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Links Between Education and Crime: A Critical Perspective

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Links Between Education and
Crime:
A Critical Perspective

Sociology Honors Paper
By: Dennis Forleo
December 3, 1997

American primary and secondary educational institutions were developed in order to give people a basic knowledge of the things that they need to know so that they can become contributing members of this society. In our high-tech, urbanized society, education is a socially valued institution that is supported by our tax dollars. Our society reinforces the notion that everyone should have at least a high school education if they even want to begin to climb the ladder of financial success. The National Education Association (NEA) "believes that all Americans have a basic right to access to free public education" (<http://www.nea.org/he/policy.html>). Recently, President Clinton gave a speech in which he said that the standard educational level for Americans should be two years of college.

I believe that a lack of an education can be detrimental to a person's economic status. In fact, I think this can be a factor that contributes to crime, one which has both structural and cultural elements. "Research has consistently shown that students who fail academically (for any reason)

and/or occupy the lowest status positions in school, exhibit the highest rates of youth crime" (Messerschmidt 1993). The *New York Times* ran an interesting article at the end of last year called "Fighting Crime with Education." The anonymous article said that a key predictor of youthful criminal behavior is failure in school. To support this idea, it gave the results of a 1991 Justice Department survey that said that only 22 percent of all state prisoners had graduated high school. In addition, only 12 percent of them had been to college (New York Times 12/1/96).

In this paper, I will investigate the correlation between educational philosophy, educational attainment, the drop out rate and crime. I suggest that insufficiencies in funding and the current educational philosophy leads to practices that increase the likelihood of dropout, and that dropping out is related to the commission of crime. I understand that there is much more to this topic than I will be addressing here, for example, adult re-education and continuing education, correctional education, and other such types of post-adolescent educational programs. So to cover an area that deals with the greatest number of students, but does not get too broad in scope, I will focus this paper on public education.

First of all, I think that public education has some financial problems that are keeping it from effectively doing what it says it is supposed to do. Next, I will look at two theorists who describe the philosophical basis of how our contemporary educational system works and how it leads to problematic practices. I will show, theoretically how these financial and practical

problems relate to the drop out rate in our country. Following this, I will show that a person that dropped out of school is more likely to engage in criminal activity. The final section of this paper tries to find some possible solutions to change education as we know it today to make it better equipped to keep our youth in school and teach them the things they need to know so they can find avenues of success in the legitimate opportunity structure.

The Promise of Education

As the achievement ideology propagated in school implies, education is viewed as the remedy for the problem of social inequality; schooling makes the race for prestigious jobs and wealth an even one.

-Jay MacLeod

In our society, we assume that with a better education a person's opportunities are greatly expanded in the job marketplace. With some exceptions, like professional athletes and entertainers, the highest paying jobs in our society are the ones that require the most education. Padilla (1993) briefly talks about this in *The Gang as an American Enterprise*, where he says,

Participation in the more permanent, high-salaried occupations... calls for individuals who have attained high levels of education and/or training--mastery that minority residents have not developed because of the historic denial of educational equality. (p.38)

The key word here is "equality." "Equality of education assumes the existence of a curriculum, within which to seek that equality" (Secada 1989: 82). My concern is that we do not very often achieve equality in our public schools.

Schools were created in order to give all of our young people the basic skills they need to give them the chance to make the best of themselves in the legitimate opportunity structure. By legitimate opportunity structure, I mean those sectors of the job market that are not illegal. In the book, *On Equality of Educational Opportunity* (1972), William Faulkner stated,

There is no such thing as equality, per se, but only equality to: equal right and opportunity to make the best one can of one's life within one's capacity and capability, without fear of oppression or violence. (p.7)

In terms of equality of opportunity, what we are really dealing with here is equal access to avenues of social mobility. These avenues can be such things as: availability of computers, proficiency in the English language, and learning the basic skills to be able to prepare for standardized tests and other measurements of students. These measurements determine, from a young age, the availability of opportunities that young people will have to further their job marketability.

It is my belief that these opportunities in schools are not being provided because of insufficiencies in the system. Richard Lawrence (1998) draws upon the work of Schafer and Polk (1972), and lists school conditions that contribute to educational failure and juvenile delinquency. The list includes:

- Belief in limited potential of disadvantaged pupils
- Irrelevant instruction
- Inappropriate teaching methods
- Testing, grouping and "tracking"
- Inferior teachers and facilities in low-income schools
- School-community distance
- Economic and racial segregation

Some of these insufficiencies are the same as those I believe to be important, particularly tracking and economic segregation. I am going to begin by discussing a problem that Lawrence does not mention outright, but implies throughout his entire list. The first insufficiency, as I call them, that I will talk about is funding.

