JUST SCHOOLING
# Contents

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This book’s title is a play on words asking three questions: about whether and how schooling still matters, about whether and how it can be made more just, and about whether and how schooling is still political in new conditions.

The first question: Just Schooling asks whether schooling is a diminished force in contemporary societies and cultures, whether it has become ‘merely schooling’. This is not just a rhetorical question but one that the teachers who worked with Trevor Gale and Kathleen Densmore confront everyday. The connectedness of what is done in classrooms to new worlds of work and technology, new cultures and identities likely is the key dilemma facing teachers, schools and governments – especially and particularly for those who are not aware that such a dilemma exists. It is worth noting that even the cinematic accounts of teaching that Gale and Densmore discuss here are rooted in very traditional assumptions about the knowledge and value, discourse and practice that schools might dispense.

A legacy from the last century of educational theory and policy has been to treat schooling as if it were the principal source of children's and adolescents’ life knowledge, as if it were both the main archive and pedagogical place for learning. In schools one was supposed to encounter all one needed to know about everything from Egyptian history to the biosphere. In schools one was supposed to learn how to ‘be’ and appear a literate and aesthetic, rational and civilized person. Schooling must now find its place – perhaps a new and different place – in worlds where space and time are compressed and redefined continuously, where community geographies and school demographies shift semester by semester, where information, discourses and images – spurious, redundant, critical, canonical, marginal, dominant – rupture, blend and expand exponentially beyond government, corporation, community or school control.

The second question: Just Schooling asks whether it is possible to have a ‘socially just’ educational system. If so, Gale and Densmore ask, upon which philosophic principles should such a system be based? How might these principles inform teachers’ work and common sense, and how we shape students’ lives and literacies?
In any dictionary of educational policy, the term ‘social justice’ would have multiple entries, each mapped against a different national and regional policy context. For many American readers, the goals of schooling typically have been defined in terms of ‘equality of opportunity’. That is, ‘justice’ in a meritocracy is taken as equal access to compete for unequal educational outcomes and life pathways. For many Australian, Canadian and UK readers the term is likely to have a different morphology, with a focus on what Gale and Densmore here describe as ‘redistributive justice’. There state schooling has taken on a commitment to redistribute educational and social outcomes towards those communities at the economic and social margins. In Australia, the latter concept of social justice has shifted from an emphasis on ‘equality of access’ to a search for actual ‘equality of outcomes’. This involves the risky and elusive tasks of defining and assessing academic and social outcomes, discourse and material consequences of schooling, and of understanding how these blend with students’ and communities’ other social and economic capital.

For those reading this book from the vantage point of indigenous, cultural and linguistic minority communities, and for those working from the perspectives of feminist and postcolonial studies, critical legal and race studies, Just Schooling raises once again issues of inclusion and exclusion. There are running debates over which kinds of difference are actually named and recognized in educational policies and practices, the degree to which historically marginalized communities, their knowledges, histories and aspirations are actually recognized and ‘included’ by schooling and educational systems. Here teachers and schools face the everyday challenges of the critique and reconstruction of what might be a ‘common curriculum’, the development of culturally appropriate and enabling pedagogies, and the reconstruction of school/community relationships.

The third question: Just Schooling asks, persistently and yet again, whether and how education is a domain of cultural politics. The title itself plays with the name of a major book by the philosopher Jean Francois Lyotard, Just Gaming. Lyotard, an architect of postmodern social theory, would ask whether the normative goals of truth, justice, and power so focal to our discussion here actually have any real value in new social and cultural conditions. His alternative is to see the formation of ideologies and institutions as language games, genres and strategies with varying and often unpredictable consequences in local contexts.

Clearly, Gale and Densmore would not have us dismiss issues of equity, value and justice as mere games, the task of teaching as mere gaming. Rather their aim is to reintroduce the fundamentally moral and political dimension of the tasks facing beginning and practising teachers. At the same time, their invitation to a ‘cultural politics’ sees schooling and education as necessarily involved in matters of discourse, text and representation. By their account, schooling is a discourse practice on several complex levels:

- Schooling is regulated through policy discourse: as in current neoliberal and technicist educational policies;
Schooling is constructed as mythology through narrative discourse: as in the influential cinematic representations of schooling examined here; and schooling is itself an institutional device for regulating access to and use of discourses: as in the instances of classroom practice and the agendas for literacy education and curriculum reform taken up here.

In this way, Gale and Densmore are concerned with educational policies as discourses, as institutional practices that effect teachers’ work and students’ life futures. They also propose, following on from Australian work on genre and critical literacy, the mastery and critique of discourses as the central strategy for redistributive and recognitive justice.

