

[Home](#) | [Job Search](#) | [Career Strategies](#) | [Business](#) | [Entrepreneur](#) | [Web](#) | [Money](#) | [Education](#) | [Network](#) | [International](#)

Advancing Women in Leadership Online Journal
Volume 23, Spring 2007

[AWL Journal Home](#)

[Current Volume](#)

[Archives](#)

[Call for
Manuscripts/Guidelines](#)

[[Journal Index](#)]

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Philosophy of Social Justice in Education
Brigid Beaubien and Karen L. Tonso

Elizabeth Cady Stanton's Philosophy of Social Justice in Education

Historical discussions of social justice in education and its impact on society tend to focus on *Brown v. The Board of Education* (1954), as an antidote to *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), which enshrined the infamous "separate but equal" dictum for racially segregated schools. One person rarely considered in the discussion, yet critical because of her enormous public influence in her day, is Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Most know Cady Stanton as a founder of the Women's Movement in America, and as an advocate for women. However, Cady Stanton also provided a well-documented, systematically developed theory on social justice in education. This surprised us, since her work received enormous scrutiny when feminists of the 1960s and 1970s worked to unearth forgotten women. Believing that advancing women's place in educational thought requires understanding the contributions of women to educational thought, we set out to understand Cady Stanton's philosophy of social justice in education.

This article begins with a brief introduction to Elizabeth Cady Stanton (Griffith, 1984; Ward & Burns, 1999) and examines her philosophy of social justice in education. Then, the article turns to contemporary implications of her writings, especially the philosophical ideals of equal educational opportunity and social justice to: 1) examine how her views of equal educational opportunity fit in relation to contemporary thought regarding social justice, and 2) investigate the forms of oppression that interested her and guided her work relative to educational opportunity for women. In the final section, a case is made to add Cady Stanton to the growing list of women who historically contributed to philosophy of education.

A two-step research process proved an especially effective approach to examining Cady Stanton's ideas, as represented in her published works (Holland & Gordon, 1991). In the first step, patterned on historical research, each piece of her *published* writing from 1855-1902 was screened for its relevance to research interests in early childhood education and social justice in education, the topic of this paper. From a comprehensive table indicating central conceptual issues for each area of interest, the most relevant writings were analyzed using an ethnomethodology patterned after Spradley (1980). A comprehensive list of those items analyzed in a fine-grained fashion is included in Beaubien, 2003. Here, semantic domain analysis--a way of following patterns of sameness in qualitative data; taxonomic analysis--a way of organizing within and between domains; and componential analysis--a way of developing patterns of contrast across domains--

-underpinned the work. Preliminary taxonomies, outlines or webs of meaning drawn from Cady Stanton's writings, preserved her way of thinking about issues and provided a starting point for a constant-comparison approach (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) through which reading less relevant writings (which had not been analyzed) refined findings. Using this approach preserved ideas in Cady Stanton's own voice, which made it possible to liberally quote from her writings. Thus, trustworthiness was built into the process via referential adequacy, holding some data to the side and using it to check findings derived from other data, and by triangulating across different pieces of data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Elizabeth Cady Stanton was the often-unknown political partner of Susan B. Anthony, famous women suffragette. Born in 1815 and raised in a family that endowed her with unprecedented access to informal and formal education, she possessed both the desire to seek knowledge and abundant practice in forming and debating her own ideas and thoughts. Cady Stanton held a unique position for men and women in that time, learning--among other things--logic, physiology, and the law. Throughout her childhood Cady Stanton was encouraged to think for herself, to form her own opinions, and to articulate them clearly. She would often debate legal professionals who worked with her father, and as a teenager attended Emma Willard's Troy Seminary . As a young adult, Cady Stanton became a fledgling activist in several causes. Through these activities she met her husband, Henry Stanton, himself an abolitionist. They spent the early years of their marriage in Boston socializing with some of the most influential thinkers of the day. Being an advocate for diverse causes helped Cady Stanton find her calling in 1848 when she and Lucretia Mott conceived of the idea for the Women's Rights Convention. Cady Stanton drafted the *Declaration of Women's Rights* , modeling it after the *Declaration of Independence* .

Cady Stanton 's prolific reading and time spent amongst notable thinkers provided her with theoretical underpinnings that were unfamiliar to most of the populace. Energized by the Women's Rights Convention, she began a career as an author and public speaker, a career so prolific in fact that her "views were sought on every sort of topic, and she rarely disappointed... In a single week in 1901, Stanton had seven articles in seven different newspapers, as well as two longer pieces in monthly magazines" (Ward & Burns, 1999, p. 206-207). Her ideas on many issues of the day were widely published and widely read, making her not only a prolific thinker of her day, but also giving the public unprecedented access to ideas. Her theories on social justice in education, often a central theme, developed throughout the 50 plus years of her career, culminating in the last twelve years of her life as she became increasingly philosophical. Roesch Wagnor, in the 1999 PBS documentary, *Not For Ourselves Alone* , summarized this period of Cady Stanton's life best when she stated:

I think that the most interesting Stanton is the Stanton of the last decade. This is the woman I love the most. This is the contemplative woman who has a world of, a life of experiences that she brings to each thought, who has a pen so sharp that it is laser sharp. (Ward & Burns 1999).