Funding as an Insufficiency of Public Education

Educational opportunities in this country differ from school district to school district. This is in part because of the unequal distribution of monetary funds to some districts based on tax structures. Our local property tax dollars are distributed amongst the school districts in which we live and are for the most part, their largest source of income. When I talk about low income families and low income schools, this is the connection. For the most part, family income determines where a family has choices to live. Families that have low income usually have to live in neighborhoods that have low rent because they can not afford to live in high rent neighborhoods. These low rent neighborhoods have lower property value and hence, lower property taxes. Since these taxes are the main source of funding for most districts, low rent neighborhoods generally have low income schools.

These regional financial differences among families are important because they can be used to predict the effectiveness and drop out rate of their

school district. Russell Rumberger (1995), of the University of California at Santa Barbara, published a study on factors involved in the prediction of drop outs in *The American Educational Research Journal*. "Rumberger found that students in schools whose students had high socioeconomic status had lower odds of dropping out even when individual SES was statistically controlled" (Bracey 1996). For clarification, this means that school districts with students that have high family socioeconomic status, consequently would have a higher income because of the increase of property taxes amassed from the high-income neighborhood in which the youths live.

Seeing the financial differences in school funding, youngsters in poor inner-city schools can not get the same type of education as youths in suburban schools because the curriculum of most schools is based on their resources. Higher income school districts curriculum are usually geared toward college entrance and middle/upper-middle class job placement. Whereas in poorer districts, the curriculum might be based on vocational education or other "non-college" directed programs. Stemming from this, GPA's and standardized test scores that are used for college entrance (hence upward mobility) are generally lower in these areas as well. The following table shows this difference:

National income levels per family	Mean SAT Verbal	Mean SAT Math	Mean SAT Total
less than \$10,000/year	428	448	873
\$10,000 - \$20,000/year	454	464	918
\$20,000 - \$30,000/year	480	492	972
\$30,000 - \$40,000/year	496	497	993
\$40,000 - \$50,000/year	507	508	1015
\$50,000 - \$60,000/year	515	518	1033
\$60,000 - \$70,000/year	522	526	1048
\$80,000 - \$100,000/year	540	544	1084
more than \$100,000/year	559	571	1130

source: <http://fiartest.org/satcr97.htm>

We see here that income levels of families affect the SAT scores of their children. Poorer families (who pay less rent on cheaper property, the tax for which goes to schools in their district for resources) have children who go to poorer schools that do not have the resources to help them score as well on the SAT. The people who make more money can afford to live in a “better” neighborhood, that has better funded schools that use some of this funding for resources to help their children do better on the SAT.

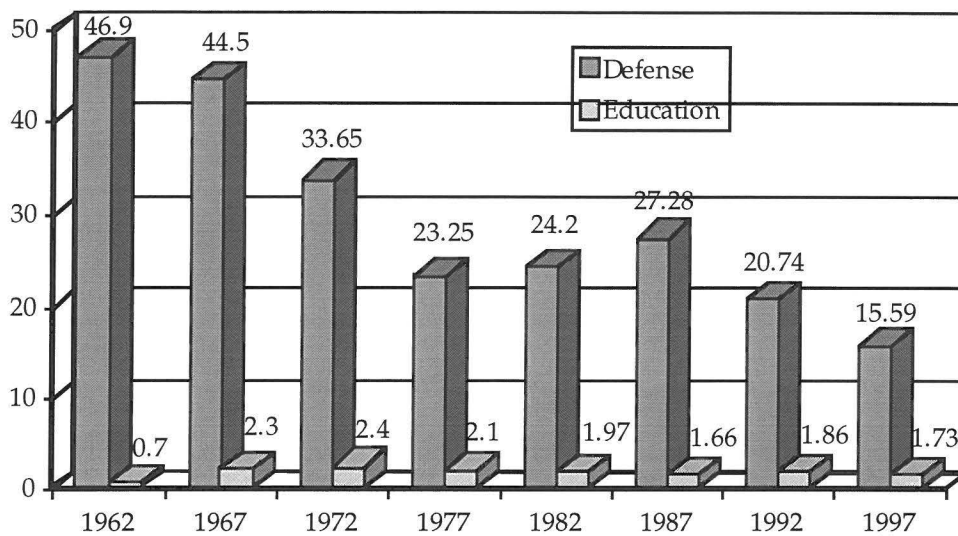
Since these academic ability markers are widely used for college entrance and job placement, youths from academically “deprived” areas are at a disadvantage when they try to enter either the legitimate job market or avenues of higher education. The wealthier, “college bound” district, in most regions is considered “more academically effective” than other types of educational programs that do not share the same direction and goals.

