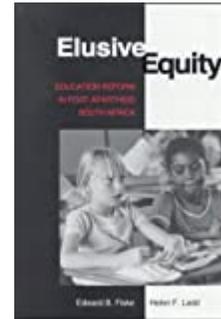




**Edward B. Fiske, Helen B. Ladd.** *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. C.: Brookings Institute Press, 2004. 269 pp. \$32.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8157-2840-5.



**Reviewed by** Reitu Mabokela (Department of Educational Administration, Michigan State University)

**Published on** H-SAfrica (July, 2007)

## The Pursuit of Educational Equity

The South African system of education has undergone significant changes over the past thirteen years since the democratically elected government came into power. Changes within the education sector have occurred within a broader context of change in the social, political, and economic arenas. Edward Fiske and Helen Ladd in their book *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa* offer a compelling account of key opportunities and challenges that confront South African schools as they attempt to shed systemic restrictions imposed by discriminatory laws and policies of apartheid. Through their comprehensive analysis, the authors illuminate complex dynamics that need to be taken into account to successfully reform the system of education in this country. There are four central themes that emerge from *Elusive Equity*: the impact and continuing legacy of apartheid policies; the significant role of politics in education reform efforts; funding of school to achieve equity; and curriculum reform.

The book begins with an historical overview of the apartheid system in chapter 2 and the role of apartheid in education (chapter 3). These chapters are quite compre-

hensive and they would be particularly informative for readers unfamiliar with the political landscape of South Africa. In these two chapters, Fiske and Ladd succinctly demonstrate how the legacy of apartheid, particularly race, continues to impact and complicate reform efforts across the entire system of higher education.

Chapter 4 reinforces the integral role that changes in the broader socio-political context have played in the transformation process within the education sector. In this discussion, the authors chart the vision of the now ruling African National Congress during the early years of the political transition. What emerges from their account is the complexity of the negotiated process that the newly elected ANC government had to enter into, not only to assert its position as a legitimate political player, but more importantly as a party with a vision to create an equitable society, with education being a critical element. The provincial demographic data presented in this chapter provides a useful benchmark for comparison with data presented in later chapters within this book.

In chapter 5, the authors utilize the example of three schools in Cape Town (Western Cape Province) to ex-

plore how issues of governance and student access manifest. Specifically, they examine how race, desegregation, and integration issues emerge among students, teachers, and the communities within which these schools are located. Fiske and Ladd juxtapose the trends observed in the schools in the Western Cape with the neighboring Eastern Cape Province, which they contend shows patterns of student mobility across formerly racially segregated schools that are more reflective of broader national trends within South Africa.

Under apartheid, funding was one of the strategies used to reinforce disparities across the racially segregated schools, where schools for whites received a significantly higher proportion of available resources. As discussed in chapters 6 and 7, these inequitable funding patterns affected the quality of school facilities, teacher salaries, quality of teachers employed, student-teacher ratios, and, subsequently, the academic outcomes as defined by pass rates. Disparities across schools were exacerbated by school fees policies, where parents' ability to pay influenced (and continues to influence) not only access, but also quality of education received.

In chapters 8 and 9, Fiske and Ladd capture some of the complexities around the implementation of a new outcomes based curriculum, which was intended to em-

brace and reflect the values of the newly democratic South Africa. The implementation of this curriculum met with mixed reception across various stakeholders within the South African education system. On the one hand, supporters of this proposed change viewed it as an opportunity to undo the substantial damage imposed by apartheid education, while others raised concerns about its mixed results observed in countries including Australia and New Zealand.

Chapter 10, on higher education, covers a wide terrain within this sector and does not have the depth compared to the other chapters in the book. The authors attempt to offer a discussion of changes in higher education by including everything from an historical overview of the structure of South African higher education, to government policies, to student access and participation, to efforts towards transformation. This sweeping discussion lacks the richness of other chapters and does not capture the complexity of issues and reform that have occurred within the higher education sector. The book would have been quite complete without the inclusion of this chapter.

In essence, the authors have presented a well-researched book that vividly captures and conveys the complexities of school reform in South Africa.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-safrica>

**Citation:** Reitu Mabokela. Review of Fiske, Edward B.; Ladd, Helen B., *Elusive Equity: Education Reform in Post-Apartheid South Africa*. H-SAfrica, H-Net Reviews. July, 2007.

**URL:** <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=13406>

Copyright © 2007 by H-Net, all rights reserved. H-Net permits the redistribution and reprinting of this work for nonprofit, educational purposes, with full and accurate attribution to the author, web location, date of publication, originating list, and H-Net: Humanities & Social Sciences Online. For any other proposed use, contact the Reviews editorial staff at [hbooks@mail.h-net.org](mailto:hbooks@mail.h-net.org).