

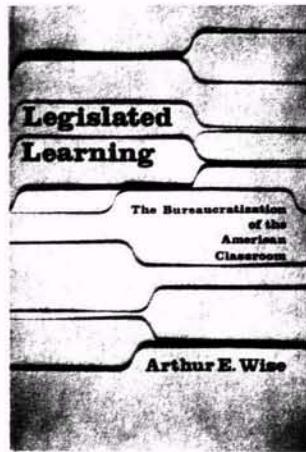
Reviews

Legislated Learning: The Bureaucratization of the American Classroom. Arthur Wise. Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1979.—Reviewed by Gary Sykes, National Institute of Education, Washington, D.C.

Arthur Wise's new book, *Legislated Learning*, deals with a familiar and much-discussed subject these days: the role of government in the affairs of its citizens and their institutions. A chronicle and indictment of the growing tendency in our political culture to seek control of education, central chapters provide a detailed critique of both legislative efforts to ensure accountability and of the broadening scope of judicial decisions mandating quality education (one of the book's six chapters is a case study of *Robinson v. Cahill*, the New Jersey Supreme Court case which Wise takes as a classic instance of judicial attempts to order "thorough and efficient" education).

Legislated Learning focuses specifically on the potential consequences of various efforts to regulate education through legislation and the courts, and Wise develops two arguments about such activity.

First, he claims that such policies lead to more centralized control over education at federal and state levels, a more bureaucratic and legalistic conception of schools, and a "hyperrationalization" of education. This last term Wise uses to condemn the broad class of regulatory activity intended to control some aspect of educational quality. He defines hyperrationalization as ". . . an effort to rationalize beyond the bounds of knowledge. This involves imposing means which do not result in the attainment of ends or the setting of ends which cannot be attained, given the available means—imposing unproven techniques, on the one hand, and setting unrealistic expectations on the other" (p. 65). Hyperrationalization produces a number of baleful effects including reduction of educational goals to those which can be standardized and measured, excessive prescription of educational processes, procedural complexity, and inappropriate solutions to problems of teaching and learning.



Second, he argues that the bureaucratic, rationalistic, and legalistic conception of schooling implied by these various "quality control" policies is seriously at odds with the view of schooling held by teachers and with the realities of classroom life. Drawing on the writings of Phil Jackson and Dan Lortie, Wise portrays teachers as deriving rewards from their relationships with particular children, as relying chiefly on their own schooling experiences for guidance in planning instruction, and as setting goals and gauging success in an intuitive, personal manner. Wise argues that teachers' approaches to teaching are not irrational but rather are a reasonably well-adapted response to a highly uncertain task performed under demanding conditions. The relationship between teaching and learning is still so imperfectly understood, and the charge to teach simultaneously 20 to 40 children so inherently complex that teachers must rely on their experiences and must feel their way along. He claims that efforts to impose a science of instruction or to mandate particular processes or outcomes are likely to dangerously distort and oversimplify a very complicated endeavor.

Wise's solution to these problems is simple. Government educational policy should have as its goal the pursuit of equity—defined narrowly as the fair allocation of resources. Pursuit of equity he views as essentially a political problem which requires government action, legislative and judicial, for its solution; pursuit of equality is a technical one. We cannot mandate what we do not understand, and efforts to do so are likely both to waste energy and to produce unintended, pernicious side effects.

Although *Legislated Learning* is a useful contribution to the debate over the proper role for government in education, I have difficulties with some of Wise's analysis and recommendations.

For example, is there evidence that government attempts to regulate educational quality have in fact led to centralization, bureaucratization, and legalization? In places Wise seems to claim such consequences, but in other places he speaks only of influence on a conception of education. The book is somewhat ambiguous on the nature of the claim being made although it is clear that little empirical research is available on these issues.

A second troublesome question concerns the origins of "legislated learning." Government, after all, responds to pressures from constituencies, and courts do not hand down decisions unless suits are brought. Who, then, are the culprits in initiating these policies? The problem may be that we are all implicated. We all may press our version of educational reform and seek to protect our interests through legislative and judicial action while simultaneously decrying this general trend and its effects. In the final analysis, it is not clear to whom Wise is addressing his indictment or how we are to get out of the predicament.

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THE SEARCH

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Experiential Education

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On Wise's recommendation that government should limit its aim to the pursuit of equity—the roots of government's pursuit of both quality and equality in education are deep and thoroughly entangled. Pursuit of each is both a technical and political problem, and as much uncertainty attends pursuit of the one as of the other. Disputes over the roots of inequality in our society have led to a progressive redefinition of equality emphasizing not only resource inputs, but outcomes (in other words, academic achievement, career opportunities) which should not be correlated with class, race, or sex. In pursuit of this expanded definition of educational equity, policy inevitably concerns itself with educational process. The question that Wise must confront, then, is this: If we achieve an equitable distribution of resources at state, district, school, and classroom levels, and inequality of schooling outcomes persists, has government fulfilled its responsibility? *Legislated Learning* is not definitive on these issues, and evidence on many of the claims set forth is lacking, but it is an important critique of a significant trend in education today which is well worth reading and challenging. *EL*

SUMMER READING

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Educational Policy

As both a political scientist and an officer of one of the interest groups cited, Stephen K. Bailey provides a unique perspective on education policy making at the national level in *Education Interest Groups in the Nation's Capital* (Washington, D.C.: American Council on Education, 1975).

A framework for the development of education policy and decision making is presented by Arthur E. Wise in *Legislated Learning: The Bureaucratization of the American Classroom* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979). In addition, he analyzes the impact of some well-intentioned but inappropriately-conceived educational policies on the bureaucratic structure of schools and the attainment of equal educational opportunity.

Also looking at equal educational opportunity, Richard H. deLone concludes that ability is not as important as family status, race, and sex in determining a child's future. In *Small Futures* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), deLone, a policy analyst, challenges the notion that our society is egalitarian as he surveys the social reform movement and concludes that the source of inequality is the tension created between democratic and capitalistic ideologies. *EL*

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