To make these avenues of mobility available to all requires money. Therein lies the crux of the problem. As mentioned before, higher income neighborhoods have higher property taxes which gives their school districts

more capital to make opportunities available. As a result, poorer neighborhoods are unable to fund their school districts with enough money to make these programs available to their youth. "Even today there are school districts without enough money to buy new books, let alone computers" (Marx & Grauer 1996). Seeing this, we have good evidence to show a correlation between a well-funded education and future success.

National funding even more clearly shows the minimal investment our country is willing to make in our children's futures. In addition to local property taxes, some federal funds are also distributed among school districts. However, the Department of Defense received almost 267 billion dollars (25.84%) of the federal budget in 1996, in comparison to the Department of Education which received almost 32 billion dollars, 3.13% of it (<http://ibert.org/civix.html>). The most disturbing fact is that until recently, each year we have been spending less on education. From 1979 until 1996, the percentage of federal expenditures on education has fallen from 9.8% (Aaron & Schultze 1992) to the 3.13% cited earlier. These numbers for education are skewed because of what is included in the budget category for education. Training, employment and social services are often put into the same budgetary category as education. The following table examines the numbers again, but this time, not including these other categories.

Percentage of Expenditures for the Federal Budget from 1962 to 1997



Source: Historical Tables: Budget of the United States Government; Fiscal Year 1998

You can see that the percentage for spending has seen an overall decline in both categories since 1967. But the larger reason for using this chart is to show the relationship between the amount of money that the Department of Education receives in comparison to the entire budget (1.73%). To bring it a little closer to home, let's say that I make \$30,000 in 1997. Only \$519 of it would go toward my child's education (to last the whole year) if I had the same budgetary commitment as the federal government has to public education.

Another cause of the difference in educational experiences in public schools, which is again highly related to funding, is student access to well-trained teachers. Iris Rotberg and James Harvey said,

More often than not, the 'best' teachers, including experienced teachers offered greater choice in school assignment because of their seniority, avoid high-poverty schools. As a result, low-income and minority students have less contact with the best-qualified and more experienced teachers, the teachers most likely to master the kinds of instructional strategies considered effective for all students. (Wilson; 1996)

William Wilson (1996: 212) pointed to four key aspects that led to school environments not being conducive to learning: the shortage of qualified teachers, material resources, the lack of “engaging activities” that teachers use in the classroom, and far less “exposure to good training and knowledge in mathematics and science.” As I have shown, minimal funding negatively effects the opportunities we give our youth to do well in school.

How does this minimal funding translate into how youths perceive the value of their education? Funding of a school determines its resources and hence, curriculum. So what a child learns, or has the opportunity to learn, is related to funding. According to Richard Lawrence (1998), most kids want to learn but they often do not see what they learn as relevant to their success. A study in 1974 by anthropologist John Ogbu, in discussing children that were not seen as deviant, found that they “were acquiring the belief that schooling was of no use because it would not open up the opportunities that good school performance ought to” (Elkin & Handel 1989). Our kids are losing their aspirations for school achievement.

In *Masculinities and Crime*, Messerschmidt notes that youths from poorer areas are the least likely of all children to see a connection between schooling and occupational success (1993: 104). He quoted another study that said among “lower-working-class, racial minority youth, ‘school is perceived as unrelated to future success; as a result, they see little reason to conform to the demands of the school environment’” (104). In comparison, white, middle-class youth believe their future chances depend on school success and

therefore internalize its values and garner the privileges it offers - access to higher education and a professional career (95). This obvious class division shows that the economic reality of society is reflected in lower class youths perceptions of their place in society.

So, from all of this, it seems that a well-funded education decreases the likelihood that a student would drop out of school. More and better opportunities, such as, advanced curriculum, better teachers, and higher resulting academic ability test scores all are a result of a well-funded education. The lack of these things magnifies class divisions between students and perpetuates their differences. The next section looks at this country's current educational philosophy to see that funding is not our only problem.

