

# American Education

TENTH EDITION

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2002



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## CHAPTER 4

# Equality of Opportunity and Social Class

From the nineteenth century to the present America's democratic ideology has promised equal opportunity for all citizens. Equality of opportunity means that all members of a society are given equal chances to enter any occupation or social class. It does not mean that everyone will have equal incomes and equal status; rather, all have an equal chance to compete for any place in society. In the United States, the primary emphasis is on equality of opportunity in gaining economic rewards. Ideally, equality of opportunity should result in a social system in which all members occupy their particular positions because of merit and not from family wealth, heredity, or special cultural advantages.

One way of thinking about equality of opportunity is as a race where everyone is competing for jobs and income. To provide equality of opportunity to compete in the race all participants should begin at the same starting line. During the actual running of the race, some people will end up leading while others will follow. In this model of equality of opportunity, education can ensure that either everyone begins on equal terms at the starting line or it can control the race to ensure that competition is fair. In the first instance, the concern is to ensure that everyone has an equal education at the beginning of the race. In the second instance, the concern is to identify and develop everyone's abilities during the race.

The idea of equality of opportunity, argues historian J. R. Pole in his massive volume *The Pursuit of Equality in American History*, has been America's way of balancing the ideal of equality with a society riddled with inequality caused by differences in income and racial attitudes. Inequality of income and racial discrimination has contributed to unequal treatment by the justice and political systems. Those with more money can afford better lawyers and, consequently, are more likely to win more favorable court decisions than are poor people being represented by low-paid, court-appointed lawyers. Also, those with more money are able to exert more influence over the political system through direct campaign contributions and associations with political candidates.

By believing that everyone has an equal opportunity to achieve wealth and power, one can ignore these blatant inequalities with the argument, "Hey,

everyone is given a chance to get ahead. Those without money or power just didn't work hard enough. They had all the chances. They could have done well in school and gotten into a good college." This reasoning, of course, stabilizes the social system by shifting the causes of inequality onto the shoulders of the individual. Schools contribute to this stabilization by promising to be the gateway to equal opportunity.

Consequently, within the framework of equality of opportunity, the central questions become

1. Can schools provide equality of opportunity?
2. How can schools attempt to provide equality of opportunity?
3. What are the consequences of using schools to achieve equality of opportunity?

### EDUCATION AND INCOME IN THE GLOBAL ECONOMY

Can schools provide equality of opportunity? The answer is yes and no. There is a definite relationship between years of schooling and income. However, there do exist differences between male and female incomes even with the same level of educational achievement. In Table 4-1, income parallels increases in educational level. There is a steady increase from those with less than a ninth grade education to professional degrees. For males, the increase is from \$18,743 mean annual income to \$120,352. For females, the increase is from \$12,392 mean annual income to \$59,792. Of major importance, regarding gender discrimination, is the fact that a female's educational achievements are worth almost half those of males. For instance, a female high school graduate's mean annual income is \$18,092 while a male high school graduate's is \$30,414. A female with a master's degree has a mean annual income of \$42,378 as compared with a male's of \$68,367.

The relationship between education and income is evident in most national economies. In 2000, the Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation reported that the additional income for men with a college degree in comparison to those with only a high school diploma ranged from less than 40 per-

TABLE 4-1 Educational Attainment: Total Money Earnings in 1999 of People 18 and Older

	Less than 9th Grade Education	High School Graduate	Associate Degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's Degree	Professional Degree
Mean earnings						
Male	\$18,743	\$30,414	\$40,047	\$57,701	\$68,367	\$120,352
Female	12,392	18,092	25,079	32,546	42,378	59,792

Source: U. S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income in the United States: 1999." Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000, pp. 36-38.

cent in Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway, and Sweden to 80 percent or more in Finland, Hungary, Portugal, and the United States.

In the United States a person with a college degree in 1999 earned 89 percent more than a person with a high school diploma. This difference is, in part, explained by the declining value of a high school diploma. The Economic Policy Institute reports that in the last two decades, wages for those with high school diplomas have plunged—for men by 25 to 30 percent and for women by 15 to 18 percent.

The Organization for Economic Development and Cooperation also found a worldwide discrepancy between male and female salaries at all levels of education. The organization's 2000 report *Education at a Glance* states, "When all levels of education are taken together, women's earnings between the ages of 30 and 44 range from about one-half in Switzerland and the United Kingdom to around 77 percent of those of men in Hungary and Spain."

To return to the question: Can schools provide equality of opportunity? The close relationship between income and education indicates that education is an important factor. However, the difference between male and female salaries at each level of educational attainment suggests that factors other than schooling influence equality of opportunity. In this context, education cannot provide equality of opportunity if women are being discriminated against in employment. For women, equal education does not result in equal pay.

### EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AND AMERICAN SCHOOLS

How can schools attempt to provide equality of opportunity? American schools have adopted a variety of approaches in an attempt to provide equality of opportunity. The role of the school in the provision of equality of opportunity changed from the nineteenth century to the twentieth century. In the common school model, as depicted in Figure 4-1, children from all social backgrounds enter the common school and receive a common education. The social starting line for competition for jobs and status begins at the point of graduation. Competition occurs outside the schoolhouse. Theoretically, all graduates have an equal chance to compete because they have received an equal education. The common school model is criticized because competition outside school is influenced by family background.

In the sorting machine model, as depicted in Figure 4-2, the school attempts to overcome the unfairness of competition after graduation. Students from all social backgrounds enter school where they are divided according to individual talents. Using scientific and professional opinions, students are classified and placed in ability groups and tracks that will lead to appropriate jobs. The result is students receiving unequal and different educations. Some students will graduate with vocational training while others are prepared to enter college. The school provides an unequal education with competition for social positions taking place in the school. Theoretically, equality of opportunity is guaranteed by the impartial decisions of teachers, counselors, and standardized tests.

