

**Positioning Critical  
Educational Studies  
within the Field  
of Education:  
Rethinking Lagemann's  
*An Elusive Science***

**By Isaac Gottesman**

Ellen Condliffe Lagemann's (2000) *An Elusive Science* provides the most comprehensive history of education as a field of academic study. As such it is important for those in the education community to read and reflect upon the text in order to take stock of the field. Foundations scholars who read Lagemann's work may be struck by a stark irony, however. While Lagemann is an eminent historian of education and scholar of educational foundations whose work explicitly champions foundations as an important arena of educational inquiry, her vision of the future of the field leaves little room for historical, philosophical, and other conceptual scholarship. This article aims to identify the intellectual assumptions that led Lagemann into this contradiction. It also aims to illuminate how a sustained examination of one historical moment in particular—the turn to “criti-

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cal” work in the field in the late 1970s and early 1980s—highlights the problematic nature of Lagemann’s position and opens up possibilities for a counter-vision of the role of foundations in the field of education.

### **Lagemann**

In *An Elusive Science* Lagemann (2000) claims that the history of educational research is defined by a “narrow problematics” that is of a “technical and individualistic character” (p. 236-237). The result, she argues, has been the failure of educational research to take into account the social processes and personal experiences that affect teaching and learning, and policy and governance of schools. Lagemann argues that this narrow problematics most specifically emerges in the work of psychologist Edward Thorndike in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In particular, she accuses Thorndike of three things: first, “grounding educational psychology in a narrowly behaviorist conception of learning that involved little more than stimuli, responses, and the connections between the two;” second, an “extreme emphasis on quantification in educational study;” and third, “a deep-seated genetic determinism,” that “was an important factor in establishing an emphasis on testing and tracking in education and on test development and psychometrics in education research” (p. 235). By 1920, Lagemann contends, these problematics shaped the field, and they have dominated ever since.

As a corrective, Lagemann (2000) advocates tempering our scientism by widening the scope of educational inquiry.<sup>1</sup> First, this means increasing our use of (and respect for) qualitative research, especially in the ethnographic tradition because such work enables us to get at the complexities of context and experience (pp. 219-221). Second, this means turning to the history of education, and foundations more generally, as “guides to change” (p. 246). In both instances, Lagemann looks to John Dewey and George Counts who were both critics of Thorndike, as inspiration and example.

Lagemann’s (2000) narrative is strong, often convincing, and provides a necessary history of how behaviorism came to dominate educational research, how high-stakes testing and the standards movement came to dominate federal and state education policy, and how the field of education has tried to make a science out of schooling since the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century when it became institutionalized within universities.<sup>2</sup> It is my position, however, that while Lagemann is correct in her identification of behaviorism and quantification as problematic focal points for the field, her own attempt to widen the scope of educational research is also rather problematic. The limits of Lagemann’s analysis are most apparent, ironically, in her inability to view foundations of education as more than an instrument for building good conceptual frameworks for the policy and practice outcomes of qualitative and quantitative research.

A key moment where Lagemann (2000) reveals her own problematics is in her extremely brief discussion—one paragraph—of the turn to “critical” work in

education that occurred in the 1970s and 1980s. She locates her discussion of the turn to critical work towards the end of a short section on “Qualitative Methods and Interpretive Studies” (pp. 222-223). Lagemann’s paragraph on the critical turn begins by claiming that interpretive studies contributed “insights” to the “multiple contexts” in which “education can and does occur” (p. 222). After making this opening remark about interpretive research, Lagemann (2000) offers her commentary on the critical turn:

However controversial, critical and postmodern scholarship, which flourished throughout the 1980s, contributed to these insights. Although there were important differences among the scholars who wrote from these perspectives, there was a general concurrence in the belief that the failings of the U.S. education system were neither ironic nor accidental. Especially from a Marxist perspective, these failings were seen as a logical and essential part of the inequalities of capitalism. Although feminist scholars shared with critical and postmodernist scholars a belief in the oppressiveness of established school arrangements, they dissented from the latter’s exclusive focus on race and class. The merits of either perspective aside, growing acceptance for qualitative research had clearly opened the doors to many new debates about the social significance of education. (pp. 222-223)

The ultimate *non sequitur* of this final sentence is indicative of the fundamentally problematic treatment of the critical turn not only in Lagemann’s history of the field, but in the field itself. In Lagemann’s account, the issues of social and economic oppression that are central to Marxist analysis are set aside in favor of a view that frames critical work as simply a matter of method. This way of framing the field makes all educational research and thought subordinate to the development of effective schooling policy. The justness of the social order, much less the position of schooling within it, is not up for discussion or debate.