This laser sharp pen was often focused on obtaining social justice through education.

Cady Stanton 's thinking about women, social justice, and education fell into three periods: early career from 1850 to 1869; middle career from 1869 to about 1890; and the final years from 1890 to her death in 1902. Each is covered in turn below.

Early Career

Cady Stanton 's views on education and social justice, in the early years, centered around two main concepts, democracy and equalization. In particular, Cady Stanton believed that when "all vote all must be educated" and that "our public school system is the result of this principle in our government" (*Thompson*

on *Suffrage* , 1869) . She stated that when men were responsible for a ballot, they would rise to the occasion and educate themselves for this privilege (*Thompson on Suffrage* , 1869). This process would become a step in the creation of productive citizens and would continue because as "the masses become educated they will govern; when they begin to govern, they will demand laws for their benefit" (*Thompson on Suffrage* , 1869). Holding a ballot required being educated; education would then promote civic action and continue the cycle. Thus, for Cady Stanton, education was part and parcel of her early suffrage work.

Her beliefs also centered on education as an equalizing force within society between different socioeconomic classes of people and then between the sexes. Education was a right, while providing the poor with an education was a Christian thing to do because the "rich should help the poor" (*Free Schools* , 1850). In fact, she firmly believed that the "bulwarks of aristocracy will, one by one, be swept away with education" (*Thompson on Suffrage* , 1869). She was frustrated that "labor holds the ballot," but did not know how to use it, and that "educated women knew how to use the ballot yet couldn't have it" (*Thompson on Suffrage* , 1869). She felt that "what elevates and dignifies men will educate and dignify women also" (*Thompson on Suffrage* , 1869).

Cady Stanton , as time progressed, increasingly believed that if women became better educated many of these injustices would be rectified, writing: "Evils suffered by women would be extensively remedied by establishing institutions for training" (*Women's Education* , 1869). In fact, as women became educated, society would have to make substantial changes to accommodate their increasing demands. Cady Stanton hoped an increased awareness of social justice would bring substantial shifts within organized religion and the oppression she viewed it as promoting.

Cady Stanton frequently questioned the blind faith many women had in religion when it kept them in such a subordinate role. While "Protestant clergy, preach on the honor and duties of the family state" (*Women's Education* , 1869), she demanded that women's more-enlightened, that is educated, sense of themselves within marriage replace preaching of oppression of women in subservient roles to men. She further felt that once women could "translate the Bible for themselves we shall have a new evangel of womanhood, wifeness, and motherhood" creating tremendous social change (*Man Marriage* , 1869).

Cady Stanton 's early ideas regarding education were not as clearly focused on social justice as they would become. However, one can clearly begin to see education as her way to promote civic responsibility. Though she believed that educated citizens would make wise civic choices, which would create an improved society, and that improved society would create more educated citizens, education, in fact, became a clear class division for Cady Stanton. Thus, those who held little or no education were, in her estimation, substantially below anyone with an education regardless of gender, social class, or race.

But, Cady Stanton worried that too many women lacked interest in anything intellectual. She asserted throughout this first period that what women needed was either their own training institutions or that training institutions already in existence open to women. Once inside these training institutions, women would need to be trained in taking care of themselves and receive skills for practical employment. Cady Stanton hoped also that by receiving an education, women would begin to understand that they were oppressed. Although Cady Stanton did not clearly articulate what she thought the results of this education might be, her ideas continued to grow.

By 1869, at age 54, Cady Stanton began traveling the country giving lectures on not only women's rights, but also a variety of other topics as well. These trips, ten in total, lasted through the next decade and kept her traveling eight months out of every year, thus beginning the second stage of her career.

Middle Career

Cady Stanton's speeches and writings throughout the middle of her career began to articulate more clearly her reasons for education, including reforming society and creating equalization. Cady Stanton was frustrated that "man holds the key to knowledge and power yet never seems in unison with the world [where] he lives" because she thought that "the only hope for radical reform in social life lies in the education of children" (*Begin at the Beginning*, 1889). She asserted that if society could only focus on children obtaining knowledge, then this would lead to a "marked change in the human family" with the "words and deeds of successive generations" building up "a glorified humanity" (*Begin at the Beginning*, 1889).

Cady Stanton saw several reasons that equal educational opportunity was important for girls. She noted how "dashing, noisy, happy, healthy girls grow calm and pale and sad when they awakened to the fact that they belong to a subject, degraded, ostracized class" (*Our Girls*, 1872). Cady Stanton also viewed the differences in their futures as reasons for boys and girls to have access to equal education, stating, "Boys and girls are one today in school, at play, at home never dreaming that one sex was foreordained to clutch the stars, the other but to kiss the dust" (*Our Girls*, 1872). She believed instead that "every girl should be something in and of herself, have an individual aim and purpose in life" (*Our Girls*, 1872), suspecting that "with the scientific education of our youth of both sexes and a strict observance of the great immutable laws of life, another generation might show a marked change in the human family" (*Our Girls*, 1872).