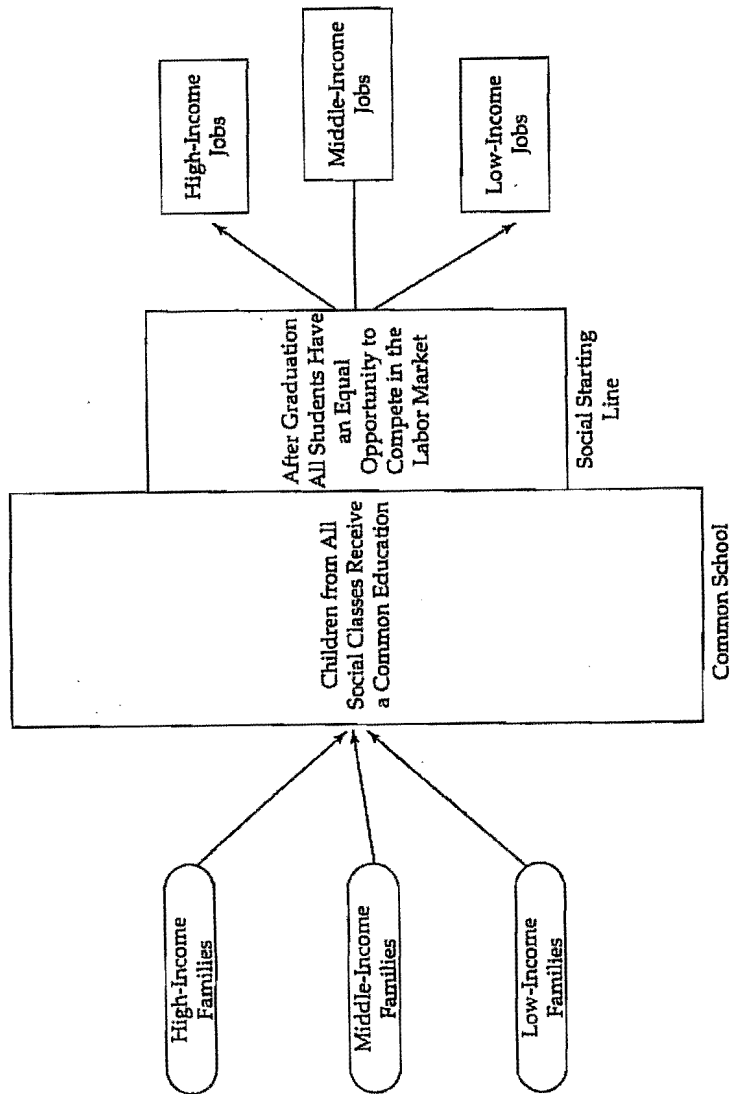


FIGURE 4-1 Equality of Opportunity: Common School Model

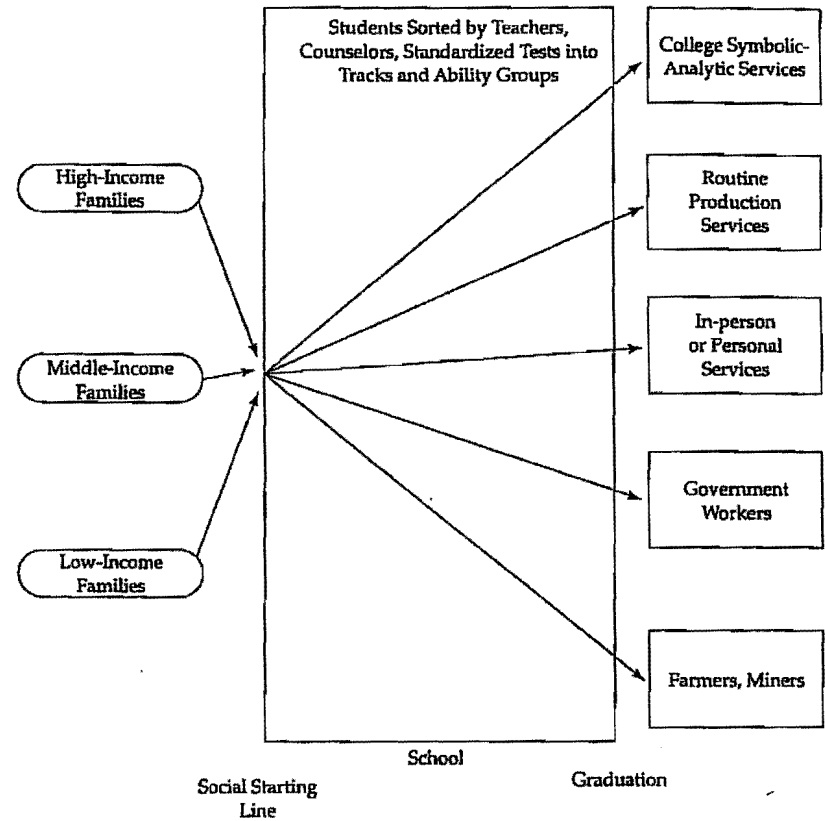


FIGURE 4-2 Equality of Opportunity: Sorting Machine Model

A brief history illustrates these differing models for the school's role in providing equality of opportunity. In the common school of the nineteenth century, differences of social class and special advantages were to disappear, as everyone was given an equal chance to get an equal education. This was one reason for the support of common schools in the nineteenth century. During the 1830s, workingmen's parties advocated the establishment of publicly supported common schools and the end of the pauper schools that were the only free schools up to that time. It was asserted that with public schools for the poor and private schools for the middle class and the rich, education reinforced social differences and doomed the children of the poor to a perpetual lower-class status. Only common schools could provide for equality of opportunity.

The most extreme statements came from one faction of the New York Workingman's Party. This group argued that sending students to a common school would not in itself eliminate differences in social background, because the well-

to-do child would return from school to a home richly furnished and full of books, whereas the poor one would return to a shanty barren of books and opportunities to learn. School, in the opinion of these workingmen, could never eliminate these differences. Their solution was that all children in New York should be removed from their families and placed in state boarding schools where they would all live in the same types of rooms, wear the same types of clothes, and eat the same food. In this milieu, education would truly allow all members of society to begin the race on equal terms. This extreme solution to the problem did not receive wide support, and debates about it eventually led to the collapse of the New York Workingman's Party.

boarding schools  
New York

In the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries, the development of intelligence tests provided another means of organizing schools so as to provide equality of opportunity. Some people argued that intelligence tests could be an objective measure that could be used to decide one's best place in society. The French psychologist Alfred Binet, who wanted to find a method of separating children with extremely low levels of intelligence from those with normal intelligence levels, developed the first intelligence test in the early 1900s. The assumption of the test was that an inherited level of intelligence existed and could be measured independent of environmental factors such as social class, housing conditions, and cultural advantages.

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In the United States, the intelligence-test movement spread rapidly because of its link to the ideology of equality of opportunity. The doctrine of native intelligence provided the premise that the role of the school was to eliminate all hindrances to the full development of individual intelligence. Individuals would be given an equal chance to develop their particular level of intelligence. Intelligence tests seemed to furnish a scientific means to achieve equality of opportunity based on individual ability.

Binet

Also, intelligence tests justified a hierarchical social structure, based on intelligence, in which all people were not equal. Within this framework democracy was viewed as a social system in which all people were given an equal chance to reach a level in society that corresponded to their individual level of intelligence.

The major problem in linking measured intelligence to equality of opportunity is the cultural bias of tests. In addition, there is the issue of whether an inherited native intelligence exists or whether intelligence is determined by early learning. Those believing in the existence of inheritable intelligence feel that test results accurately reflect social-class differences. Alfred Binet contended that the reason the poor did not do well on intelligence tests was that they had lower levels of intelligence and, moreover, that was why they were poor. More recently, psychologist Arthur Jensen argued that existing tests accurately measure inherited intelligence and that differences in performance by certain racial and social groups are accurate. On the other hand, there are those who believe in the existence of inherited intelligence but feel that the questions asked on existing tests reflect the cultural and social bias of the dominant middle class in the United States. The poor, and certain racial groups, do poorly on existing tests because many test questions deal with things that are not familiar to those groups. Within this framework, the solution to the problem is the creation of an intelligence test that is free of any cultural bias.

Another approach to the problem is the complete rejection of the idea of inherited intelligence and the acceptance of the view that intelligence and abilities are primarily a result of environment. This is the famous nurture versus nature debate. Those who see nurture as more important argue that differences in measured intelligence between social and racial groups primarily reflect differences in social conditions. The poor grow up in surroundings limited in intellectual training: an absence of books and magazines in the home; poor housing, diet, and medical care; and lack of peer-group interest in learning all might account for their poor performance on intelligence tests. This approach suggests that the school can act positively to overcome differences caused by social and cultural conditions.