Lagemann (2000) goes on to advocate for a pluralism of quantitative and qualitative work, guided by philosophically and historically informed conceptual frameworks that enable research to positively impact teaching and learning and schooling policy and governance. Thus, despite her nod to Dewey and Counts, both of whom have a much more expansive view of the relationship between school and society than she concedes, Lagemann is not making an argument for a socio-historically sophisticated look at education. Rather, for Lagemann the purpose of educational research is to fix and solve problems in schools. In fact, after leaving her readers with the impression that she will discuss educational theory as educational research, as she does at length with curriculum theory developments in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, she virtually leaves behind conceptual work in her discussion of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The result is that core questions in a historically and conceptually broad interpretation of foundations, such as what is the purpose of education, why do we have schools, and what role should education play in a just society, are lost in Lagemann’s text and absent in her advocacy. Thus, Lagemann herself suffers from the very problem she identifies as plaguing educational research: “narrow problematics.”

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This article is a critique of the ideological assumptions that frame Lagemann's narrative, assumptions that, in Lagemann's work and others, have placed Marxist and other radical critiques of the social order at the margins of educational history and contemporary scholarly discourse. It is my contention that Lagemann's uncritical commitment to liberalism and the liberal political project, and thus to instrumentalism and schooling, constricts her ability to see the conceptual critique of the social order that drove the shift to "critical" work in the field of education in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, I believe that Lagemann's historiographic misstep illuminates a crisis in the field of education—the precarious position of social and cultural foundations of education within the field. Even for a historian and foundations scholar like Lagemann, the ends of education, the legitimacy of the social order, and the place of schooling within that order tend to be more often assumed than examined. The critical turn in education is important historically as a time when these questions were forcefully examined. Understanding the origins and significance of this movement is essential to reclaiming the ground for reasserting these questions in the field in the future and continuing a forceful critique of liberalism, instrumentalism, and the decontextualized focus on schooling that pervade the field.

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### The Critical Turn

In *Marxism in the United States*, Paul Buhle (1991) writes, "To the question, 'Where did all the sixties radicals go?' the most accurate answer would be: neither to religious cults nor yuppieism, but to the classroom. For every professor with a New Left background whose books surface in non-academic review columns, there are a thousand who have written texts of lesser prestige, mainly in order to go on teaching" (p. 263). With the fall of the New Left in the early 1970s, contend many historians of the American left, arose a new left during the late 1970s and early 1980s: the Academic Left.<sup>4</sup>

While those in the Academic Left embraced a great variety of radical ideas, no intellectual tradition had quite the same impact within the academy as Marxism. As Bertell Ollman and Edward Vernoff write in the opening sentence to the introduction to their 1982 edited work *The Left Academy: Marxist Scholarship on American Campuses*, "A Marxist Cultural Revolution is taking place today in American universities" (p. 1). The turn to Marxism, as *The Left Academy* documents in the disciplines of Sociology (written by Richard Flacks), Economics (written by Herbert Gintis), Political Science (written by Mark Kesselman), Philosophy (written by Marx W. Wartofsky), Psychology (written by Dana Bramel and Ronald Friend), History (written by Michael Merrill and Michael Wallace), and Anthropology (written by Eleanor Leacock), was a turn to a sweeping array of Marxist perspectives, including the emergence of analytical Marxism.<sup>5</sup> However, as made clear in the work of J. David Hoeveler (1996), Michael Denning (2004), and Timothy Brennan (2006), within the humanities and much of the social sciences, perhaps the dominant shift was a turn to the Western Marxist tradition.

Initially emerging in the left-wing of the communist movement during the inter-war period, the Western Marxist tradition (e.g., Georg Lukacs, Karl Korsch, Ernst Bloch, Max Horkheimer and other Frankfurt School affiliates, and Antonio Gramsci) forcefully positioned itself in opposition to the perceived mechanistic materialism and economic determinism of scientific Marxism. Often labeled critical Marxism, humanist Marxism, and cultural Marxism, this tradition of Marxist thought was centrally concerned with historical understanding, consciousness, dialectical thought, ideology, emancipation, and the study of the superstructure as push-able and pull-able in political and cultural struggle.<sup>6</sup> In the 1960s and 1970s, as a result of anti-colonial movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, the war in South East Asia, growing dissent in Eastern Europe against Soviet “state socialism,” and a massive wave of domestic unrest across the globe, including in Western Europe and the United States, the Western Marxist tradition underwent a revival. Radicals were looking for new language and frameworks to help them understand the complexities of culture and social structure and to help them strategize opposition to rapidly expanding global capitalism and concomitant state sponsored oppression. In the United States, as the 1970s wore on and the fragmented New Left became an Academic Left searching for answers to address the rise of neoconservatism and Reagan, the critical Marxist tradition became a staple for left academics attempting to theorize resistance in a post-Fordist world.<sup>7</sup>