Philosophy as an Insufficiency of Public Education

No sophisticated educational theory has overlooked the fact that schools prepare youth for economic life.

Samuel Bowles & Herbert Gintis
in Schooling in Capitalist America (1976: 68)

...as part of its economic role, education serves as a screening mechanism: regardless of what they have learned, persons who successfully negotiate the education system have demonstrated that they have certain talents, useful in the business world, in dealing with institutions, individuals, and problems.

(Hanson and Meyerson 1990; 51)

Before getting into the philosophical model of education, we must first look at education in light of the possibility that the insufficiencies are by

design. MacLeod (1987) points out that certain structures in this country, including education, serve not only to maintain, but reproduce social and economic structures of power, all the while paying lip service to equality. Throughout chapter two of MacLeod's book, *Ain't no Makin' it*, he discusses different theories of social reproduction. He discusses Bowles and Gintis, who argue that the structure of education: 1) produces reserves of skilled labor; 2) legitimizes the "technocratic-meritocratic" perspective; 3) accentuates the separation of workers into stratified status groups; and 4) familiarizes young people to the social relationships of dominance and subordination in our economic system (Bowles & Gintis 1976: 56).

MacLeod also notes that "schools serving working-class neighborhoods are more regimented and emphasize rules and behavioral control. In contrast, suburban schools offer more open classrooms that 'favor greater student participation, less direct supervision, more student electives, and, in general, a value system stressing internalized standards of control'" (12-13). So the essence of education is to reproduce systems of privilege and power.

On one hand, employers and other social elites have sought to use the schools for the legitimation of inequality through an ostensibly meritocratic and rational mechanism for allocating individuals to economic positions; they have sought to use the schools for the reproduction of profitable types of worker consciousness and behavior through a correspondence between the social relationships of education and those of economic life. (Bowles and Gintis; p. 101)

This "reproduction of profitable types" is best accomplished through the use of certain practices that encourage stratification of groups based on merit and controllability. These practices are embodied in the current traditional philosophical model of education.

George Ritzer (1996) made an interesting analogy of this model in his book, *The McDonaldization of Society*. He uses Weber's "iron cage" critique in his notion that our education systems have become part of a broader process of rationalization that restricts human action. Calculability, predictability, control and efficiency are the four dimensions involved in rationalization and are shown most effectively, by Ritzer, in the working principles of McDonald's. Over the past two or three decades, our education systems have demonstrated all of these concepts. I will go over them briefly, one by one.

Calculability: There is an increasing focus in our schools to "herd" as many students through the system emphasizing grades and test scores without regard to the quality of their educational experience (Ritzer 1996: 64-68). As long as they show up to class, most students can expect to pass.

Predictability: In comparing colleges and universities, lower division classes of the same subject are strikingly similar. They use very comparable texts and are structured in similar fashion (86,87). Students can know what to expect from a class, or a teacher, in advance.

Control: From kindergarten through high school, students are taught to obey and not question the teaching of their instructors. "Students are taught not only to obey authority, but also to embrace the rationalized procedures of rote learning and objective testing" (106).

Efficiency: With the advent of multiple choice tests (and now, ready made tests), teachers have been able to save enormous amounts of time grading and even sometimes making up test questions (42,43).

This process of the rationalization of education (rational being the increase of technical efficiency) is becoming more popular as more of our children are told they should pursue an education, even beyond high school. It is interesting to look at how this system of education can affect grades of different students. Everything about this system is quantifiable and controllable. It can not, and does not show qualitative differences between students. Some students are better with lectures and multiple choice tests than discussions and essays. The converse is also true. This system seems to lend itself to a particular type of student. It is possible to assume then, that some students fail classes and even sometimes drop out, in part, as a result of this incompatibility of learning styles.

Paulo Freire (1981) describes this type of educational philosophy in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* as what he called the banking concept of education. He sees this as the embodiment of most of our public education systems today. Knowledge, in this system, is a gift given by the people that consider themselves "knowledgeable" to those whom they consider to know less or nothing. Students are mere containers (depositories) to be filled by the teacher. "The more completely he fills the receptacles, the better teacher he is. The more meekly the receptacles permit themselves to be filled, the better

students they are" (Freire 1981: 58). This is a direct parallel to Ritzer's explanation of current educational practices.