Most recently, school programs have tried to overcome inequalities caused by differences in preparation for school learning. The argument for equality of opportunity is placed in the culture-of-poverty argument described in Chapter 1. Through compensatory education and Head Start programs, schools attempt to end poverty and provide equality of opportunity by trying to compensate for unequal social conditions. Head Start and early childhood education programs are designed to counteract the supposedly poor learning opportunities of the children of the poor, and compensatory education is designed to provide special instruction in reading and other skills to offset disadvantages in preparation for formal schooling.

### SOCIAL CLASS AND EDUCATION

What are the consequences of using schools to achieve equality of opportunity? Rather than providing equality of opportunity, does the school reproduce and reinforce social-class differences instead? In other words, does family income determine educational success and, consequently, the student's future income, despite these historical attempts to use schools to provide equality of opportunity?

To answer these questions requires an understanding of the distribution of U.S. family incomes and a definition of social class based on family income. As indicated in Table 4-2, the U.S. census bureau divides household incomes into 20 percent groupings. I will identify the top 20 percent according to household

TABLE 4-2 Social Class by Mean Household Income, 1999

Social Class	Percentage or Quintile	Income (\$)
Upper	Highest 20%	\$135,401
Upper-middle	Fourth 20%	63,555
Middle	Third 20%	40,879
Lower-middle	Second 20%	24,436
Lower	Lowest 20%	9,940

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income in the United States: 1999." Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000, p. xii.

TABLE 4-3 Share of Total Household Income by Year and Social Class

Social Class	1980 (%)	1985 (%)	1990 (%)	1999 (%)
Upper	43.7%	45.3%	46.6%	49.4%
Upper-middle	24.9	24.6	24	23.2
Middle	16.9	16.3	15.9	14.9
Lower-middle	10.3	9.7	9.6	8.9
Lower	4.3	4.0	3.9	3.6

Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Money Income in the United States: 1999." Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000, p. xii.

income as the upper class and the bottom 20 percent as the lower class. The middle class is the 20 percent between the top 40 percent and bottom 40 percent. In this table, household includes family (couples and single-parent families) and nonfamily households.

As indicated in Table 4-2, the mean middle-class household income in 1999 was \$40,879 as compared with a lower-class mean income of \$9,940 and an upper-class income of \$135,401. Using the preceding definition of social class, Table 4-3 indicates the increasing income inequalities between social classes based on the share of household income held by each social class.

As indicated in Table 4-3, income inequality is increasing, with the upper-class share of total household income growing by almost 6 percent from 1980 to 1997 while the percentage of total household income for all other social classes declined. Why? U.S. Bureau of the Census explains, "Increasing income inequality is believed to be related to changes taking place in the labor market and in the composition of the households in the United States." The composition of households is an important factor with a decline in married couple households and an increase in single-parent and nonfamily households, which typically have lower incomes.

The labor market's contribution to income inequality is the result of increasing wages paid to well-educated or high-skilled workers and declining wages for poorly educated or low-skilled workers. Workers now compete in an international labor market. U.S. companies will move if they can find cheaper labor and production costs in another country. U.S. workers must compete with the wages paid in other countries. This results in a decline in real wages for unskilled labor in the United States.

### EDUCATION, SOCIAL CLASS, AND EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Does the close linkage between education and income improve the ability for schools to provide equality of opportunity? Or consider the possibility that linking education and income results in a class system based on educational ad-

TABLE 4-4 Educational Practices That Limit the Role of the School in Providing Equality of Opportunity

1. Tracking
2. Ability grouping
3. Counseling methods
4. Teacher expectations
5. Unequal school expenditures

vantages. In other words, do the educational and income advantages of the family influence the educational advantages of their children? If they do, then the school does not provide equality of opportunity.

One way of exploring this question is to look at school practices that are influenced by the social-class background of the student. Table 4-4 lists the educational practices that limit the role of the school in providing equality of opportunity.

Two methods that can separate students according to family income are *tracking* and *ability grouping*. Tracking, primarily a practice of the high school, separates students into different curricula such as college preparatory, vocational, and general. Ability grouping places students in different classes or groups within classes based on their abilities. These abilities are usually determined by a combination of a teacher assessment of the student and standardized tests.

The United States, with its emphasis on individual differences, uses ability grouping more often than other countries. A 1991 study found that the use of ability grouping in math classes in the United States was two-thirds higher than in other countries. In lower secondary school grades, 56 percent of math classes used ability grouping. England reported the highest use of ability grouping with 92 percent of math classes grouped in the lower secondary grades.

Often, the family income of students parallels the levels of ability grouping and tracking. That is, the higher the family income of the students, the more likely it is that they will be in the higher ability groups or a college-preparatory curriculum. Conversely, the lower the family income of the students, the more likely it is that they will be in the lower ability groups or the vocational curriculum.

Studies show the existence of this condition in the American public schools from the 1920s to the present. One of the first major studies of social-class differences in relationship to adolescent culture and the high school was conducted in a small town in Indiana by a team of sociologists headed by A. B. Hollingshead. Their findings, which they titled *Elmtown's Youth*, can still be found duplicated in many high schools throughout the country.

The Hollingshead study divided the population of Elmtown into five social classes as shown in Table 4-5. The tracks, or courses of study, at Elmtown's high

TABLE 4-5 Social Class in Elmtown

1. Upper class, wealth primarily a result of inheritance
2. Income from profession, family business, or a salaried executive
3. Income from small businesses, farms, and wages from white-collar jobs in mines, mills, and public service
4. Income from blue-collar occupations in mills and mines
5. Income from unskilled, part-time labor and welfare

school were college preparatory, general, and commercial. When the social-class origins in each track were determined, it was found that children from social classes 1 and 2 concentrated on college-preparatory courses (64 percent) and ignored the commercial courses. Class 3s were found mainly in the general courses (51 percent), with 27 percent in college preparatory and 21 percent in commercial. Class 4s slipped down the hierarchical scale of curricula; only 9 percent were in college preparatory, 58 percent were in general, and 33 percent were in commercial. Only 4 percent of class 5s were in the college-preparatory curriculum, whereas 38 percent were in commercial, and 58 percent were in the general curriculum.

That the distribution of students in the various curricula of a school reflects social class does not in itself show a problem or that the school is responsible. Hollingshead found that social pressures from family and peer groups contributed to the decision to enter a particular course of study. Upper-class parents tended to be more oriented to college, while lower-class parents thought about training for jobs within their own particular social class.

Pressures outside the school existed to support the differences in social classes, but Hollingshead found that the school, through a variety of methods, also reinforced social-class differences. Variations in responses to educational situations reflected the social class of the student. For instance, counseling methods were found to reinforce social-class differences. The parents of students were counseled differently according to social class. Although children from social classes 2 and 3 received better grades than lower-class children, parents of social classes 2 and 3 were more often called to school to discuss the *work* of their children. The parents of lower-class children, however, were more often called to school to discuss the *behavior* of their children. This situation was paradoxical because not only did lower-class children tend to receive lower grades, but they also tended to fail courses more often than children from the upper classes. Objectively, one would assume that if the school were acting free of social-class bias, parents of lower-class children would receive more counseling about schoolwork than about behavior.