The vast amount of literature on the history of academic shifts during the period has largely neglected the field of education.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, it is crucial to remind ourselves that those in the institutional field of education in the United States were not immune from the effects of this turn—they participated in it. The one sustained attempt within the literature of either the history of radical theory or the literature on the history of education to historicize this participation in the United States is Martin Carnoy’s (1984) essay “Marxism in Education,” which appeared in the second volume of Ollman and Vernoff’s (1984) survey of Marxism in the academy.<sup>9</sup>

Carnoy (1984), whose work at the time was on the political economy of education and its relationship to imperialism (i.e., he is not a historian),<sup>10</sup> argued that moving into the 1970s there were three radical critiques of education that set the stage for the entrance of Marxism. First, he contended, were “critical educators,” such as Paul Goodman, John Holt, and Jonathan Kozol, writing in the mid and late 1960s, who “wrote more as muckrackers crying for increased sensitivity and ‘better’ treatment of children or reverence for learning than as analysts providing a coherent explanation of why U.S. schooling is the way it is or what shape reform strategy might take” (p. 82).<sup>11</sup> Second were “radical educators,” writing in the early 1970s, especially Ivan Illich who argued “failure, not mobility or success, was institutionalized in the schools for the mass of American children...that education was colonizing rather than liberating” (p. 82). Carnoy noted that “what the radical educators did not do, however, was to distinguish between successful and unsuccessful students—to tell us how and why failure was systematized in the

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schools so that children from certain social classes were inculcated with a different pattern of self-realization and different kinds of knowledge than children from other classes” (p. 82). Third, there were “revisionist” historians, such as Michael Katz and Joel Spring, who “produced evidence showing that American education had failed, historically, to lessen class inequality,” and that “...public schools had served the needs of industrialists in developing wage labor force, and that, as part of their function, they socialized various groups of youths to perform particular roles as wage labor” (p. 82). Here, Carnoy claimed, the revisionist historians “began to destroy the ideological myths that surrounded the tradition of American education,” and attack the “roots of schooling’s intellectual legitimacy” (pp. 82-83).

Carnoy (1984) argued that these three radical critiques of education, plus the Marxist writings of Antonio Gramsci, Louis Althusser, Nicholas Poulantzas, Clause Offe, and Paulo Freire were the major inspirations and foundations for Marxist work in education in the United States. As he noted in 1984, “especially in the last five years...there has been a virtual explosion in Marxian educational analysis” (p. 87). In order to illustrate the core debates within the new Marxist work, Carnoy focused his attention on theorists whom he viewed as central to the turn to Marxism: Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis who subscribed to a correspondence theory of schooling, and Michael Apple and Henry Giroux whose work looked to contradictions in the correspondence theory with the aid of critical Marxist theoretical tools such as the concepts of ideology and hegemony. Carnoy’s conclusion clearly expressed support for the work of Apple and Giroux. As he noted, “the struggle over education exists already, but if intellectuals can use Marxian analyses to increase consciousness of the hegemonic forms and content—the hidden curriculum—in schooling, contradictions can be accentuated and an alternative pedagogy developed as part of that struggle” (p. 93).

Thus, in contrast with Lagemann’s interpretation, the critical turn in education was a moment when scholars in the late 1970s and early 1980s such as Michael Apple and Henry Giroux, with the aid of the Western Marxist tradition, began to grapple with the complex relationship between school and society, to study the language and practice of scientism and instrumentalism, and to critique core assumptions in liberalism. This was the first moment in the field of education since the social reconstructionism of Counts and Kilpatrick, whom Lagemann speaks of approvingly early in her text, in which scholars in the field *en masse* began asking core foundational questions: What is the relationship between politics and education, and what is the position of education within the social order?<sup>12</sup> As Giroux notes in the conclusion to his 1982 *Social Text* essay “The Politics of Educational Theory”:

Finally, it must be stressed that as important as historical, cultural, and politically analyses of schools might be, such analyses cannot be abstracted from concerns regarding the role of the state, the process of capitalist accumulation and reproduction, etc. Understanding the complexity of schools in terms that are historical, sociological, economic, and political is necessary not only to move beyond functionalists and idealists accounts of schooling, but also so that struggles

in schools will be seen as an inextricable part of similar struggles waged in other social sites. (p. 107)

Those engaged in writing radical educational theory during the 1970s and 1980s were deeply concerned with the relationship between education and social formations. Within the area of curriculum and instruction, they contributed to debates about curriculum, ideology, and pedagogy; within sociology of education they engaged in debates about social and cultural reproduction. In the late 1970s and early and mid 1980s these conversations took place in a handful of education journals, such as *Curriculum Inquiry*, *Educational Theory*, *Journal of Education*, and *Theory and Research in Social Education*, several books, and at various academic conferences across the country. Though small in number, this group of educational scholars—Apple, Giroux, Jean Anyon, etc. and fellow-travelers such as Stanley Aronowitz—were productive in their writing, dedicated to their intellectual and political projects, and, as the proliferation of the word “critical” demonstrates, influential in the field of education.