Many readers of this book will be student teachers and students of educational research. Just Schooling sets out to reframe teachers’ common sense about difference, about justice, and about the possibilities of a just educational system. Gale and Densmore tell us that this book is a hybrid: part textbook and part research study, part essay and part narrative, and, no doubt, part science and part story. As you read, you will probably be composing a kind of counter-text about your particular local, regional or state educational system – weighing and discussing what might be possible, and indeed what might be ‘just’.

What might a socially just school look like? Is it engaged in the redistribution and reconstruction of discourse and texts? Which discourses and texts? How are these optimally engaged with by students and teachers? The test for Just Schooling will be its local application and sustainability in the classrooms and schools where you work.

Allan Luke
The possibility that this collection of ideas might form the basis for a book was first raised by Stephen May in our discussions over the search for an appropriate textbook for students, although it was Nick Burbules who introduced us as potential co-authors. Both gave us the initial encouragement to turn an idea into a proposal and for this we thank them. We are also grateful for the wonders (and traumas) of email without which we might never have ‘met’ and this book might never have been written. Indeed, this entire project was completed without us ever meeting in a traditional sense, although we have discovered, nevertheless, a great deal of compatibility in our interests and commitments. We would also like to thank those whose interest and encouragement contributed more directly to the production of this work. They include: the staff at Open University Press, who were so obliging and patient with us; Bob Lingard, John Knight and Carl Padover for their friendship and intellectual guidance; Pam Gale and Carmen Mills, who generously attended to many of the technical and tedious matters of preparing a manuscript; and, most importantly, those with whom we share the intimacies of our lives and whom we love dearly, Pam and David. We would be remiss if we did not also thank Allan Luke for writing the Foreword during a particularly taxing period in which he was actively engaged in rethinking and reworking systems of just schooling. Finally, portions of this book have appeared elsewhere in different forms and have been reworked for inclusion here. We would like to thank the publishers for permission to make use of the following materials: a version of Chapter 2 originally appeared in Gale, T. (2000) Rethinking social justice in schools: How will we recognise it when we see it? International Journal of Indusive Education, 4(2); Chapter 3 in Gale, T. (2000) Are we raising the standards of language use or just playing games? Melbourne Studies in Education, 41(1); and Chapter 6 in Gale, T. and Densmore, K. (2000) Questions of (re)production and legitimation: A second screening of teacher–student relations, Journal of Curriculum Studies, 32(6).
Introduction: just to put you in the picture

Just schooling

This book is not just about schooling; it is about just schooling. More specifically, it explores what it means for teachers to act justly in classrooms and towards their students. It is written at the beginning of a new millennium in which there remains ‘widespread homelessness, joblessness, illiteracy, crime, disease (including AIDS), hunger, poverty, drug addiction, alcoholism as well as the various habits of ill health, [youth suicide] and the destruction of the environment’ (Wallace 1991: 6). All of these have spawned ‘a temper of distrust, disillusionment, and despair’ (McLaren 1997: 520) in many areas of western societies, including within and about their systems of schooling. We mention this at the outset because we do not want readers to disassociate the book’s discussions from the abject material conditions experienced by many real students and their families. Also, we want to argue that issues of social justice are particularly pertinent for contemporary capitalist societies and their citizens. But we do not want that argument to be reduced to ‘textual disagreement and discourse wars’ (McLaren 1997: 522) even though we will engage in aspects of this ‘war’ ourselves as a way of addressing people’s adverse experiences.

When it comes to theorizing and practising social justice not everyone agrees about how students should be treated and what ‘playing fair’ means for teachers. Sometimes it is easy for us to regard these matters as self-evident and, therefore, as not worthy of prolonged discussion. It is as if we are convinced of the simplicity of statements like Justinian’s who commented in the sixth century that ‘justice is the constant and perpetual will to render to everyone their due’ (quoted in Isaacs 1996: 42). But the problem is, even among those who have the will, not everyone agrees on what they are due and how it should be rendered. Tripp (1993: 58), for example, has identified at least 12 different ways of understanding what it means to act fairly. Many writers have attempted to address this complex array of opinions about what is socially just (and what is not). Our categorization of these various perspectives in Chapter 2 as distributive, retributive and recognitive is informed by several of these discussions and we have recommended some of them at
the end of that chapter for further reading. In our account of social justice we particularly emphasize a more recent politics of recognition that, among other things, gives prominence to the meanings and material consequences associated with words and actions.