In the situation described by Hollingshead, problems related to children of the lower social class tend to be considered behavior problems in school, whereas those related to the upper classes tend to be considered learning problems. Nothing so dramatically tells the story of institutional response to social class than the tale about the enforcement of the school tardiness rule.

Elmtown High School adopted a new tardy rule, which the principal and superintendent intended to enforce with vigor. The first violator of the tardy rule was the son of a class 1 family; he arrived late to school in his father's Cadillac. The student was told by the principal to report for detention after school. When the student did not appear for detention after school, the principal phoned the father, who brought the student back to school. The superintendent, nervous about offending the father, greeted the boy at the school door and had him sit for ten to fifteen minutes in his outer office before sending him home. The superintendent later stated that he did not want the boy to have to sit with the other students in the detention room.

The opposite response occurred the next day when a son of a class 4 family arrived late to school. The principal and superintendent made joking comments about the student's dress and statements about his father being a laborer at the local fertilizer plant. When school ended, the superintendent and principal roamed the halls, and when they saw the class 4 student trying to leave the building, the principal grabbed him and began to shout at him. The student broke from the grasp of the principal and ran through the halls, where he was eventually caught by the superintendent, who shook and slapped him three or four times. Eventually the principal and superintendent physically pushed the student out of the school.

In the cases just described, the school officials identified the social-class origins of their students through their personal contact within the local community. In larger educational systems social-class identification is often made through the dress of the student, the ethnic or racial background, the location of the home within the community, and informal discussions. For instance, a student might be referred to as coming from a particular section of town, which when mentioned is understood to be an area inhabited, say, by blue-collar workers in a local factory or by executives in major industries. Ethnic names in large metropolitan areas can also cause a response related to the social-class nature of the family or attitudes toward learning.

A contributing factor to social-class and racial bias in schools is teacher expectations. Sometimes, teachers and other school officials expect certain students to act in certain ways. In its simplest form, this stereotyping results in the expectation that students from middle- and upper-class families will do well in school, whereas children from lower-class backgrounds are expected to do poorly. Research findings suggest that one problem with such stereotyping is that students live up to expectations about them. If students are expected to do poorly, they do poorly; if expected to do well, they do well. This is called the *self-fulfilling prophecy*.

The most famous study of the tendency to live up to expectations is Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson's *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. In the first part of the study, a group of experimenters was given a random selection of rats and told that certain rats came from highly intelligent stock. The rats labeled as coming from highly intelligent stock tended to do better than the other rats, though they were randomly grouped. The two psychologists tested their results in a school to see if teacher expectations would affect student performance. After

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giving students a standardized intelligence test, they gave teachers the names of students whom they called late bloomers and told the teachers to expect a sudden spurt of learning from them. In fact, the names of these students were selected at random from the class. A year later the intelligence tests were administered again. The scores of the supposed late bloomers were compared with those of other children who received scores on the original test similar to the supposed late bloomers. It was found that those students who were identified to teachers as late bloomers made considerable gains in their intelligence-test scores when compared with students not designated as late bloomers.

The principal inference of this study is that teacher expectations can play an important role in determining the educational achievement of the child. This might be a serious problem in the education of children of poor and minority groups, where teachers develop expectations that these children will either fail or have a difficult time learning. Some educators, such as teacher and educational writer Miriam Wasserman, argue that teacher expectations are a major barrier to educational success for the poor and for certain minority groups.

Wasserman, in her case study of the New York school system, *The School Fix: NYC, USA*, relates the issue of teacher expectations to what she calls the "guidance approach to teaching." The guidance approach means that when planning instructional units, the teacher tries to take into account the student's family background, social life, and problems outside school. On the surface this sounds like good educational practice in relating teaching methods and materials to the background and needs of the student. In practice, Wasserman discovered the tendency to label all students from poverty areas as having learning problems, as not being interested in school, and as probably not succeeding in school. Teachers tended to provide material that was not very challenging to students so labeled or explained their own failure to teach the student in terms of the student's background.

In further investigation of this problem, Wasserman interviewed students from poverty backgrounds who had been successful in school. She found that these students believed the major element in their successful educational career was having a teacher who was primarily interested in the student's learning and who emphasized and demanded high-quality work. These teachers had high expectations for their students, expectations that were not influenced by the social-class backgrounds of the students.

According to a 1996 report by educational researcher Dennis Carlson, tracking underwent significant change in the 1990s. Many vocational programs were collapsed into a basic skills curriculum, causing a major division between students enrolled in basic skills tracks and those enrolled in college-preparatory tracks. In addition, because many college-preparatory tracks are in magnet schools, parents choose to send their children to a particular magnet school specializing in academic, math and science, or other college-preparatory curricula. Many of these schools have entrance examinations.

Another measure of the relationship between social class and education is the use of home computers. Using a home computer is now considered a distinct advantage for students preparing for the rapidly advancing information

TABLE 4-6 Percentage of Students Who Used a Computer at Home, by Purpose, Current Grade Level, and Family Income Level

Current Grade Level and Family Income Level	Used Home Computer for Word Processing (%)	Used Home Computer for School Assignments (%)	Used Home Computer for Graphics/Design (%)
Grades 1-6			
Upper class	27.5%	42.6%	15.3%
Middle class			
(including upper-middle and lower-middle)	15.5	29.7	10.3
Lower class	12.5	21.7	7.3
Grades 7-12			
Upper class	58.6	70.8	19.7
Middle class			
(including upper-middle and lower-middle)	41.4	60.7	16.4
Lower class	26.9	44.6	9.7

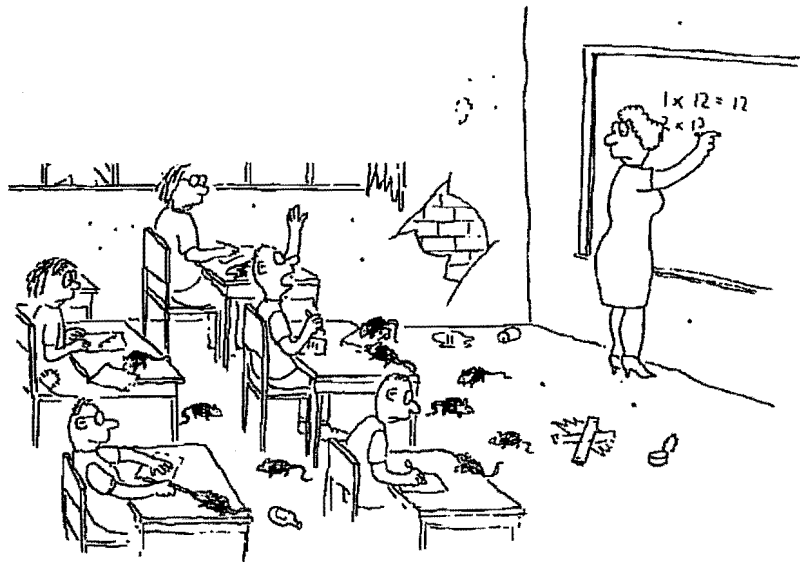
Source: Adapted from "Table 18-1, Percentage of students who used a computer at home, by purpose, current grade level, race-ethnicity, and family income: 1997." *The Condition of Education 1999*. Washington, DC: U.S. Printing Office, 1999, p. 173.

age. Obviously, poor families are less likely to own a home computer than are wealthy families. This situation could create a major technological gap that could lead to even greater possibilities of students remaining in the social class of their parents. In 1999, the U.S. Department of Commerce released the figures presented in Table 4-6 on home use of computers by students.