Cady Stanton outlined the steps needed by both men and women to create these marked changes, telling men, "Men of the Republic strike off these chains!" and demanding that "fathers, husbands and brothers inaugurate some grand reform" (*Our Girls*, 1872). She hoped that young men would become educated "to demand something better than they have yet subsidized" and those young women would be educated to "call more for principle than pleasing" (*Our Girls*, 1872). She asserted that once women were baptized "into the spirit of freedom and equality" and when men began to "demand healthy, happy, vigorous, self-reliant women" then "they will make their appearance" (*Our Girls*, 1872).

It is in this period that Cady Stanton began to define equal educational opportunity for herself. She began by asserting that children are born equal, but they move through childhood in such a way that boys begin to assume roles of power and girls become increasingly oppressed, becoming "pale" and "depressed" as a result of these socially constructed inequalities. Cady Stanton articulated her belief that all girls had a right to be their own person, and that if society would educate children in equality, the changes for society would be enormous. She began laying out a rudimentary argument supporting equal educational opportunity. First she felt that men must allow women to take steps toward equal opportunity. Second, she saw women as needing to develop a better sense of self, her thinking being that if women had more respect for themselves they would set standards that men would have to rise to meet. Interestingly, Cady Stanton viewed men as needing to allow these steps to equal educational opportunity, while women had no direct course of action except to better themselves and wait for approval. She seemingly failed to appreciate the contradiction between a demand for equality and seeking permission to obtain it, which clearly signaled that men held the power in gender relations.

Cady Stanton hoped that these perceived inferiorities of women could be rectified by co-education. She disagreed with popular opinion that "the sexes differ; therefore the systems of education should differ," and was critical of educational funding disparities, calling attention to the imbalance of monies spent on education for women and men: "Estimate[s] in dollars and cents on the education of men and women is 15 million against 1.1 million dollars" (*Co-Education*, 1872). She stated that

inferiority here [in the entire U.S. social system: funding, schooling, roles in society] is the whole difficulty in a nutshell judged alone by the comparative advantages we see for the education of the sexes. Men are considered 'superior' hence their education has seemed to all primal importance; even women have ignored their own sex. (*Co-Education*, 1872)

Cady Stanton observed that in regard to co-education, men were "bound by custom and prejudice who have never fairly considered the ethics of the subject nor the facts that exist around them" (*Co-Education*, 1872). She disagreed with society's assertion that women would "lower the standards of scholarship" and would "not have the physical health" to participate in the endeavor (*Co-Education*, 1872). Rather, she saw women as being able to "maintain good morals, manners, and health and also equally rank in scholarship," believing that "it is important for the girls knocking at the doors of these venerable institutions to know that they have a right inside" (*Co-Education*, 1872).

Cady Stanton was of the opinion that women were "educated in superstition and subjection" (*Women of Wealth*, 1875), so that they had "all the bravery educated out of them" (*Health of American Woman*, 1882). She also felt that it was unjust "to educate all women for teachers and seamstresses, cooks and chambermaids to make the supply in the home sphere greater than the demand, thus terminally to keep down wages and degrade all these branches of labor" (*Our Girls*, 1872).

Unlike in the first period, in which Cady Stanton accused women of having no interest in intellectual issues, she clearly saw in this middle period that women lacked self-respect. Within her middle years, Cady Stanton recognized for the first time the role of mother as educator. In fact, while she believed that women held the most important job in the world, that of mother, it was their lack of respect that aided in the continuation of their oppression. Cady Stanton grew concerned, in these middle years, that if women did not begin to respect themselves, they would be stuck in lower paid, lower status, service occupations that would simply continue the oppression she was fighting against.

Contrasts between the first two periods became evident. In the first period, Cady Stanton felt that training institutions were needed to increase the opportunity for women to attend schools. Now she believed that money was needed. She was baffled that women would give money for men's education, yet withhold funds for their own sex to receive a comparable education. In both of her first two periods, Cady Stanton envisioned women being trained in practical skills. However, in this second period, Cady Stanton also made new connections between education, self-respect, and freedom, believing that as women became educated, their self-respect would increase. Unlike in the previous period, Cady Stanton saw clearly that through this education women would become self-supporting and demand better conditions for themselves, which would lead to the end of their oppression.

Throughout this middle period, Cady Stanton was an enthusiastic supporter of education. Her ideas in this period led to an increasing focus on education in the final years as she began to see clearly that obtaining suffrage was not going to create equalization in the roles of men and women. Rather, to gain true political equality, children would have to be educated in not only becoming productive members of society, but educated in the beliefs of equality and social justice as well.