What follows is an overview of the book’s content and how it is organized; how we go about addressing the issues these comments raise. From the book’s title and the paragraphs above, you would already be aware that we are concerned with social justice and its relevance for teaching. This is a theme that underlies many of the chapters, including discussions of popular issues such as gender, race and social class. In addition, there are other related themes that will be of particular interest for those who are, and/or want to be, teachers; themes that encourage exploration of what is meant by concepts central to schooling, but are often taken for granted, such as language, education and diversity. Throughout the following chapters these and other issues are explored and examined, with successive themes drawing on previous discussions for their explanation.

The book draws on the voices of teachers in combination with understandings from the academic literature. Throughout, three teachers ‘speak’ more frequently than others and their particulars are outlined below. In writing about these teachers and their work we have not aimed for a textbook or for a research monograph in their traditional and separate senses. Rather, our intention has been to produce a text that might sit comfortably in both camps. This is not simply in recognition of ‘the politics of the textbook’ (Apple and Christian-Smith 1991) and the performativity criteria introduced by research monitors, but also a concern to address the dichotomies that such politics create. To these ends we have drawn on relevant academic scholarship to illuminate theoretical discussions of issues related to just schooling and we have also drawn on research data to confirm, challenge and rework these explanations in ways that we hope will contribute to academic understandings. Rather than this being a discussion between two seemingly opposite positions, our approach is dialectic. That is, we employ theory to ‘talk’ to the world of practice and we implore practice to ‘talk’ to the world of theory. In fact, we do not see these as necessarily separate worlds and so do not see their separation as particularly helpful in understanding and challenging schooling.

**An approach to research and its presentation**

The theoretical and methodological orientation of this book is perhaps best described as socially critical and post-structural. By ‘critical’ we do not mean that we take a negative stance on social matters irrespective of what they entail and by ‘post-structural’ we do not want to suggest that there are no stories of value about the social world. Nor do we necessarily regard being critical and being post-structural as being at odds with each other and/or as separated respectively into modern and postmodern camps as some
would have them. Instead, we tend to think of our post-structuralism as (re)informing our social critique, which has long ‘assume[d] that it is the task of social scientists to take things apart’ (Kogan 1979: 5). Our deconstructive efforts are informed by particular social and methodological orientations. As critical researchers, these very broadly involve five interrelated commitments: first, to investigate matters beyond their ‘surface appearances’ (L. Harvey 1990: 19); second, to ‘stand apart from the prevailing order of the world and ask how that order came about’ (Cox 1980: 129); third, to take little for granted, asking ‘whose interests are being served and how’ (Tripp 1998: 37) in the arrangements we find; and fourth, given that this assumes that ‘we live in a world of unequal distribution of resources and power’, to understand how socially critical researchers can ‘work towards a more just social order’ (Lenzo 1995: 17). Added to these is a commitment to reflexive conversations at all levels of the research endeavour, achieved through ‘a constant shuttling backwards and forwards’ (L. Harvey 1990: 29) between such things as theory and data.

In keeping with our intent to write a textbook and a research monograph, we tend to canvass a variety of theoretical positions on any given issue, although, clearly, we hold particular theoretical preferences and this is often evident in our exploration of these issues. Also fighting to be heard in this theory-work are evidences of teaching practice, and in particular, interviews conducted as part of our research (discussed more fully below) with those directly involved in schooling students. These resources are supplemented by observations of teachers at work with students, often represented as critical incidents (see Tripp 1993), and academic literature that pertain to the substantive issues. A further data source, specifically utilized in Chapter 6, is the interactions between three ‘onscreen’ teachers and their students, who appear in the films Dangerous Minds (1995), Kindergarten Cop (1990) and Dead Poets Society (1989). But to reiterate, our work is not solely driven by theory or data. Instead, it attempts to give prominence to both as dialectically related.

There are two main research projects on which this book draws. The first includes in-depth and extended interviews with three teachers, one from each of three levels of schooling: David, a primary/elementary school teacher; Michelle, a secondary/high school teacher; and Carl, a post-secondary technical college teacher. Although they are actual people, for reasons of confidentiality their real names have not been used, nor any detail that might identify them or their specific schools. Their interviews extend across a range of issues with a central interest in exploring how teachers’ implicit and explicit views on language, education and diversity influence the schooling that students receive. More explicit research questions are revealed in the chapters that follow. We introduce these three teachers more formally below and hope that they will become familiar companions as you read their views on issues examined throughout this book.