As indicated in Table 4-6, there is more than a 26 percent difference between upper-class high school students and lower-class high school students in the use of home computers for completing school assignments. For elementary grades there is almost a 21 percent difference. Are upper-class students more advantaged in entering the labor market than lower-class students because of the home use of computers? Is knowledge about the use of computers a new factor in the provision of equality of opportunity? While nothing conclusive can be said about the effect of the use of home computers on later employment and income, one could speculate that a student who frequently used a home computer might be at an advantage when entering the labor market as compared to a student who did not use a home computer. Is a technological divide a new cause of social inequalities?

The combination of the classification of students according to abilities and curriculum and the expectation of teachers and other school officials seems to contribute to the social-class divisions of the surrounding society being reflected in the placement and treatment of students in the school. In addition, it





"Miss, I'm finding it hard to concentrate with the rats nibbling at my books."

www.CartoonStock.com.

has been found that in terms of educational achievement, the differences between children from different social classes become progressively greater from the first grade through high school. And, now there is the possibility of technological gap between social classes.

### INEQUALITIES IN SCHOOL EXPENDITURES

The correspondence between education and income makes it imperative to give all children quality elementary and secondary education. Admission to college, progress through college, and admission to professional schools depend on a person's experience in elementary and secondary schools. A low-quality elementary and secondary education can hinder a person's ability to reach higher levels of educational attainment, while just the opposite is true of a person receiving a high quality of education. Consequently, in the global labor market, the quality of schooling can influence average annual incomes. If the quality of elementary and secondary education depends on the wealth of a community, then the wealth of a community in which a person is educated can influence that person's future income. These relationships are illustrated in Figure 4-3.

Unequal school expenditures are a major cause of the unequal distribution of educational opportunities between social classes and racial groups. The measure of unequal school expenditures is the money spent per student. Most

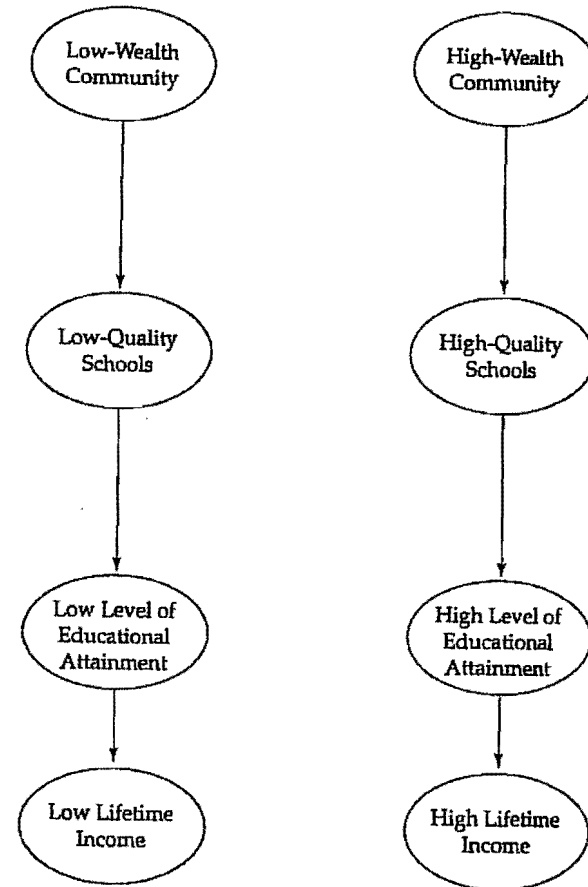


FIGURE 4-3 School Quality, Educational Attainment, and Income

of the school districts in the United States receive approximately 50 percent of their financial support from local taxes. This means that children attending schools in districts with a great deal of taxable wealth will have more money spent on their education than children attending schools with little taxable wealth. These differences in spending affect the quality of education that, in turn, affects the ability of graduates to compete for jobs.

The National Center for Education Statistics released the following estimates of inequality between school districts. The report provides two sets of figures. The first figures show actual differences in money spent on schools. The second figures show the real difference after adjusting for cost of living and the educational needs of the child. Cost of living varies across the nation and, in the words of the report, "Districts with high percentages of disabled, limited-



English-proficient and poor children may have to raise more revenue to provide education comparable to those in districts with lower percentages of these children." The major findings of the report include the following:

- The wealthiest school districts in terms of household income have 36 percent more revenue per student than the poorest districts. This difference is reduced to 16 percent after considering cost of living.
- School districts with less than one-twentieth of children living in poverty have 27 percent more revenue per student than districts with more than .25 percent living in poverty. The difference is 20 percent with cost-of-living adjustment.

The most recent figures provided by the National Center for Educational Statistics on inequalities in school spending are calculated on school spending for 1996. In 1996, calculations were made on the range of per-pupil expenditures by state. As indicated in Table 4-7, there are considerable differences between rich and poor school districts. Table 4-7 shows the range from rich school districts in the 95th percentile of expenditures to poor school districts in the bottom 5th percentile of expenditures. For instance, in Alaska, school districts in the 95th percentile of expenditures spent \$7,657 more per student than did poor school districts in the bottom 5th percentile. In Connecticut, rich school districts spent \$3,239 more per student than did poor school districts. Table 4-7 further indicates that a great deal of variation occurs among states in the range of expenditures between rich and poor school districts. While the range in New York is \$5,122, the range in Nevada is only \$583 and in West Virginia it is only \$781.

TABLE 4-7 The Range of Expenditures in Public School Districts for Selected States, 1996

State	Type	Range between the 5th and 95th percentiles (in dollars)
Alaska	Elementary and secondary	\$7,657
California	Elementary	1,472
	Secondary	2,057
Connecticut	Elementary and secondary	3,239
Illinois	Elementary	4,017
	Secondary	6,795
Massachusetts	Elementary and secondary	3,545
Michigan	Elementary and secondary	3,368
Nevada	Elementary and secondary	583
New Jersey	Elementary	4,182
	Secondary	5,249
New York	Elementary and secondary	5,122
Pennsylvania	Elementary and secondary	3,933
West Virginia	Elementary and secondary	781

Source: Wayne Riddle and Liane White, "Expenditures in Public School Districts: Estimates of Disparities and Analysis of Their Causes (1996)," <http://nces.ed.gov/>.

Some states in Table 4-7 are reported according to differences between elementary and secondary schools. In general, secondary education is more expensive than elementary education. The range in differences between rich and poor elementary and secondary schools varies among states. For instance, compare the figures for New Jersey with California. The range in per-pupil expenditures in New Jersey between rich and poor elementary schools is \$4,182, while the range for secondary schools is \$5,249. The differences are much smaller in California with the range for elementary schools being \$1,472 and for secondary schools, \$2,057. On the other hand, in Illinois the difference between rich and poor elementary schools is \$4,017, while for secondary education the figure is a whopping \$6,795. These figures suggest the existence of some very exclusive and well-financed public high schools in New Jersey and Illinois.

