“American Education.” Joel Spring: Chapter 3 – Education and Equality of Opportunity

This chapter discussed the original intention of American schools to create equality of opportunity for all children. However, this has not been accomplished at all, in fact, it seems that the school system is currently doing just the opposite by providing a better education to privileged children. While it might be easy for the school system to plead ignorance, Spring outlines several studies that show the inadequacy of the school system to create equality.

One statistic that really stood out to me was that the biggest risk factor for not graduating high school was being held back in elementary or middle school (Spring, 2013). To me, this statistic truly highlights the idea that it you can’t change a child to fit his/her education, instead, you have to adapt for the student to learn and grow. On the other hand, I know there are likely several other factors impacting this statistic, such as coming from a low-SES background.

Last year, I worked at a rural elementary school in which most students were low-SES. This year, I work at a middle school in Corvallis that is very high ranking (see <http://www.schooldigger.com/go/OR/schools/0348000033/school.aspx>). Although, in my position, I mostly work with the less-privileged students, Cheldelin serves a student population that is mostly very privileged. It’s interesting to compare the two schools. One huge difference I’ve noticed is the authoritarian style of Cheldelin staff, compared to the authoritative style in my previous school. In my last school, there was a major focus on obedience and following the (sometimes trivial) school rules. For example, the students were to always walk on the third tile from the wall in the hallways. It’s interesting to consider the implications this leadership style can have on children.

Oprah’s interviews with youth who visit each other’s schools

This clip contrasted two schools—one from the suburbs, and one from a less affluent area of Chicago. The differences were striking. The suburban school had better facilities, higher test scores, and more rigorous classes. The students for the less-privileged school were less likely to live up to their ambitions because they would be going into college so much less prepared than their counterparts in the suburbs. It was especially sad to see the girl from the less-achieving school sit in on a trigonometry class. She was very high achieving in this subject at her previous school, but could hardly follow the instructor at the richer school. That is so unfair! I share Jess’ sentiment of anger at the inequity! I also noticed the jail-like atmosphere at the less-prestigious school. Instead of being trained to have successful careers in the future, these students are learning the structure of institutionalizations such as jail. I wonder what influence this structure has on the students’ expectations for their own future. What is the unspoken message being sent to less privileged students?

Washington Post Animated Map of the growth of income inequality in the U.S.:

This map was shocking! Inequality is everywhere, and at shocking levels. The two reasons for this inequality were business income and capital income being unequally distributed. This ties into Springs’ discussion of how outsourcing puts low-income kids at risk, because the positions the historically have held are going to other countries. How are we going to solve this problem? I know that the education system needs to change so that all individuals can compete, but there are always going to be classes in a capitalistic society. What are the low-class jobs going to be? How will we create enough of them, when they are rapidly being outsourced? This scares me!