Yet, these critical scholars were not simply educational theorists. As members of an Academic Left with an eye toward on-the-ground politics, they were concerned with writing innovative and insightful radical theory that connected educational theory and practice to the building of sustainable, transformative radical social movements. Their scholarship thus drew on radical theoretical work in other fields and disciplines, such as British Cultural Studies, and engaged in debates about ideas located in non-education journals, such as *Telos*, *Theory and Society*, *New Left Review*, and *Social Text*.<sup>13</sup> Like these influences, Apple, Giroux, and other critical scholars used the theoretical tools of the Western Marxist tradition, such as ideology, hegemony, and consciousness in order to think through resistance to an unjust social order. They were writing and thinking broadly as social and political theorists, not only as social and political theorists of education, and they were explicit about their radical political commitments and Marxist thinking. Critical theory in education began as a contribution and intervention into Marxist social and political theory and the objective was radical social change.

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### Lagemann on the Critical Turn

There are three significant problems with the way in which Lagemann’s (2000) discussion of the critical turn is framed. The first is her lack of clarity about what she means by critical, postmodern, and feminist scholarship. The second is her failure to distinguish between qualitative and conceptual work, which illuminates her inability to view foundations as anything other than an instrument for aiding the construction of conceptual frameworks for qualitative and quantitative research. Finally, Lagemann’s fixation on schooling, despite her advocacy of “multiple contexts,” makes clear her position that educational research and theory is about an imagined autonomous liberal school and not about the relationship schools actually have to the social order (p. 222). This section is devoted to exploring each of these limits in more detail.



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The first problem with Lagemann's (2000) account of the critical turn is that it does not distinguish between "critical and postmodern scholarship," nor does it illuminate how either of these relates with feminist scholarship. Though critical, postmodern, and feminist scholarship may overlap in some ways, each is a distinct and expansive body of literature with their own debates and lines of research. None of her three source citations (one for critical, one for postmodern, and one for feminism) are necessarily exemplars of scholarship in these traditions; she offers no context as to how and why these scholarly projects emerged.<sup>14</sup> Conflating the three without explanation of the differences oversimplifies complex relationships by distorting the relationships these scholarly traditions have with education. Similarly, the conflation veils an understanding of how critical, postmodern, and feminist perspectives emerge in education in relationship to their emergence in other fields. This lack of clarity also renders Lagemann's reference to critical and postmodern scholarship as controversial as a claim without a warrant, and one that reads as an apology for discussing the topic. And, finally, Lagemann's lack of a warrant confounds her claim, which is mistaken, that critical and postmodern work focused solely on race and class and did not focus on gender. The initial wave of critical work dealt quite poorly with race (e.g., Apple, 1979/2004; Apple & Weiss, 1983; Giroux 1981, 1983)<sup>15</sup>, and postmodern work dealt quite poorly with class and partially emerged in education as a way to engage gender (e.g., Luke & Gore, 1992)<sup>16</sup>. As a whole, Lagemann's work with the literature on how these three complex and sometimes intersecting intellectual traditions impact the field of education is problematic.<sup>17</sup>

To some extent this is an issue of chronology. As noted earlier in this essay, the turn to critical work in the field of education emerged in the late 1970s in concert with a general shift within the left and academic theory toward work in the Western Marxist tradition. While there were certainly signs of work in education related to the turn to postmodernism that occurred in literary and aesthetic studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s, postmodernism did not begin to emerge as a prominent intellectual force in educational theory until the early 1990s.<sup>18</sup> Ironically, one of the leading figures in this move to popularizing postmodernism within education was Giroux (e.g., 1991), whose work advocated engaging in "postmodern criticism"—an embrace of postmodern and poststructuralist critique and analysis of totalizing systems and meta-narratives that was wedded to radical liberal political engagement. Giroux's embrace of postmodernist ideas is probably most appropriately characterized as post-Marxist, a political position that advocated a shift away from class-based, worker movement politics and antagonism towards capital in favor of an agonistic politics rooted in a liberal pluralist conception of a public sphere.<sup>19</sup> This was the common position of many who advocated critical pedagogy from the late 1980s to the mid 1990s, including Peter McLaren (e.g., 1991).

Importantly, one manner in which postmodernist and poststructuralist feminist critique emerged in the field of education was in reaction to critical pedagogy's relative neglect of gender. Two of the most prominent works in this regard were Patti Lather's (1991) *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in the*



*Postmodern* and Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore's (1992) edited volume *Feminism and Critical Pedagogy*. However, it is equally important to note that feminist work in education predates the turn to postmodernism in the late 1980s. Jean Anyons' (e.g., 1979) early work, for instance, demonstrates that there was a feminist presence in the critical Marxist work of the late 1970s and early 1980s. And there is certainly a feminist presence in educational thought that predates Anyon, including the important work of Maxine Greene who was teaching at Columbia during Lagemann's years there as a student.