In 2000, the National Center for Educational Statistics issued another report on inequalities in school spending between states for the 1997-1998 school year. This report did not contain adjustments for differences in cost-of-living between states. However, as indicated in Table 4-8, there are continuing major differences between states. I have only selected certain states for inclusion in this table to illustrate the broad differences. The actual report shows the spread for all states. The average expenditures per student for all states and the District of Columbia was \$6,189. As indicated in Table 4-8, the difference between the highest (New Jersey) and lowest (Utah) in expenditures per student was \$5,674.

There is still hope for improvement despite the wide disparities in spending between states and between school districts within states. During the 1990s, spending differences were reduced as a result of political pressure on state governments and court cases against state governments for violating the principle of equality before the law. The legal principle is that if a state makes provisions for a school system then all citizens of the state should be treated equally. In 2000, the National Center for Educational Statistics released a study of changes

TABLE 4-8 Current Expenditures per Pupil for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools by State: School Year 1997-1998

State	Total Expenditures per Student (\$)
New Jersey	\$9,643
Connecticut	8,904
New York	8,852
Arizona	4,595
Mississippi	4,288
Utah	3,969

Source: Adapted from "Table 5. Student membership and current expenditures per pupil in membership for public elementary and secondary schools, by function and state: School year 1997-98," *Revenues and Expenditures for Public Elementary and Secondary Education: School Year 1997-98*, <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs20000/quarterly/summer/2feat/q27.html>.

**TABLE 4-9 Variation in Instructional Expenditures per Pupil among and within States (in Constant 1996 Dollars): 1992-1993 to 1996-1997**

Source of Variation	1992-1993 (\$)	1994-1995 (\$)	1996-1997 (\$)
Among states	\$9,150	\$7,831	\$8,143
Within states	7,611	4,852	5,488

Source: Adapted from U.S. Department of Education, "Disparity in Public School Finance: Table 64-1, Variation in instructional expenditures per pupil among and within states (in constant 1996 dollars): School years 1992-93 to 1996-97." *The Condition of Education 2000*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Printing Office, 2000.

in per-pupil expenditures through the 1990s; indicated here in Table 4-9, the disparity in instructional spending per pupil between states declined by \$1,007 between the school year 1992-1993 and the school year 1996-1997 from \$9,150 to \$8,143. Within states the decline for that period was \$2,123, from \$7,611 to \$5,488. But even with these changes, the variations in spending remained high.

### SAVAGE INEQUALITIES

Parents searching for excellent schools quickly learn there is a direct relationship between the cost of housing and the quality of schools. Differences in expenditures per student do affect the quality of education, as amply explained by Jonathan Kozol in his disturbing book *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*. Kozol opens his indictment of the financial and educational disparities between school districts with a description of the economically depressed East St. Louis school system. Taken on a tour of the local high school, Kozol meets frustrated vocational education teachers who are unable to prepare their students for the world of work because of antiquated and broken shop equipment. The high school science teacher shows Kozol a physics lab where the lab stations have empty holes that once contained pipes. Balance scales and other lab equipment are either broken or outdated. The biology lab has no laboratory tables. The lack of tables did not seem to matter since the school district could not afford to buy dissecting kits. The chemistry lab, Kozol is informed, is not used because it is considered unsafe. The school has no VCRs and, therefore, is unable to use any of the latest visual-aid material.

A major problem contributing to the low quality of education in financially strapped school districts is the lack of a regular teaching force. Because of low salaries and poor working conditions, many urban school districts are unable to retain good teachers and must rely on substitute teachers. Consequently, many students spend idle time in classrooms as they face a steady stream of substitute teachers. In Chicago, more than a quarter of the teachers are low-paid substitutes. In addition, there is even a shortage of substitute teachers. On an average morning in the Chicago schools, 190 classrooms are without teachers. One high school student complained to Kozol that he had been in a class for an entire semester and there still was not a regular teacher. A student in an

auto mechanics class said that he hadn't even learned to change a tire because the substitute teacher only wanted them to sit quietly.

One way the teacher shortage is handled is to increase the number of required study halls. Therefore, many students find themselves sitting idly in classes managed by substitute teachers who do not know the subject matter of the course and then spend more idle time attending two or three study halls. No wonder many of these students do not feel that it is worthwhile going to school.

In Camden, New Jersey, Kozol found student learning hindered by both poor health conditions and poor school facilities. Learning is difficult for children if they come to school sickly. Often, poorer school districts have a flood of students with medical and dental problems that their parents cannot afford to correct. The Camden school nurse complained to Kozol about children coming to school with rotting teeth and chronic and untreated illnesses. They sit in class in a state of discomfort unable to really pay attention to the classwork. Even if they could pay attention, they would be receiving an inadequate education. A typing teacher showed Kozol a typing room full of 10-year-old manual typewriters. The training in this class, she reflected, was completely out of touch with the world of word processing and computers. Buying computers is out of the question when the Camden school district can barely pay its teachers.

Kozol found savage inequalities even within the same school district. In New York City, he uncovered disconcerting differences between public schools in the poorer sections of the Bronx and a public school in the wealthy Riverdale section of the Bronx. At one school in the Bronx, he found classes being conducted in a former roller-skating rink lacking any windows. Although the school's capacity is 900, more than 1,300 children attend. A shortage of textbooks requires students to share social studies books. Because of a lack of classroom space, two first grade classes share the same classroom, with a blackboard being used as a divider. In some parts of the school, Kozol found four classes taking place within the same undivided space. On the top floor of the school, Kozol encountered fifty-nine students and four adults of a bilingual class and a regular sixth grade class sharing a classroom that in a suburban school would be assigned to twenty students.

In contrast to the conditions in this school, an elementary school in the Riverdale section of the Bronx allows gifted students to have access to a school planetarium. At this school, class sizes are kept to around twenty-two. Each classroom has a computer. Classes have in-class research centers stocked with up-to-date sources. The school does not depend on substitute teachers. Whereas in other areas of the Bronx students find themselves being forced to sit idly, students at the Riverdale school are engaged in constant learning activities that emphasize the use of reason and critical thinking.

Besides certain privileged urban schools, savage inequalities become most apparent when comparing schools with low per-student expenditures to schools in wealthy suburban districts and elite private schools. In contrast to Chicago schools, where students must worry about having a regular teacher and textbooks, New Trier High School, which serves wealthy Chicago suburban communities, provides 4-year courses in six foreign languages and elective courses

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ranging from the literature of Nobel winners to computer languages. The school even operates its own licensed television station. The average class size is twenty-four. Each freshman is assigned an adviser who remains the student's counselor through graduation. Each counselor has only twenty-four students to advise as compared with Chicago schools, where counselors advise an average of 420 students. In contrast to the problems facing students in the Camden school district, the nearby wealthy Cherry Hill suburban school district offers fourteen different courses in its physical science department and eighteen biology electives. In Princeton, New Jersey, students are provided with music suites and computer-equipped subject-related study halls. Besides having up-to-date equipment, a large variety of courses, and a dedicated teaching staff, elite private schools such as Exeter maintain class sizes of about thirteen.

The obvious cause of these savage inequalities is difference in community wealth. The New Trier district has approximately \$340,000 of taxable property for each child while the Chicago schools have approximately \$70,000 per student. As I will discuss in Chapter 11, there have been many court cases and legislative attempts to equalize school expenditures, but currently, little has been accomplished. The savage inequalities continue.