Final Period

Within the last 12 years of her career, Cady Stanton pointed with laser-like focus on issues of social justice in education, believing that education had a role to play in creating citizens, asserting that citizens should "learn their own organization and the laws that govern them" (*Race Question*, 1902). She felt that people "should glow with the principles of justice, liberty and equality" (*Bible in Schools*, 1897). Cady Stanton also wanted to "educate people that a moral revolution is possible" (*Worship of God*, 1901). She hoped to "educate the rising generation into these broader principles of government, religion, and social life and then ignorance poverty and vice will disappear" (*Worship of God*, 1901).

Similar to past periods in her career, Cady Stanton believed that organized religion had a large responsibility to educate its population on issues of social justice and to stop the oppression churches practiced against women, especially subservience to men's will and exclusion from holding central roles in religious

institutions. However, in this period Cady Stanton thought that the wealthy had a role to play in education as well. She wanted the upper class to be educated in the "community idea of social life . . . teach[ing] them they have no right to enjoy luxuries when many do not have necessities" (*Bible in Schools* , 1897). She hoped they would come to understand that they held an obligation to insure that those less fortunate received an education (i.e. her ideal Sunday, when opportunities for learning would be made available to those who worked on other days of the week). Cady Stanton felt also that wealthy men needed to "plant schools, colleges, and libraries" (*Education Will Do It* , 1901; *Race Question* , 1902).

She also believed that "common sense must be used in educating the impecunious classes in the South, whether black or white" and that "society doesn't admit ignorant labors regardless of color" (*Education Will Do It* , 1901). In this sense, society meant the upper, educated classes or the class of which she herself was a member--a Euro-centered, class-based society. But, it is important to again note that Cady Stanton's connecting the vote with having an education underpinned her being a vigorous advocate for the education of all. She was opposed to ignorance, not intolerant of racial communities. The authors wish this point had been made earlier by other authors.

As is the case in several of the concepts that became central to Cady Stanton's ideas, in this last decade of her life she clearly articulated, for the first time, steps to educate the citizens of the United States . She laid out a plan for education, how to create citizens, and how to encourage the wealthy of the nation to become more involved. She began to question for the first time how education funds were spent, determining that if more money was spent in schools rather than jails, good from evil would be taught and the morals of the laboring class would be elevated. Probably the most forward thinking of her ideas concerned social justice. She began to clearly lay out her ideas regarding this, even going as far as utilizing the phrase that continues to underpin social justice in education today: equal educational opportunity.

As discussed below in its own section, Cady Stanton's ideas on equal educational opportunity expanded substantially in the final period of her life and became closely connected to her ideas on social justice. Also, Cady Stanton's ideas on women's education came a long way from her first period. In the final phase of her career, she discussed with pride the proven track record of women's education, something she could not have done in the previous two periods. However, for the first time she named obstacles to women's obtaining an education: being excluded from it and having social restrictions placed on them that kept them from utilizing what education they could acquire.

Her ideas about the curriculum that women should have in schools also changed. She no longer saw the curriculum being based on getting practical skills, learning to take care of themselves, and gaining self-respect. During this final period, Cady Stanton's ideas on women's education were more revolutionary. She saw education as being based in not only building self-respect, but also in learning to demand justice, liberty, and equality. She viewed self-esteem as becoming a more critical self-reverence as well. Unlike the previous two periods, she viewed the results of women's education as revolutionary in three ways: (1) the respect with which women treated themselves and demanded that others treat them with as well, (2) nothing short of complete emancipation of women, and (3) the education, self-respect, and freedom culminating in more power and influence within society itself. After attempting reform work, Cady Stanton seemed to realize that the only way to effect needed change was first educating both men and women to understand that they were critical in a just society and then, through being educated themselves, raising their children to believe that social justice was not only possible, it was expected.

This period of Cady Stanton's thoughts demonstrated beautifully the culmination of a lifetime of profound work, not only on behalf of women, but for society as a whole. As her ideas filled with self-reflection, hindsight, and forethought, she clearly and concisely outlined a theory of education that is still part of the educational landscape today. Cady Stanton saw the ballot she strived for and the social justice she struggled to obtain intimately braided to the education of the masses, with education being the only sure way to bring

about these changes she desired. Here, she gave a central place to equal educational opportunity.

Equal Educational Opportunity

Throughout these last years of Cady Stanton's life, she increasingly saw equal educational opportunity as a way to cure many of society's flaws. First, she laid out her ideas on equal educational opportunity, followed by reasons for equal educational opportunity, and concluded with the steps needed to achieve it. Her thoughts here are overwhelmingly about women, but on careful reading one gets a sense of her stance on issues of race, which challenge the widely accepted claim that Cady Stanton was thoroughly racist.

Gender Equality in Education

In her day, acceptance of gender inequality in schools was common, but Cady Stanton argued against a sense that gender inequality was genetically determined, saying, "Our theories of life are all wrong that these adverse conditions can and must be changed" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891). According to Cady Stanton, "the only way out of this political, social labyrinth is through the education of the masses" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891) and "to my mind the only hope for lasting progress of the race [and here she refers to the human race] and a radical reform in social life lie in the right [or healthy] birth, education and development of children" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891). Cady Stanton felt what was needed was similar to the approach taken by "Quakers, chartered by William Penn," who believed in "equal advantages for both boys and girls" (*Emma Willard*, 1893).