By the late 1990s, with the spread of various post-traditions emerging from within and in critique of the Marxist tradition, and with the increasing prominence of French intellectual currents within the field of education, the term "critical" had emerged to cover not just work in the Marxist tradition but work in postmodern, feminist, and other traditions as well. As Thomas Popkewitz and Lynn Fendler note in the preface to their 1999 edited work *Critical Theories in Education*: "Critical theory addresses the relations among schooling, education, culture, society, economy, and governance. The critical project in education proceeds from the assumption that pedagogical practices are related to social practices, and that it is the task of the critical intellectual to identify and address injustices in these practices" (p. xiii). This is an expansive explanation of critical theory, and the volume, which is read widely, celebrates the expansiveness. Postmodernism, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, neo-pragmatism, cultural studies, queer theory, feminist theory, Marxism, et al. are all considered critical theoretical approaches. In educational research, ranging from critical ethnography to critical race theory to critical literacy, critical work is everywhere in the field. Unfortunately, Lagemann's (2000) work does little to help us uncover or understand these complex histories of ideas or the conceptual critiques of the liberal social order that they engage.

A second problem with the way Lagemann (2000) frames her discussion of the critical turn is that her poor definition of the terms critical, postmodern, and feminist, and her lack of engagement with their respective philosophical projects leads her to conflate qualitative and conceptual work. The opening sentence and the closing sentence of her brief discussion combine to offer the distinct impression that critical, postmodern, and feminist work in education is either (a) qualitative work, (b) closely aligned with qualitative work, or (c) emerges because of qualitative work. Of these three possibilities only (b) is close to accurate. Lagemann appears to be conflating methodology and method. In education, critical, postmodern, and feminist work has greatly influenced the epistemological and ontological assumptions (methodology) that guide various quantitative and qualitative (and mixed) research projects (method). Critical ethnography is one such example (e.g., Valenzuela, 1999; Brantlinger, 2003). However, one can do interpretive work without being critical, postmodern, or feminist. Ethnography that does not label itself critical is one such example (e.g., Wolcott, 1973). Thus, although critical, postmodern, and feminist work in education has been largely aligned with interpretive work, this alignment is not because they are the same. The difference is that critical, postmodern, and

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feminist work in their initial stages in education emerge as conceptual work related to wide-spread intellectual currents outside of the field of education that were intended to critique the social order. While at various moments this conceptual work goes on to influence and guide quantitative and qualitative work within the field, such as critical ethnography, it did not emerge from within or because of this quantitative and qualitative work.<sup>20</sup>

Lagemann's (2000) conflation of conceptual and qualitative work shows either a deep misunderstanding of the turn to critical, postmodern, and feminist scholarship, or a deep unwillingness to give critical, postmodern, and feminist scholarship its due. It appears to be her insistence on the instrumentalism of conceptual work that guides her reasoning, which ultimately makes her unable to see social and cultural foundations as anything more than a space for the constructing of conceptual frameworks for qualitative and quantitative work. History, philosophy, and social and political theory can and should be used to help frame conceptual frameworks for "data" driven educational research—quantitative and qualitative work. Yet, the real power of this foundations scholarship is its ability, as conceptual work in and of itself, to push and engage challenging conversations about the meaning, purpose, role and position of education within the social order. The critical turn, for instance, was a moment in educational history that pushed our understanding of the relationship between education and the social order by theorizing spaces for agency and resistance within the structures of school and society. This was a conceptual push that forced the field to think about the ideological assumptions that frame our understanding of schooling. As Michael Apple notes in his 1979 classic *Ideology and Curriculum*:

In fact, if one were to point to one of the most neglected areas of educational scholarship, it would be just this, the critical study of the relationship between ideologies and educational thought and practice, and the study of the range of seemingly commonsense assumptions that guide our overly technically minded field. Such critical scholarship would lay bare the political, social, ethical, and economic interests and commitments that are uncritically accepted as "the way life really is" in our day-to-day life as educators. (1979/2004, p.12)

The task of critical work was to challenge the dominant interests and commitments of the field.

The third problem with Lagemann's (2000) discussion of the critical turn is its hyper focus on schooling, which constricts her ability to see schooling as one part of many social relations, and thus as one part of the social order. Even though Lagemann contends that "multiple contexts" affect schooling, and that interpretive research can help us understand the effect that society has on schools and thus learning and teaching, her conception of interpretive work places schools at the epicenter of a contextual conversation; it does not position schooling as one part of a web of social relations that allows us to see how the school is positioned and conditioned within and by the social order. Thus, in this instance, Lagemann's hyper focus on schooling illuminates the reasons for her failure to note that it was

the conceptual push of the critical turn that emerged in the late 1970s that began to push interpretive work, especially ethnographic work in education, to engage a social-relational approach. In the end, Lagemann's belief in the relative autonomy of schooling, and the relative justness of the social order in which schooling is a part, blinds either her ability or willingness to see that critical scholars were not merely writing about the oppressiveness of "established school arrangements"; they were writing about the oppressiveness of social arrangements, and the ideological role of schooling within these social arrangements (p. 223). Thus, the "failings of the U.S. educational system," which for Lagemann appear to be an issue of meeting some standard of adequacy, which is never clearly articulated in her text, is for those engaged in the critical turn a failing of the social structures in which schools exist—the educational system fails because the social order itself fails (p. 222).<sup>21</sup>

