutions of the state, public schools tend to be very limited or incremental in realizing these goals. Liberation resulting from ideology critique tends to emerge through extra-educational institutions; that is, beyond the schoolhouse door, which leads to the third prong in my conceptual framework.

Third, schooling and education are viewed both formally and informally. In other words, learning obviously occurs in formal schools, but it also takes place every day outside schools informally. A great example includes the Civil Rights Movement, which served as a widespread process in ideology critique, a fundamental ingredient of critical theory that was and continues to be eschewed in most public schools. In other words, this movement taught America more broadly the hypocrisy between its national ideals on the one hand (the Declaration of Independence's notion that "all men are created equal") and national practices on the other, such as slavery and Jim Crow.



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Critical theory's use of ideology critique continues to support both formal and informal methods of learning in order to achieve the aims of social justice. Therefore, while formal schooling serves as a fundamental focus of this book, informal schooling also serves as an important link in developing students' understanding of schools and education as construction of historical, philosophical, and political conflict. Formal schooling serves as a functional means by the state to develop literate and informed citizens, while informal education often serves as an extra-institutional means of countering or resisting formal learning that focuses on the transmission of dominant ideologies. Such a distinction is highlighted in the purported quote by Mark Twain: "I never let my schooling get in the way of my education." What he meant by this quote is that his real education occurred outside institutionalized and systematized schooling because formal schooling appeared to lack relevance.

This three-pronged approach is highlighted in Figure A, which is discussed at the end of each chapter in the section covering history. The three-pronged approach is not used in the chapters covering philosophy because each philosopher and theorist develops their own conceptual frameworks for analyzing their epistemologies, ontologies, and theories of the state, political institutions, and education.

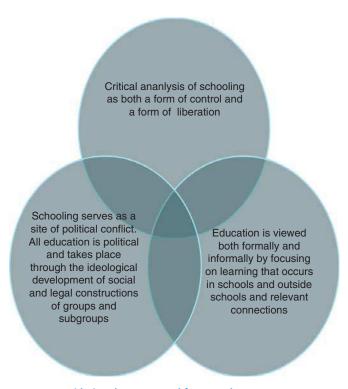


Figure A Considering the conceptual framework



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George Counts, one of the fathers of educational foundations, envisioned teachers as key actors in the development of a broader "social intelligence" that could lay the foundation for a meaningful democracy in search of social justice. This text is intended to inform students by developing their "social intelligence," an intelligence that prepares them to be agents for change in their communities and to give them the skills to empower their own students' abilities to critically think and to critically analyze schools and education situated as social, historical, philosophical, and political institutions.

Coverage and Organization

While this text relies on the past to help students understand the present, the past also informs us philosophically. This text includes a broad array of philosophical influences from the Western canon, and while many more could have been chosen, I highlight a select number of philosophical and theoretical works due to limited space. These include a few notable classics, such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle; Enlightenment thinkers including John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels; as well as theories formulated by Mary Wollstonecraft, W. E. B. Du Bois, John Dewey, and Paulo Freire. In keeping with the book's conceptual framework, each chapter in the philosophy section provides students with an understanding of each of these individuals' primary political philosophies and social theories in order to provide greater context for their views on schooling and education, their epistemological frameworks, and their conceptions of schooling as social and political institutions. Plato and Aristotle (Chapter 1), for example, refused to consider private education as a viable alternative in a just state, while John Locke (Chapter 2), due to his fear of concentrated political power, criticized the suggestion that the state be responsible for mass public schooling. John Dewey (Chapter 5), on the other hand, preferred public schooling in order to cultivate experiential and cooperative learning for a democratic future.

The second half of the book provides several chapters that explore the history of American education divided into chapters that focus on the following traditional eras: Colonial, Revolutionary, Antebellum, Post-Civil War, Progressive, Post-World War II, the 1980s and beyond, and a final chapter that focuses on the current privatization movement in schooling. Each of these chapters focuses on larger historical events and conflicts in order to provide political context for coverage of formal and informal education during the given historical era. As already mentioned for example, Chapter 13 provides a discussion of the Civil Rights Movement as an educative experience while also discussing formal schooling and federal policies like the National Defense Education Act of 1958 and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

Features

Due to the fact that philosophy, history, and politics are often perceived by students to be dry academic subjects, let alone students' tendency to see little connection between traditional liberal arts and teacher preparation, each chapter includes a variety of features



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instructors and students will find useful. These include chapter objectives, chronological timelines (see the beginning of any chapter), a significant number of side-bar questions and comments for students to consider while reading. The side-bars assist students in making historical, philosophical, and political content relevant to their current lives, their teacher preparation, their scholarship, their teaching practices, and their overall critical understanding of schooling as a social and political institution.

Moreover, each chapter includes relevant images (see the subsection titled "Aesthetics and Art as Educationally Transformative" in Chapter 5), tables, and figures (see Chapter 11). Each chapter ends with a list of "Questions" for students to consider or to use during class discussions (see the end of any chapter), ideas for classroom activities, as well as a list of online resources relevant to each chapter, suggested films and readings, and references (see the end of Chapter 14). A few chapters offer suggestions for the use of novels and other literary works, particularly genres that focus on literary critique and realism (see the end of Chapter 4). Each chapter is divided into multiple subsections in order to assist students' understanding of the material, and in the history section Chapters 10–14 each have a list of relevant court cases at the end (see, e.g., the end of Chapter 13). Every chapter is written to help students understand and make relevant parallels and connections to contemporary issues and conflicts that will inform their own teaching theories and practices. In addition, students will be able to develop a deeper understanding of the importance of history, philosophy, and politics as they relate to contemporary forms of schooling and education.



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