Cady Stanton outlined reasons supporting equal educational opportunity, including her belief that "long experience has proved that all races are capable of profiting by education" (*Race Question*, 1902), stating remarks also published in *Social Progress* (1891) that "lasting progress of the [human] race and a radical reform in social life lie in the right birth, education and development of [all] children" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891).

Cady Stanton, however, outlined substantial reasons for equal educational opportunity based on the differences of education between boys and girls: "Girls are denied equal educational opportunity. The natural chivalry of their brothers is never called forth. The lesson of inferiority is taught everywhere and we have the result of wide spread degradation of women" (*First Step*, 1901). Cady Stanton saw boys as having "the whole field of knowledge open to them while girls [were] allowed only to sew, read the catechism, write the alphabet, and practice good manners" (*Emma Willard*, 1893). Girls were also "taught in Dame schools" or with "inferior, cheaper teachers at inconvenient seasons and hours" (*Emma Willard*, 1893). All of this she could not understand because "fewer girls fall behind in their studies from ill health - girls [are] more vigorous in body and mind" (*Emma Willard*, 1893). Cady Stanton urged a different tack: "Let us try equality and independence; let every girl be educated to use her own hands and brains and to take care of herself" (*Emma Willard*, 1893).

Racial Equality in Education

Cady Stanton, however, rarely mentioned equal education for Negroes, which some have taken to mean that it was inconceivable to her. Yet, she stated, "progress of the [human] race is a reason to educate" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891), and "how shallow the argument, that each class must be educated for the special work it proposes to do" (*Solitude of Self*, 1892). Here, near the end of her life, there is every reason to believe that she sees "classes" of humans--whether sorted along socioeconomic, racial, ethnic, or gender lines--as a product of society, not of biological givens. And, she repeatedly called for the education of all. She seems to be saying that for U.S. society to live up to the vision encapsulated in the *Bill of Rights* requires "complete individual development for the general good" (*Solitude of Self*, 1892).

Thus, Cady Stanton's views on race may not be as simple as earlier thought. On one hand, she has been thought of as racist because of her outspoken rhetoric in opposition to Black men being allowed to vote before White women. A key issue left out of that equation, and one critical to Cady Stanton's ideas, is the part played by education. Cady Stanton had a problem with *uneducated* Black men voting before *educated* White women. Education was her bias, not necessarily race. This is clearly demonstrated in her article *Education Will Do It* (1901):

In regard to society, no one asks that ignorant laborers, of whatever color be admitted into the higher classes.

The hue and cry against Booker Washington dining with the President, came from those who either forgot or did not know that he is an educated, polished gentleman, laboring for the good of this race, a true philanthropist, in the best sense of the term.

The duty of the American people at this hour, to atone for the wrongs of centuries, is to give to the black race all the opportunities for development that we are extending our own.

In fact, similar to her views on women's education, she considered education to be the equalizing force between the races.

Steps for Approaching Equality in Education

Cady Stanton outlined six steps needed to reach equal educational opportunity, both for White girls and for Negroes, in the terminology of her day. The first step was the use of common sense, stating that it was needed "towards educat[ing] Negroes and impecunious class in the South, whether white or black" (*Education Will Do It*, 1901). For instance, providing them with an education that would assist them in becoming better citizens. Cady Stanton believed that education would produce a cyclical effect as people became better educated they would demand laws benefiting themselves. The more laws in place benefiting them the better educated the Negroes and impecunious class would become. The second step was to educate the upper class into "the belief that our present society is based on false principles . . . that they have no right to live in luxury while others starve [, and] that they have no right to pleasure or comfort at the cost of welfare of another" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891). The upper class must be educated "to believe our present conditions and environments can and will be changed" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891). The third step toward equal educational opportunity was to educate the poor, primarily "that they have inalienable rights on this earth the right to life, liberty and happiness" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891), but also to "see that the stratum of Society see the Masses are well clothed, fed, sheltered, educated and enfranchised" (*Worship of God*, 1901). The fourth step was to build a government that was "based on broad principles of equal rights to all" (*Lasting Progress*, 1891). The fifth step saw religion as "teach(ing) the brotherhood of the race, the essential oneness of humanity" (*Social Progress*, 1901). Finally, Cady Stanton saw her schools on Sunday as a kind of social justice, believing that "open(ing) railway systems and museums for free on Sunday - this is not charity simply an act of justice" (*Ideal Sunday*, 1901).

This Radical work cannot be done with charity but by teaching sound domestic principles to our educated classes. Showing that by law, custom and false theories of natural rights they are responsible for the poverty, ignorance and vice of the masses. (*Worship of God*, 1901)

Thus, by making public social institutions unavailable to those of limited means, Cady Stanton found a way to provide for the edification of adults.