### QUALITY OF CITY SCHOOLS

The quality of education in urban schools is affected by a combination of factors, including property values. A 1996 National Center for Education Statistics report found that fewer urban students completed high school than poor children in rural areas. What is the educational disadvantage of city living?

Jeanne Griffith, acting commissioner of the Center, explained, "We found that in about half the things we looked at—that the problems in urban schools were due to poverty. But in the other half, there was something about being in an urban setting that contributed even more." According to the Center, the poor academic performance of urban students from low-income families is often a result of

- Attending schools with large enrollments.
- Attending schools with high rates of teacher absenteeism.
- Attending schools with safety problems.
- Attending schools with high discipline rates.
- Transferring schools more frequently.
- Living in single-parent homes.
- Watching at least three hours of television a day.
- High rates of teenage pregnancy.
- Exposure to crime, including murder.

As Brenda Chaney, a Boston reading teacher states, "Too many of my students have seen murders. One student last year had to move because his brother had gotten shot (fatally) by a gang and they were worried he would get shot, too."

Savage inequalities are reflected in dropout rates by social class and race. Certainly, in today's global labor market, dropping out of secondary school al-

TABLE 4-10 Dropout Rate according to Social Class, 1996

Social Class of Family	Dropout Rate (%)	Percent of All Dropouts
Upper (top 20% income)	2.6%	5.2%
Middle (includes upper-middle, middle and lower-middle)	10.8	56.1
Lower (bottom 20% income)	22.1	38.7

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "Dropout Rates in the United States, 1996," <http://nces.ed.gov/>.

TABLE 4-11 Dropout Rates by Race and Gender, 1996

Characteristics	Dropout Rate (%)	Percent of All Dropouts
Sex		
Male	11.4%	51.3%
Female	10.9	48.7
Race-ethnicity		
White, non-Hispanic	7.3	44.8
Black, non-Hispanic	13	17.6
Hispanic	29.4	37.6

Source: National Center for Education Statistics, "Dropout Rates in the United States, 1996," <http://nces.ed.gov/>.

most guarantees a low-income job. Table 4-10 indicates dropout rates according to social class; as indicated in the table if you are born into the lower class, then you have more than a 20 percent chance of dropping out of school and perpetuating the low-income status of your family. When you compare Table 4-10 with Table 4-11<sup>1</sup> you find that if you are Hispanic, male, and from a lower-class family, then your chances of dropping out are even higher.

The consequence of these savage inequalities is the perpetuation of social-class differences. A child attending an impoverished school district is receiving less of an opportunity to gain an education than students in elite suburban and private schools. Without the availability of computers, a broad range of electives in humanities and science, regular teachers, and advisers with small student loads, children in impoverished school districts are not being prepared for college or to enter high-paying jobs. Even if they go to college, the graduates of the East St. Louis, Chicago, and Camden schools will have difficulty competing with their better-prepared counterparts from Exeter, New Trier, and Princeton.

### SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

The discussion so far in this chapter would suggest that schools play a role in maintaining differences between social classes. This argument is called *social reproduction*. Simply defined, social reproduction means that the schools reproduce

the social-class structure of society. Economists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis are the major proponents of the concept of social reproduction. They contend that the school causes occupational immobility. This argument completely reverses the idea that the school creates occupational mobility. Bowles and Gintis, in constructing this thesis, accept the findings that mobility rates are consistent throughout Western industrialized countries and that family background is one major factor in determining economic and social advancement. What they argue is that the school is a medium through which family background is translated into occupational and income opportunities.

This translation occurs regarding personality traits relevant to the work task; modes of self-presentation such as manner of speech and dress; ascriptive characteristics such as race, sex, and age; and the level and prestige of the individual's education. Bowles and Gintis insist that the four factors—personality traits, self-presentation, ascriptive characteristics, and level of educational attainment—are all significantly related to occupational success. They also are all related to the social class of the family. For instance, family background is directly related to the level of educational attainment and the prestige of that attainment. Here the economic level of the family determines educational attainment. Children from low-income families do not attain so high a level of education as children from rich families. From this standpoint the school reinforces social stratification and contributes to intergenerational immobility. For ascriptive characteristics such as race, the social advantages or disadvantages of a particular racial group are again related to levels of educational attainment.

Personality traits and self-presentation are, according to Bowles and Gintis, important ingredients in occupational success. These characteristics are a direct product of child-rearing practices and reflect the social class of the family. Also, the economists assert, child-rearing patterns are directly related to the occupation of the head of the family. This argument is based on the work of Melvin Kohn, whose study *Class and Conformity: A Study of Values* found that middle-class parents are more likely to emphasize children's self-direction while working-class parents are more likely to emphasize conformity to external authority.

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 In other words, working-class families tend to be more authoritarian and violent toward their children than upper-class families. Children are more often punished with beatings in lower-class families than upper-class families. On the other hand, children in upper-class families are often given more freedom to pursue their own interests than children in lower-class families. Working-class parents value obedience, neatness, and honesty; higher-status parents emphasize curiosity, self-control, and happiness. Even when racial and religious divisions are considered, Kohn found that social class still stands out as the more important determinant in child-rearing values. Kohn argues that the most important thing that determines how children are treated in a family is the type of job held by the head of the household. If the head of the household works in a factory or other workplace where they primarily take orders, they will give orders to their children. On the other hand, if the head of the household has a job with a great deal of freedom to make independent decisions, then the chil-

dren in their family will be granted the same freedom. The more self-direction experienced on the job by the head of the family, the more likely it is that child-rearing patterns will emphasize self-direction. Self-direction on the job is directly related to the social class of the family. Higher-status and higher-income jobs usually involve self-direction; lower-status and lower-income jobs tend to be more routine and require more conformity to imposed rules.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America*, Bowles and Gintis support Kohn's conclusions. Child rearing, they declare, is important in developing personality traits related to entrance into the workforce. Personalities evidencing a great deal of self-direction tend to have greater success in high-status occupations. The differences in child-rearing patterns, the authors state, are reflected in the schools attended by different social classes. Schools with populations from lower-income families tend to be more authoritarian and to require more conformity than schools attended by children from higher-income families. This is often reflected in the differences between educationally innovative schools in high-income suburbs and the more traditional schools in low-income, inner-city neighborhoods. In some cases, parents place pressure on local schools either to be more authoritarian or to allow more self-direction. The nature of this pressure tends to be related to the social class of the parents.

In this manner, Bowles and Gintis argue, the child-rearing patterns of the family are reflected in the way schools treat children. Children from authoritarian families are prepared by authoritarian schools to work at low-paying jobs that do not require independent thinking and decision making. The reverse is true for children coming from upper-income families and schools; they are socialized to high-paying jobs that require independent thinking. In this manner, education reproduces social classes. One problem with the social reproduction argument is the treatment of students as passive recipients of knowledge. But, as a later section on resistance suggests, students are not passive objects that are easily manipulated by school authorities.