A second project involved over 20 semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers and school administrators associated with government
primary/elementary and secondary/high schools. The interviews were augmented by observations in classrooms, although over fairly limited durations and contexts and, hence, these should be seen more as supplementary sources. A major aspect of the research focused on the nature of and the extent to which actors at the level of schools mediate government and departmental policy (in this case, policy concerning students with learning difficulties/disabilities), thereby influencing students’ schooling. Other aspects of the research considered the ways in which students (with difficulties/disabilities) are conceived within schools and the language that is involved in this construction. Again, more specific research questions appear in the following chapters along with the data used.

Interviews from these projects were audiotaped and later transcribed. However, in writing this book it was possible to include only a fraction of the 240,000 words of interview text that this collection produced. Indeed, many of the interviewees and participants who contributed data in this way are not quoted directly even though their contributions are reflected in the book’s more general comments and analyses. Sometimes data are sacrificed for theoretical explanation but there remains a clear intention to include the voices of teachers and other relevant actors alongside our more theoretical accounts, and for those accounts of theory and practice to converse with each other. To maintain confidences, names of interviewees have been changed and other material that might identify specific individuals, institutions and/or geographical areas have been altered or omitted. What is worth acknowledging is that contributors are drawn from western democracies in which English is the medium of instruction. One convention followed throughout is that where conversations from the data are directly quoted, the voices of teachers and parents appear in plain text while other speakers (interviewers, students, and so on) are represented by italicized text. A second convention involves referencing these speakers. Comments drawn from the first research project are referenced to David, Michelle or Carl, whereas those from the second project are referenced to indicate the interviewee’s status as a teacher (T) or parent (P) and are numbered (T1, T2, P1, P2, and so forth) to distinguish one interviewee from another.

Now to some more personal introductions. Throughout this book we have included the voices of three teachers more frequently than others. Our intention is for readers to gain a picture of who these teachers are, what they think about a range of issues we raise and how these views influence their teaching practices. We do not expect that readers will be able to identify with our three teachers in all respects but we trust that there will be aspects of their identities and/or circumstances with which some resonances may be found. It is our hope that in recognizing familiar ideas and circumstances in their comments, this might provide non-threatening opportunities for readers to rehearse and examine their own ideas as they (re)negotiate their position on just schooling. We are grateful for the willingness of these teachers to reveal themselves to us through our research. We have found them to be well intentioned and dedicated to their students, highly regarded
by their peers, and easy to work with. We trust that readers will similarly enjoy their company and the honesty with which they talk about themselves and their work.

David: access to resources, good career prospects

David is a primary/elementary schoolteacher with over 15 years' experience. He works in a government school with recently established facilities, a population of around 600 students, and which is surrounded by modern detached housing located in an urban area. David claims that this population is ‘not homogenous’ but he acknowledges that there are very few students who have non-English-speaking backgrounds or who belong to racial minorities. Most of the students’ parents are middle-income earners and both parents tend to be in paid employment. There are a few single-parent families but they do not represent a sizeable group. ‘Something I should have mentioned, I guess, is that we have a very high proportion of children with disabilities of one kind or another’ (David). These students are catered for within the school by a special unit that attracts both supplementary government funding and students with various intellectual and physical disabilities, totalling approximately 10 per cent of the student population. David is one of seven male teachers at his school. At the time of interview, he was enrolled in a Masters programme at a nearby university.

Michelle: travelled, varied but short career, facing new challenges

Michelle is a health and physical education teacher in a secondary/high school, although she also teaches classes in social and political studies. She has over five years of teaching experience, several in overseas countries in inner city schools as well as in private schools in her home country, and has recently commenced working at her current teaching appointment, a small government school of approximately 200 students set in a rural town surrounded by agricultural farming. The main school building has a heritage facade but its interior has been refurbished and its good facilities are complemented by newer buildings. Just under one-third of the school’s students live in outlying areas, the rest live in town. The town once had a thriving industry but this has since closed. Most of the town students are from families whose main source of income is from some form of welfare payment. The students have various living arrangements: many live with both parents, some live in one-parent families, others live with relatives such as an aunt or an older sibling, and a few are self-supporting. Up to 30 per cent of the student population is drawn from one racial minority group. Michelle comments: ‘my little welcome to the school from the principal [head teacher] was “teaching is a challenge”’.
Carl: an ‘alternative’ career, confronting others’ ‘failures’