Implications of Cady Stanton's Thoughts

Cady Stanton defined herself "as a leader of thought," knowing that her strength was in her ideas, thoughts,

and philosophy. She viewed the world as unjust in significant ways, and she looked for solutions to aid these problems. Cady Stanton's views on education demonstrate tremendous forethought and clearly advance the contemporary conversation regarding social justice in education. In fact, consider the contemporary political philosophy writings of Amy Gutmann and Kenneth Howe.

Late 20th Century Thoughts on Equal Educational Opportunity

Gutmann (1987) began the contemporary discussion about schooling in a democracy. According to Gutmann, "Education, in a great measure, forms the moral character of citizens" (p. 49). Ideally, "adult members are, and continue to be, equipped by their education and authorized by political structures to share ruling" (xi). This she called democratic character, which required knowing enough to deliberate about issues of importance. Such individuals are

.committed, at least partly through the inculcation of habit, to living up to the routine demands of democratic life, at the same time as they are committed to questioning those demands whenever they appear to threaten the foundational ideals of democratic sovereignty, such as respect for persons. (p. 52)

Gutmann's (1987) democratic theory of education suggests how

.to consider ways of resolving those problems that are compatible with a commitment to democratic values. A democratic theory of education provides principles that, in the face of our social disagreements, help us judge (a) who should have authority to make decisions about education, and (b) what the moral boundaries of that authority are. (p. 11)

Furthermore, her philosophy of education goes on to develop a process through which such an ideal purpose might be attained. The principle of nondiscrimination

.prevents states and other groups in society from denying anyone an educational good on grounds irrelevant to the legitimate social purpose of that good. In its application to primary schooling, whose social purpose is to develop democratic character in all citizens, the principle of nondiscrimination becomes a principle of nonexclusion: no educable child may be excluded from an education adequate to participating in the processes that structure choice among good lives. (p. 127)

She will guarantee this with a process requiring first the democratic authorization principle, which "grant[s] authority to democratic institutions to determine the priority of education relative to other social goods" (p. 136). Second, she proposes a democratic threshold principle that specifies "inequalities in the distribution of educational goods can be justified if, but only if, they do not deprive any child of the ability to participate effectively in the democratic process" (p. 136). This is a process model that provides a way to consciously create an education worth having, not the failing schools, staggering dropout rates, and standardized test scores one sees today. Howe (1997) summarized Gutmann's threshold, stating,

Gutmann (1987) establishes a limit on the requirement of equalization. In her case, once the threshold is met, the "democratic authorization principle" permits, but does not require, further efforts at equalization. That is, if a community achieves the threshold for all its children and decides this is sufficient, then it has discharged its responsibility; if a community achieves the threshold for all its children and decides it wants to do more, then it is free to do so. (p. 66)

But to ensure that such a system operates fairly, a principle of justice is needed. Since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), equal education opportunity has been the central ideal for judging whether schooling meets social justice criteria. As Howe (1997) summarized it, equal educational opportunity has been interpreted in three key ways: formal, compensatory, and participatory. Formal, or equal access, interpretations place no formal barriers to participation regardless of race or gender. Formalists are

indifferent to issues that matter in education, or as Howe says of the formal interpretation "It is far too often insensitive to the profound influence that social factors can have on educational opportunities, even when formal barriers are absent and resources such as funding are equalized" (p. 28).

Compensatory interpretations understand the importance of interactions between schools and individuals, realizing that these interactions have direct impacts on educational opportunity. But, compensating for mismatches between the characteristics of individuals and that of the school setting, in and of itself, is not enough to guarantee social justice, because this approach fails to take into account the opportunity that is being presented to those who fail to meet societal norms. As Howe (1997) noted, "fail(ing) to afford educational opportunities of equal worth to individuals who have had no part in shaping the educational practices and curricular content that are deemed educationally worthwhile" is a hollow kind of opportunity (p. 29). These concerns led to the participatory interpretation, of which Gutmann's democratic theory is the central example.

The participatory interpretation states that mere compensation for disadvantages must be combined with equal respect for different views on what worthwhile needs, interests, and capabilities are, particularly where self-identity and self-respect are at stake. Merely compensating for disadvantages is not sufficient. It must be combined with equal respect for different views; those who are disadvantaged need a voice in the process, and they need to consider the process of inherent value to themselves. Young (1990) outlines this:

Groups with different circumstances or forms of life should be able to participate together in public institutions without shedding their distinct identities or suffering disadvantage because of them. The goal is not to give special compensation to the deviant until they achieve normality, but rather to denormalize the way institutions formulate their rules by revealing the plural circumstances and needs that exist, or ought to exist, within them (p. 134).

Howe agreed in principle with Gutmann's model of distributed justice wherein an authorization principle guided democratic deliberation and a threshold principle placed limits on what must be taught. But, Howe worried that deliberations could occur in which the voices of some were heard, but not listened to. As such, he found reason for concern about oppressive practices in the application of the authorization principle. He suggested that a nonoppression standard was required and used Iris Marion Young's (1990) forms of oppression as a way to consider participation .