### SHOULD TRACKING AND ABILITY GROUPING BE ABOLISHED?

In 1992, with the backing of Governor William Weld and the Commissioner of Education Robert Antonucci, the Massachusetts Department of Education began an active campaign to eliminate grouping by academic ability in local schools. Since the 1920s the separation of students by academic ability has been criticized because the result is often separation by socioeconomic class and race. In 1985 these practices again became an important issue with the publication of Jeannie Oakes's *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality*. As the name of the book suggests, Oakes documented the use of grouping by academic ability as a means of fostering social inequality. By 1993 the debate over grouping by academic ability had reached a point that, in the words of educational researcher Robert Slavin, "whenever anybody holds a meeting on this topic, it is packed to the rafters." The National Education Association adopted

a resolution in 1992 condemning the use of academic tracking as a means of segregation by social class, race, and gender.

Participants in the debate refer to two forms of grouping by academic ability. One form is tracking, where students are divided into separate classes according to their academic ability. The other form is ability grouping, where students within a single classroom are separated according to academic abilities. Opponents of tracking and ability grouping argue that these practices primarily promote inequality without benefiting the fast or slow learner. An analysis of the National Education Longitudinal Study concluded that a group of eighth graders separated by academic ability and studied for two years showed few benefits from the practice. In this analysis, separation by ability worsened the educational achievement of low achievers and did nothing for high achievers.

While criticizing academic ability grouping that results in discrimination by social class, race, and gender, supporters argue that the practice makes it easier for teachers and it allows high achievers to progress at a more rapid rate. Teachers of gifted and talented classes are particularly upset at the idea of ending academic ability grouping. A defender of ability grouping, Peter D. Rosenstein, the executive director of the National Association of Gifted Children, worries that it has become "politically correct to deny that there are different potentials among children." Supporters might be correct that there are different academic potentials among children, but the reality is that tracking and ability grouping are frequently used as a means of discrimination.

### RESISTANCE

As educational philosopher Henry Giroux argues, most educational studies assume that students are nonresistant recipients of instruction and that they can be easily managed by the school. Certainly, arguments that schools simply reproduce the social-class structure create an image of submissive students being molded for their place in society. Even the more-effective-schools movement assumes that students can be easily managed to achieve higher test scores. But any teacher will tell you that students are not that easily controlled and manipulated. Many students balk at following instructions, and they go out of their way to make life difficult for teachers. Students have an agenda regarding life that might have little to do with the goals of the school.

Giroux contends that students often resist the plans made by teachers and school administrators. In this case, resistance means the culture developed among students to oppose the goals of teachers and the schools. The pioneer study of this phenomenon is Paul Willis's *Learning to Labour*. Willis studied a group of students from working-class backgrounds who attended an all-male comprehensive high school in an industrial area of England. These students learned to manipulate the environment of the school to make sure that they would have a good time. They created a peer culture that was antischool. Their culture differed sharply from what they called the "ear-oles." The ear-oles—students who appeared to do nothing but sit and listen in school—represent the

student who conforms to the authority and the expectations of the school. The working-class students resented both the ear-oles and the authority of the school. They felt that the school was out of touch with real life and had little relationship with the male working-class world that they came from and expected to enter as adults. They took every opportunity to play pranks on school officials, teachers, and ear-oles. Their culture was a rejection of hopes for upward mobility through schooling and the values of schooling and learning.

Ironically, Willis portrays this antischool culture as preparation for the generalized labor force the students will be entering. The pranks they play in school are similar to the pranks they will later play on the shop floor. The peer culture they develop is similar to the culture of their fathers at work and the culture they will experience when they enter the workforce. This interpretation provides a more complex picture of the interaction between family background and the school. The students create an antischool culture that plays a determining role in ensuring the perpetuation of their working-class status. In Willis's account, the school is not the villain that takes account of family background to reproduce existing social classes. Rather, the culture of the school comes into conflict with the culture of the students.

The antischool culture that developed among these students was not in their best interests. The school did hold out the opportunity for them to gain an education and improve their status in life. In addition, the student culture described in Willis's study is sexist and racist. Given these facts, the notion of an antischool culture should not be romanticized as something to protect.

On the other hand, students do resist school programs that they know are not working in their interests. Some students develop an antischool culture when they note that the real benefits of schooling seem to go to students in the upper-curriculum tracks and ability groups. Often, this resistance is exhibited as a general defiance of school authority. In addition, many students develop a sense of rage as they witness their life's chances slipping away. Rage turns to anger, and anger sometimes results in physical violence.

Within this framework, the key to improving the schools for the children of the poor is to understand that school learning is really a function of the interaction between student culture and the school's intentions. Students at many times have reasons for feeling oppressed. Consequently, educational change should be a product of a dialogue between students and school authorities. This dialogue might result in the school adjusting to the culture of students and students adjusting to the culture of the school. One might argue that this is the method for ensuring that the school provides equality of opportunity.

In *Theory of Resistance: A Pedagogy for the Opposition* and his many other writings, Henry Giroux argues that student resistance can be the vehicle for developing an educational method that will empower students and teachers to transform society. I do not have room in this book to cover Giroux's arguments in any depth, but at the end of Chapter 10 there is a brief discussion of critical theory that forms the framework for Giroux's argument. Critical theory suggests that by itself education can never provide equality of opportunity. Not only may the pursuit of equality of opportunity through schooling be a false

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hope, but it may also distract people from the real issues. It could be that equality of opportunity depends on concrete economic changes in society.

### PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

"Thirty years of research tells us that the starting point of American education is parent expectations and parental involvement with their children's education, regardless of their station in life, their income level or their educational background," Secretary of Education Richard Riley told the National Press Club in a speech on September 7, 1994, launching a major federal effort to involve families in education. Educators have argued since the nineteenth century that one of the keys to breaking down social-class differences in education is educating the family about how they can help their children learn.

Riley based his argument for parental involvement on a study that found that 90 percent of the difference between high and low eighth grade math test scores could be explained by factors within the control of a student's family. These factors were student absenteeism, the variety of reading materials in the home, and excessive television viewing. He also cited studies showing that the single most important factor in a child's eventual success in reading was being read to aloud in early childhood. In other words, the difference between success and failure in reading is often a result of whether family members read books aloud to a student at a young age. Riley suggested that television be limited to two hours a night "even if that means that the remote control may have to disappear on occasion." He urged parents to check their children's homework and to set high expectations.

In Washington, D.C., a coalition led by Jesse Jackson asked parents to sign pledges to take their children to school the first day, meet with teachers, pick up report cards, and turn off the television for three hours a night. Also, the Education Department formed a 45-member National Coalition for Parental Involvement in Education to make family participation a top national goal. Working with this coalition is the national PTA, the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, the National Alliance of Businesses, and the U.S. Catholic Conference. Whether the effort for increasing parental involvement will break down social-class differences in education will be determined in the future. In the next chapter, I explore the question of equality of education versus social transformation in the context of issues related to gender, ethnicity, and race. Related to this question and set of issues is the problem of equal educational opportunity.

### CONCLUSION

Can schools provide equality of opportunity? Or does equality of opportunity depend on economic circumstances outside the power of the school? Does the school reduce social differences or heighten them through ability grouping, tracking, teacher expectations, counseling, and inequalities in school financing?

Will the equalizing of school finances ensure an equal education for children from all social classes? These questions reflect the major problems confronting a public school system that professes equal educational opportunity and tries to provide an education that will guarantee equality of opportunity.

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