Carl is a teacher in an inner city technical college located in a large regional city and has over 15 years of experience in various alternative secondary/high school and college settings. At the technical college he teaches mathematics to adult learners whose past school performances in these areas have been poor. He also conducts preparatory classes in media studies for adults returning to study after long periods of unemployment, sickness, or childcare and who are seeking entry into university or other institutions and courses that offer a recognized qualification. ‘I know it sounds terrible, but you are dealing with second chance education, you are dealing with the failures of the formal institutions’ (Carl). As many as 90 per cent of students are drawn from the local community and range in age from 18 to 65 years. ‘There is no real archetype’ (Carl) – in some years the majority of students are males aged between 25 and 35, in other years the majority are young and often single mothers – but there are at least two recurring characteristics. The students are overwhelmingly located ‘at the lower end of the socio-economic scale’ (Carl) and they largely belong to one racial minority group.

Organization and content

The chapters in this book focus on issues of social justice, language, education and diversity. There is a sense in which each chapter sets the scene for those that follow but it is equally possible for readers to move back and forth between them according to their needs and interests. At the very least we hope that readers will want to revisit parts they have found particularly helpful and to make internal comparisons to allow some parts of the book to inform their understandings of others. Most chapters include Guiding questions and end with Questions for discussion/research and Suggested readings. The Questions for discussion/research are provided for readers as a way of stimulating and extending discussion and/or further research in relation to the issues raised in each chapter. Whether utilized for discussion or research, the questions should be seen as starting points from which other questions may be added or developed. By including such questioning in relation to our work we hope to create spaces for its critique, not just reinforcement of our own ideas. The suggested readings are for those seeking further insights into the issues raised in each chapter. Some engage with specific issues in greater depth and/or add to the overall discussion, while others question, and, at some points, provide quite different accounts of these issues. It should be noted that the lists are far from exhaustive. Other possible sources can be found in the reference section. As noted above, several chapters also include comments by teachers and others involved in the schooling of students, and relate theory to practice in a more explicit way.

Chapter 2 outlines what is meant by social justice, arguing in favour of a recognitive approach, and relating these debates to students and schooling.
Chapter 3 explores these issues of justice within theories of language use – a central domain of schooling – identifying four different perspectives and advocating a critical disposition that challenges notions of language as simply involving matters of technique. Informed by such critique, Chapter 4 moves beyond language rules to consider language strategies; a shift, we argue, that requires an understanding of a metalanguage characterized by the term ‘discourse’ and centrally related to ‘text’ and ‘ideology’.

Chapter 5 begins by canvassing various ideological positions on what it means to get an education, arguing that a socially democratic view of education is more in keeping with a recognitive approach to social justice. Continuing this focus on ideologies and their implications for the schooling students receive, Chapter 6 analyses the onscreen relations between teachers and students represented in three Hollywood films. The chapter deconstructs the discourses of these classrooms to reveal the ideas, beliefs and values that inform them and the commitments they are missing for more authentic and radical democratic versions of schooling.

Issues of diversity implicit in this account are taken up more explicitly in Chapters 7 and 8. Specifically, Chapter 7 examines inclusive and exclusive discourses mobilized by teachers to explain students’ academic successes and failures, particularly those explanations that draw on old nature–nurture debates but also those informed by a more recent politics of difference. Chapter 8 continues this discussion by confronting the negative discrimination in schools often associated with issues of gender, race and social class. It argues further, that the separation of these matters into categories of difference can sometimes serve to hide their similarities and points of overlap and that a more fruitful analysis might be pursued by considering the forms of oppression that these discourses engender.

Chapter 9 concludes the book by drawing together suggestions throughout earlier chapters for (re)constructing teacher practices and outlines a framework for just relations in schooling. Drawing on Giddens (1994), the chapter argues for the democratization of teacher–student relations in four connected arenas, ever widening contexts characterized by personal, group, institutional and community life.
He just flat out said it's in the ceiling. The teacher went well I guess that's your problem then and just kept walking. just-high-school-things. Follow. Unfollow.Â  One thing I miss abt elementary school is valentines day, I used to love giving/receiving candy and cards and making a little box to keep it all in. catmemer. Follow. Just Schooling invites your participation in the Breaking Curses Annual Basketball Tournament City Initiative hosted by the City of Atlanta's Mayor's Office & Partners. The event will be hosted in Read More. Name three school supplies. What is pencil, paper and notebook. 100.Â  Just schooling it. 1 team 2 teams 3 teams 4 teams 5 teams 6 teams 7 teams 8 teams 9 teams 10 teams 11 teams 12 teams 13 teams 14 teams 15 teams 16 teams. Reset Scores.