Young's (1990) theory of social justice forms a framework to clarify the "five faces of oppression. Oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (p. 41), and she noted five forms: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

Historically and in contemporary society, many women experience some of these forms of oppression daily. Women's bodies are exploited through pornography, by lack of control over their reproductive life, and in their struggle to earn equal pay for equal work. Women's voices are often marginalized in the press, academia, and often their own homes. Throughout the world many women hold little power in their governments, corporations, schools, and homes. When the sort of success offered to women means they must become more like men, a form of cultural imperialism occurs. Likewise, violence (domestic abuse, rape, and intimidation) continues to plague women. Thus, women's oppression is multi-layered and also includes issues of social class and race that compound issues of gender. Thus, with Young's guidance, Howe proposed that the participatory interpretation of equal educational opportunity require a nonoppression standard, a way to guarantee that deliberation does not impair justice.

These philosophical ideas suggest two approaches in thinking about Elizabeth Cady Stanton's work. Using

contemporary frameworks, what interpretation of equal educational opportunity did Cady Stanton use? How did oppression play a role in Cady Stanton's philosophy of social justice in education?

Evaluating Cady Stanton 's Equal Educational Opportunity

Cady Stanton 's views appear to fall along both the formal and the compensatory guidelines, and though less refined than current-day scholars, there is a participatory hint in her ideas as well. Cady Stanton clearly wanted no formal barriers to participation in education regardless of gender or race; as she put it, "the higher branches of education should be freely open to them, black or white" (*Lasting Progress* , 1891).

Cady Stanton 's ideas moved beyond simply removing barriers, however. She plainly saw that society constructed the role of woman, creating an inequality. Her beliefs regarding the lower classes also demonstrated that she saw the wealthy constructing the realities, producing inequalities for the poor. Because she saw these constructs, her views could also be defined as falling along the compensatory interpretation of equal educational opportunity. Cady Stanton suggested ways to compensate for women's inferior schools and exclusion from education through an academic curriculum and better access to schools that took them seriously as scholars. She also laid out a plan to compensate the lower classes through her concept of Ideal Sunday. While Cady Stanton was responsive to social factors that lessen educational opportunity, she did not respect competing views on what was worthwhile. This created a form of oppression between classes that allowed the poor to have no voice in their own education, demonstrating one of the major contradictions within Cady Stanton's beliefs. While she clearly saw the oppression that women coped with, she also unknowingly perpetuated class and race oppression.

As Young (1990) would opine a century later, "the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer comes not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society" (p. 41).

Furthermore, Cady Stanton's ideal education also seems to imply a participatory interpretation. This is true when she anticipates that the education of women, for instance, will change the way society works; the implication being that women will be more a part of society's decision-making processes and contribute to having their interests heard after becoming educated. This she also sees for those from marginalized racial community. Cady Stanton implied that once people became educated they would "know their rights and duties, their true place in civilization" (*Worship of God* , 1901), and "demand corresponding improvements in [his/her] environment" (*Worship of God* , 1901), leading to "uplifting humanity" to an "even platform" (*Social Progress* , 1901).

But, in her day, women's circumstances were far from just. Cady Stanton frequently discussed the exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness of women. These forms of oppression prompted her to hold the first Women's Rights Convention in 1848. From the time Cady Stanton was a child, she was frustrated that women held no rights to their property or offspring. Cady Stanton perceived that both women's lack of protection under the law and their lack of education led to exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness. She struggled against these oppressions from the time she was very young until the day she died.

Also, Cady Stanton touched on violence in two ways: first, the violence women suffered at the hands of man, and second, the violence to which the poor were subjected. Cady Stanton viewed both as oppressive and asserted that those who experienced such violence felt demoralized.

Cady Stanton likewise wrestled against the oppressive realities of cultural imperialism while ironically reproducing it at times. She asserted that the wealthy had an obligation to revise their present civilization because it was based on false principles. She also believed that they had no right to live in luxury while

others starved. On the other hand, Cady Stanton was smugly confident that what the immigrants, Blacks, and poor needed was an education that provided them with knowledge about their own governance. Ironically, this would be a society and laws that were constructed on a European, Caucasian, male ideals that others had no say in creating. Therefore, Cady Stanton's views on oppression were contradictory. Yet, she remained naively confident that regardless of the form of oppression, education could remedy the situation, stating repeatedly that "lasting progress" and a "radical reform of social life" came via children's "true" education (*Lasting Progress* 1891; *Social Progress* , 1891). Thus, in the final analysis, though her ideas are not as refined as modern scholars, and she certainly did not anticipate the difficulties of seeing her "radical" agenda, as she called it, through, her sense of the importance of education to producing a democratic state cannot be overstated. Unfortunately, her vision of equal educational opportunity did not come to the notice of many, likely because she published in popular, and not scholarly, presses, and because she was a woman. However, her place among women philosophers appears warranted .