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## Conclusion

The liberal arguments prevalent in most of the literature in the broad field of education, that schools are relatively autonomous institutions that are not, in some sense, deterministically attached to other social relations, and that schooling can be a great equalizer in our generally just social order are the embedded assumptions at the core of Lagemann's (2000) work. Like the "narrow problematics" she critiques, Lagemann is caught in the political ideology of liberalism that constricts much of the field of education. In the liberal narrative, schooling is *the* mechanism of education, and it is the means by which the social order both reproduces its core values and structure as well as the way in which individuals can obtain relative social and economic equality. Furthermore, in the liberal narrative, instrumentalism is *the* paradigm for research, including educational research—it treats ideas and method as tools used to engineer the presumptively just nation-state. For liberalism, the social order is not in need of radical critique or substantial reconstruction; it is only in need, as David Tyack and Larry Cuban (1995) once noted, of tinkering, and schools are prime places to tinker.

Because of her assumptions about the social order, Lagemann (2000) is not interested in placing education and specifically schooling in dialogue with debates in social theory and political philosophy that challenge liberalism. There is simply no need. Why position education or schooling within its broader social-relations or consider the possibilities and limits of educational reform within the social order if the social order is generally just and tinkering can correct any injustice?

While the critical turn certainly posited implications for the conceptual frameworks of quantitative and qualitative work, the critical turn was a conceptual intervention. It stands as a powerful critique of liberalism, and thus the instrumentalism and the hyper-focus on schooling that pervades the field of education; it is not simply a critique of behaviorism and quantification. Because of her commitment to liberalism, it is not surprising that Lagemann misreads this conceptual turn as

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emerging out of or in concert with the qualitative, interpretive tradition. It is also not surprising that Lagemann is unable to see how much quantitative and qualitative work has been influenced by the critical turns critique of the social order. Lagemann's problematics restrict her from seeing any contrary view.

Since the publication of *An Elusive Science* in 2000, Lagemann (2005) has continued to pose questions about the role of the humanities in the field of education. However, she continues to frame her answer to such questions in instrumental terms. Instead of highlighting the capacity of the humanities to challenge the existing social order, Lagemann insists on the capacity of the humanities to serve that order. "Given the fact that science today is riding high and the humanities in education are underappreciated," she wrote in a 2005 *Harvard Educational Review* article on the role of the humanities in "an Age of Science," "it would be woefully easy for historians and other humanists to try to mold their studies in directions that appear scientific. To do that, I believe would be a mistake. Rather, we must make the case for the humanities in education by demonstrating their utility" (pp. 22-23).

Unfortunately, Lagemann's (2000) problematics are not confined to Lagemann. They are the problematics of the field of education. Significantly, most reviews of *An Elusive Science*, including ones in *American Journal of Education* (Vinovskis, 2000), *Educational Studies* (Schultz, 2004), *Harvard Educational Review* (Anonymous, 2002), *History of Education Quarterly* (Ogren, 2001), and *Teachers College Record* (McLean, 2002), were quiet on Lagemann's positioning of foundations scholarship and largely uncritical of her representation of the history of the field of education. None of these reviews noted the neglect of a conversation about the emergence of critical educational studies. With few exceptions, such as Robert Bullough's (2006) recent essay on the humanities in education in *Educational Researcher*, within the mainstream of the field conceptual work continues to be viewed as worthwhile only when it is perceived to have instrumental value.

Thus, in addition to a critique of Lagemann, this article is a critique of the liberal assumptions that underpin the field of education, and the ways in which these assumptions prevent the field, except at the margins, from engaging in critique and analysis of the social order. Furthermore, this article is intended to show the precarious position of social and cultural foundations as result of the liberal ideology that frames the field. If we conceive of the field as only a liberal project and thus one always necessarily wedded to instrumentalism and schooling, social and cultural foundations will forever remain a place simply for the construction of conceptual frameworks for qualitative and quantitative work that serves the interests of policy. However, if we see in the field the possibility of providing critiques of liberalism, and thus instrumentalism and schooling, we will be able to see foundations as a radical and necessary push against the liberal assumptions that dominate the field and as a place from which we can engage in a critique of the social order and begin to imagine spaces of resistance and alternatives to it. The critical turn, I contend, was such a push, and a closer look at its entry into the field of education allows for an illumination of some of the core types of questions foundations seeks to

address—questions about the relationship between politics and education and the role and purpose of education in a just society.

