



Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa by E. B. Fiske; H. F. Ladd
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resolved by teachers' adding their own texts or elaborating on the discussion in class. Furthermore, while this is not a textbook—indeed the texts presented need to be supplemented—maps situating the various textual references would have been useful for beginning students. Moreover, a book of this length does raise problems of cost and class time. Rather than producing such an extensive collection in one volume, the editor and publisher might well have adopted a “modular” approach, producing four shorter and less expensive editions, one focusing on each of the four general themes. That would have allowed teachers to incorporate the essays into larger class material without such a huge investment of class time and student book fees.

Nonetheless, this volume provides a very welcome resource for teachers as well as an interesting and valuable approach for students. *Taking Sides* is an extremely effective way to lead students to discuss not only “facts” and “positions” but also forms of argument and effective presentation.

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E. B. Fiske and H. F. Ladd. *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004. Bibliography. Index. Cloth. \$32.95.

This text comes at a time when those with a stake in the answers are asking questions about the transformation of education a decade after the end of apartheid. Quite rightly, the title underscores the key point that equity goals are not so easy to attain, especially in the “new” South Africa where significant change is a historical imperative. The authors are a husband-and-wife team based in the United States: Fiske is an educational journalist and Ladd a policy studies specialist. They spent the first six months of 2002 in South Africa, and to judge by the list of references, they consulted with a wide range of political figures, educationists, and local resources on education. Although they acknowledge that they cannot claim the same insights as those who specialize in educational reform and who have had direct experience of the education system in South Africa, their account of the struggle for equity offers the independent viewpoint and objectivity of informed outsiders, and it is evident that they have the skills to do justice to the complex story.

Elusive Equity begins with two background chapters describing the context and analytical framework and providing a brief history of the racial policies and practices of apartheid South Africa. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the role of education in first maintaining and then dismantling apartheid, along with the political aspirations that led to changes. Chapters 5 through 9 constitute the core of the book. They measure recent reform efforts in

terms of progress toward equity goals, looking at issues of governance, finance, public and private resource allocations, and curriculum. Chapter 10 offers an analysis of reform in higher education and is followed by a conclusion summarizing the authors' findings.

Equity is a key educational goal in South Africa. The text defines this goal in terms of what the authors call "standards of racial equity": equal treatment, equal educational opportunity, and educational adequacy. The concept of equity may of course be defined in other terms and in other languages. For example, the Sotho equivalent for the word *equity* is *tekatekano*, meaning "almost equalized." The notion of fluidity is embedded in *tekatekano*, recognizing that the state of perfect equality can be wished for but in practice will always be a hit-or-miss proposition—hence the meaning of "almost" equal (M. G. Mahlomaholo, personal communication, 2005). The Afrikaans word *gelykheid*, on the other hand, denotes equivalence in size, form, or level. The interpretations of the concept of equity offered by Fiske and Ladd do not reflect these nuances, and yet notions such as "fluidity" (for example, in equity processes) and "sameness" (for example in resource allocation) are indicative of the systemic complexity of equity as a policy goal.

As the authors acknowledge, the text is not intended for academics. This does not mean that it will not be useful for policy research, especially because it offers well-substantiated historical perspectives and a meaningful analysis of the context of equity issues in education. Perhaps Fiske and Ladd's most important contribution is their discussion of issues of equal treatment, equal educational opportunity, and educational adequacy with reference to governance, finance, resources, and the school curriculum. These chapters not only draw on various databases, they also offer a meaningful integration of trends and patterns, such as how fiscal limitations affect goals of equity in the implementation of the new school curriculum. The work could usefully be read in conjunction with such classic texts as those by Fischer (*Reframing Public Policy* [Oxford University Press, 2003]), Sabatier (*Theories of the Policy Process* [Westview Press, 1999]), Bardach (*The Eight-Step Path of Policy Analysis* [Berkeley Academic Press, 1996]), and others on policy theory, processes, and evaluation.

A weakness of the book, however, is the frequent reliance on single units of analysis and indicator-based evaluation, a typical failing of policy analyses of this kind. For the sake of measurement and numbers, one indicator is used to represent a complex set of variables, and descriptive statistics are used to display findings. For example, enrollment patterns are used as the sole indicator of equity without reference to conditional or process variables such as teaching resources or curriculum delivery. This approach understates the complexity of phenomena and does not allow for sophisticated analyses by means of multiple regression or mixed method designs. The text also relies heavily on data obtained from policymakers, education officials, university researchers, and independent consultants; with only a

few exceptions, the voices of teachers and educators from rural areas are absent. This is probably indicative of how marginalized these voices still are in the policy-driven world of education change in South Africa.

Nevertheless, the authors succeed quite convincingly in problematizing issues of equity in education. Equity is indeed *e sa tshwareheng ha bobebe*, or *thellanyane/ ho phonyoha*—that which cannot be caught, or that which is slippery (Mahlomaholo, 2005); it is also something that is *ontwykend*—that stays away, not giving answers. While equity in education is crucial in South Africa, it remains a “slippery” goal, a goal that needs to stay on education transformation reform agendas for a long time to come. To this end, Fiske and Ladd have made a valuable contribution.

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