Cady Stanton 's Place in Educational Philosophy

Titone and Maloney (1999) defined women as educational philosophers if they have thought "deeply and systematically about education" (p. 1). They advanced this definition by describing women they profiled as educational philosophers living

.in a world that she experienced as wrongheaded in very significant ways, and she looked to find explanations for why things were wrong and what could be done to make them right. Each developed her own analysis and solution to the problems based on her experience, background, and the time and place in which she lived. Each sought a deeper sense of being human in order to liberate herself and others from oppressive social restrictions. Because of these facts, each has the potential to contribute to our deep understanding of these same challenges as we face them today. (p. iii)

Cady Stanton fits easily into these definitions. The contributions she made to the contemporary ideas regarding social justice and education included many ideas that her male contemporaries were discussing and that have placed *them* in historical texts in American education. Like Dewey, she discussed ideas similar to today's constructivist theories. Stating that the "laws of nature [were] more imperative than any written or verbal command" and that children so full of "fun and frolic" should be better understood by the teacher (*Free Schools* , 1855), she believed that "the instincts of children are quite as often right as the perverted reason of parents and teachers" (*Education* , 1855). Similar to Horace Mann, she argued for the need for women's education both for the "republic of motherhood" and development of women in their own right. She also discussed how education could be used as both an equalizing force between classes and as a way of building one national identity.

Cady Stanton believed that education was critical to achieving social justice within society. Many of Cady Stanton's ideas on education could easily be contemporary thought. Her well thought out and systematic ideas led to a clearly defined philosophy of education that was widely published and read, making clear that women philosophers of education contributed before the 19th Century.

Cady Stanton considered education a form of social justice; a way of fighting gender, social class, and race inequalities. This is demonstrated in her ideas that the wealthy have no right to so much when others have so little and her encouragement of the lower classes to understand they too have rights. Cady Stanton recognized that social justice would come only if first parents were educated into a life of respect for others consonant with democratic principles, and then second they taught their children the same beliefs. She hoped to "educate the rising generation into these broader principles of government, religion, and social life and then ignorance, poverty and vice will disappear" (*Worship of God* , 1901). As she reiterated in both *Social Progress* (1891) and *Lasting Progress* (1891), she could not untangle social reform from education, quite frankly seeing it as the "only hope for lasting progress."

References

- Beaubien, B. (2003). *The only hope for lasting progress and radical reform lies in the true education of children: Elizabeth Cady Stanton 's philosophy of education* . Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Wayne State University , Detroit .
- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory* . Chicago : Aldine.
- Griffith, E. (1984). *In her own right* . New York : Oxford University Press.
- Gutmann, A. (1987). *Democratic education* . Princeton , NJ : Princeton University Press.
- Holland , P. G., Gordon, A. D. (Ed.). (1991). *Papers of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony* . Wilmington , DE : Scholarly Resources Inc.
- Howe, K. (1997). *Understanding equal educational opportunity: Social justice, democracy, and schooling* . New York : Teachers College Press.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Beverly Hills , CA : Sage Publications, Inc.
- Spradley, J. P. (1980). *Participant observation* . Orlando , FL : Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Titone, C., & Maloney, K. E. (1999). *Women's philosophies of education: Thinking through our mothers*. Upper Saddle River , NJ : Merrill.
- Ward, G., & Burns, K. (1999). *Not for ourselves alone: The story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony*. Washington , DC : Florentine Films and WETA.
- Young, I. M. (1990). *Justice and the politics of difference* . Princeton , NJ : Princeton University Press.

Quotes from Cady Stanton's writings indicate the title of the piece and the year in which it was written, following the naming convention of Holland and Gordan who archived Cady Stanton's writings (1991).

Author's note:

Bio: Brigid Beaubien is an Assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at Eastern Michigan University , Ypsilanti , MI . She received her Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction from Wayne State University in 2003. Her research interests include the historical and philosophical contributions of women in education as well as urban education.

Bio: Karen L. Tonso is an Assistant Professor at Wayne State University in Detroit , Michigan . She received her Ph.D. in Educational Foundations, Policy, and Practice from University of Colorado in 1997. Her research interests include qualitative research methods, cultural studies of engineering education, and philosophical underpinnings of social justice in education.

Copyright: Advancing Women in Leadership holds the copyright to each article; however, any article may be reproduced without permission, for educational purposes only, provided that the full and accurate bibliographic citation and the following credit line is cited: Copyright (year) by the Advancing Women in Leadership, Advancing Women Website, www.advancingwomen.com; reproduced with permission from the publisher. Any article cited as a reference in any other form should also report the same such citation, following APA or other style manual guidelines for citing electronic publications.

[Home](#) | [Job Search](#) | [Career Strategies](#) | [Business](#) | [Entrepreneur](#) | [Web](#) | [Money](#) | [Education](#) | [Network](#) | [International](#)

[About Us](#) | [Advertising Info](#) | [Content, Reprints](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Sitemap](#)

AdvancingWomen Web site Copyright © Advancing Women (TM), 1996 -

For questions or comment regarding content, please contact publisher@advancingwomen.com.

For technical questions or comment regarding this site, please contact webmaster@advancingwomen.com.

Duplication without express written consent is prohibited