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> It is important to note that Lagemann is not opposed to the field of education being scientifically sound; rather, she is against scientism. One of her clearest articulations of this important distinction is in her discussion and praise of Dewey's (1929) *The Sources of a Science of Education* (Lagemann, pp. 231-232).

<sup>2</sup> In addition to identifying a narrow problematics in educational research, Lagemann argues that two additional (but related) problems haunt the field: institutional isolation and low status, and diffuse governance and authority structures. The evolution of these problems is traced in her book, and she also offers some advice for solutions.

<sup>3</sup> Liberal political thought in education has, I believe, five main attributes. First, a rhetoric of rights, codified in law, and a language of citizenship; second, a belief that American history can be viewed as a struggle to expand rights, as presented in the Constitution and expressed in the Declaration of Independence, accorded to individuals (an historical progression of the negotiation of the inclusion of individuals and groups into the nation-state, which, in education, means law and educational policy as mechanisms); third, a belief that the nation-state is a legitimate, desirable, and just political institution that can protect rights; fourth, a belief that, in order to distribute justice, the nation-state should intervene on behalf of those whose rights are not protected; and fifth, a belief that education, and schooling in particular, is a means by which individuals in the nation-state can achieve relative equality, and a means by which the state can reproduce the social order. A frequently read example of scholarship in the liberal tradition in the field of education that reflects these attributes is David Tyack and Larry Cuban's (1995) *Tinkering Toward Utopia: A Century of Public School Reform*. For a discussion of liberal political thought in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century see Stephen Eric Bronner's (1999) *Ideas In Action: Political Tradition in the Twentieth Century*.

<sup>4</sup> In addition to Buhle (1991), the list of historians and commentators on the American left who make this claim include: Stanley Aronowitz (1996) *The Death and Rebirth of American Radicalism*, Timothy Brennan (2006) *War of Position*, Michael Denning (2004) *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (2004), John Patrick Diggins (1992) *The Rise and Fall of the American Left*, Barbara Epstein (1991) *Political Protest and Cultural Revolution: Nonviolent Direct Action in the 1970s*, Richard Flacks (1988) *Making History: The American Left and the American Mind*, J. David Hoeveler Jr. (1996) *The Postmodernist Turn: American Thought and Culture in the 1970s*, and Russell Jacoby (1987) *The Last Intellectuals: American Culture in the Age of Academe*.

<sup>5</sup> G.A. Cohen's (1978) *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defense* is perhaps the key historical marker for the emergence of analytical Marxism. Other prominent analytical Marxist thinkers include philosopher John Elster and sociologist Erik Olin Wright.

<sup>6</sup> For an historical account of Western Marxism see Perry Anderson's (1976) *Considerations on Western Marxism*, Stephen Eric Bronner's *Of Critical Theory and Its Theorists* (2002), and Martin Jay's (1984) *Marxism and Totality*.

<sup>7</sup> In the United States, arguments against the failure of revolutionary Marxism are

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best heard in laments about the fall of SDS, which many scholars of the New Left such as Aronowitz (1996) and Flacks (1988) claim was the result of infighting amongst Leninist and Maoist factions. For a counter-interpretation that explicitly discusses racial politics within the New Left see Max Elbaum's (2002) *Revolution in the Air: Sixties Radicals turn to Lenin, Mao, and Che*. For a detailed discussion of the revival of Western Marxism in the United States see the histories of the transition from the New to Academic Left noted above, with particular attention to Denning (2004) and Epstein (1991). Finally, it is notable that the lines between the revolutionary Marxist and Western Marxist traditions are often quite blurry (e.g., Antonio Gramsci). In radical educational theory, for instance, Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is an excellent example of an embrace of both revolutionary and critical Marxist thought.

<sup>8</sup> None of the books mentioned above on the history of the transition from the New to Academic Left discuss the field of education.

<sup>9</sup> Carnoy's very raw sketch remains the best historical account of the critical turn in education. Raymond Allan Morrow and Carlos Alberto Torres' (1995) outstanding work *Social Theory and Education: A Critique of Theories of Social and Cultural Reproduction* offers what is probably the single greatest overview of Marxist theories of social and cultural reproduction, including those of Apple and Giroux; however, their work is an overview of ideas in social theory and not a history of the emergence of these ideas. Additionally, while several prefaces and introductions to Apple and Giroux's work as well as edited volumes on subjects like critical pedagogy offer some discussion of context, these discussions tend to take the form of brief biographical notes or intellectual sketches rather than focused analyses in their own right. Two examples of general works include *The Critical Pedagogy Reader*, edited by Antonia Darder, Rudolfo A. Torres and Marta Baltodano (2002) and *Critical Pedagogy Primer* by Joe L. Kinchloe (2004).

In addition to Carnoy's essay on education, Ollman and Vernoff's (1984) second volume surveyed the turn to Marxism in Literary Studies (James Kavanaugh and Frederic Jameson), Art History (Alan Wallach), Classical Antiquity (Marylin Arthur and David Konstan), Geography (David Harvey and Neil Smith), Biology (Martha Herbert), and Law (Mark Tushnet).

<sup>10</sup> Carnoy's classic work of the 1970s that placed him in a position to write this essay is *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (1974).

<sup>11</sup> Importantly, Carnoy is not using the phrase "critical educators" to signify a connection to the Marxist tradition. In fact, it is unclear why he is using this term at all. He does not refer to Michael Apple or Henry Giroux as critical educators.

<sup>12</sup> For a work that draws parallels between social reconstructionism and critical pedagogy see William B. Stanley's (1992) *Curriculum For Utopia: Social Reconstructionism and Critical Pedagogy in the Postmodern Era*.

<sup>13</sup> For a history of British Cultural Marxism, see Dennis Dworkin (1997), *Cultural Marxism in Postwar Britain: History, the New Left, and the Origins of Cultural Studies*.

<sup>14</sup> The reasoning for Lagemann's choices is unclear. A better choice for critical is either Michael Apple's (1979/2004) *Ideology and Curriculum* or Henry Giroux's (1983) *Theory and Resistance in Education: A Pedagogy for the Opposition*. A better choice for feminism is Carmen Luke and Jennifer Gore's (1992) edited *Feminism and Critical Pedagogy*. For postmodernism and feminism a good choice is Patti Lather's (1991) *Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy with/in The Postmodern*.

<sup>15</sup> Until the emergence of critical race theory in the field of education in the mid-1990s there was little work in the field explicitly aligned with the critical tradition that fully engaged



race, racism, and white supremacy. Much of the conceptual work in the field in the 1970s and 1980s that focused on race was in the tradition of multicultural education, such as the work of James Banks (2006). For a history of the emergence of critical race theory in the field see William F. Tate (1997) "Critical Race Theory and Education: History, Theory, and Implications." For a discussion of the urgent need for critical work to engage race see Zeus Leonardo's (2005) edited *Critical Pedagogy and Race*. Perhaps the most commonly read piece in the critical tradition in the field of education that engages race is bell hooks' (1994) *Teaching to Transgress*, which also engages class and gender.

<sup>16</sup> For a critical work in the socialist feminist tradition (class and gender) that is critical of postmodernism see Jean Anyon's essay (1994) "The Retreat of Marxism and Socialist Feminism: Postmodern and Poststructuralist Theories in Education" in *Curriculum Inquiry*. Also see Kathleen Weiler's (1988) *Women Teaching For Change: Gender, Class & Power*.

<sup>17</sup> Notably, like much work in the liberal tradition, Lagemann fails to engage a sustained conversation about race in her historical discussion of educational theory, practice, and policy. As Charles Mills (1997) forcefully argues in *The Racial Contract*, the liberal political tradition emerged out of an explicit dialogue, and often alignment (e.g. John Stuart Mill), with European colonialism and imperialism. One implication of this positioning, according to Mills, is that *all* progressive conversations about inclusion and exclusion into the liberal nation-state must directly engage the history of white supremacy. For illuminating discussions about the ways in which racial discourse has framed inclusion/exclusion policy debates in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century United States see George Lipsitz's (1999/2006) *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit From Identity Politics*, Mae M. Ngai's (2005) *Impossible Subjects: Illegal Aliens and The Making of Modern America*, and Nikhil Pal Singh's (2004) *Black Is A Country: Race and the Unfinished Struggle for Democracy*. Scholarship on specific examples of inclusion/exclusion debates in the history of schooling in the United States include Ruben Donato's (1997) *The Other Struggle For Equal Schools: Mexican Americans During the Civil Rights Era* and Daniel Perlstein's (2004) *Justice, Justice: School Politics and the Eclipse of Liberalism*.

<sup>18</sup> For a look at the turn to postmodernism within the American academy see Hoeveler's (1996) *The Postmodernist Turn*. For a historical look at postmodernism and its companion postmodernity see David Harvey's (1991) *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

<sup>19</sup> Laclau and Mouffe's (1985) *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics* is perhaps the key text in political theory that pointed to a post-Marxist political position. Giroux's work from the mid 1980s to the present has been very indebted to their work.

<sup>20</sup> For a history of critical ethnography in educational research see Gary L. Anderson's (1989) "Critical Ethnography in Education: Origins, Current Status, and New Directions" in *Review of Educational Research*.

<sup>21</sup> Jean Anyon's (2005) *Radical Possibilities* wonderfully articulates how structural injustice (employment opportunities, housing, taxes, etc.) shapes school failure. This is exactly the type of argument about the location of schools within the social order that Lagemann refuses to engage. It is also the type of scholarship that the field of engage needs to engage.

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