The philosophy of education that Ritzer and Freire are describing is well adapted to providing all the things Bowles and Gintis said were needed in education. Advancement based on merit, stratification of groups, and an understanding of the power structure are all accomplished through practices based in this philosophical perspective.

Practices Stemming from this Philosophy

I am going to focus on two main practices in our schools that stem from the traditional philosophy discussed above that are correlated with the drop out rate. They concern how teachers handle a wide diversity of students. Academic tracking is one of these policies. Tracking was developed to try to accommodate the growing number and diversity of students. It is the practice of assigning students to different programs of study based on past achievement and teacher/counselor evaluations. It is the teachers and counselors that most frequently put students in their track assignment. Most high schools offer many different "tracks," but the two most common are college preparatory and non-college (vocational). Students from different tracks usually do not take the same classes together. Schools use these tracks

to let the students work at their own pace and for their own interests (Cobb 1995).

Robert Slavin, director of the elementary school program in the Center for Effective Schooling for Disadvantaged Students at Johns Hopkins University, and Jomills Braddock III, professor and chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Miami, (1993) wrote, "Arguments in favor of ability grouping depend entirely on the assertion that grouping is necessary to meet the differing needs of children of different performance levels, especially those of higher achievers" (11,12)

Studies have shown that tracking is not helping our schools in the ways that it was designed to. In fact, it is contributing to racial inequalities, alienation from school and increased drop out rates (Snow 1986). Lower income and minority students are much more frequently put in non-college than in college tracks (Page 1990). Gamoran and Mare (1989) looked at a national sample of over 10,000 high school students and found that students assigned to lower tracks do not do as well and are more likely to drop out of high school. They also found that over 50% of the difference in graduation rates between the tracks could be explained by their track assignment.

Oakes (1985) found that "these and similar data strongly suggest that the practice of tracking adversely affects students who are assigned to lower tracks" (Cobb 1995: 42). Assignment to lower tracks makes it more likely that these students will work toward lower goals, proceed at a slower pace, have fewer opportunities to learn, and achieve less than students in higher tracks.

The concept here is one of a *self-fulfilling prophecy*, in which “if people act on the basis of a given definition of a situation, there is some likelihood that their actions will bring about conditions that confirm the definition on which they have acted, even if circumstances were not originally as they thought them to be” (Hewitt 1997).

“Shafer, Olexa, and Polk (1972) conclude that tracking ‘independently contributes to resentment, frustration, and hostility, finally ending in active withdrawal from the alienating situation or school’(p.42)”(Cobb 1995). The creation of such frustrations and hostilities is the negative side of tracking. Thus, public education is not always a welcoming place for all students.

In schools that practice tracking, those in authority (i.e., teachers, administrators) are more likely to negatively label the students in the lower tracks based on their track, thereby further emphasizing this tracking process. Labeling is the other problematic practice of public education because it is the personal application of the tracking system on to the students by their interaction with those in power.

Labeling in our schools creates a “good student” vs. “bad student” sorting process. Labeling theory has its theoretical roots in Cooley's concept of the “looking-glass self.” Basically, he said that a person’s self concept and identity are reflections of their interpretation of other people's reactions to their actions and conduct (Bynum & Thompson 1996). A person becomes the thing he or she is described to be.

Labeling in educational institutions is a very common practice. It helps teachers differentiate the “troublemakers” from the “average” students and from the “bright” ones. Labeled students have certain unspoken expectations placed on them by their teacher which makes the quality of teaching different, in addition to what is taught (Page 1990). Results of studies on this topic have concluded that students with higher expectations placed on them achieved more academically than those with lower expectations (Elkin & Handel 1989).

These kinds of procedures in our schools have consequences for individuals throughout their lives. Both tracking and labeling increase the plausibility that kids who start out with disadvantages only have them magnified by the system. For many students, school becomes a hostile place in which they do not feel comfortable or welcome. So in order to cope with this, some students choose to remove themselves from this unwelcome situation and drop out of school.

Dropping Out and Crime

The “traditional” philosophy used in most public schools today leads to practices that segregate and alienate certain students. In studies mentioned earlier, these practices have been found to correlate with a high drop out rate. Dropping out and/or not being in school is a factor in the likelihood that the dropout may turn to crime or other delinquent activity. Thornberry, Moore

and Christenson (1985) found that dropping out does in fact have a positive correlative impact on criminal involvement. According to a recent *New York Times* article, 66% of all state prisoners dropped out before they completed high school (New York Times 12/1/96). Farrington *et al.* (1986) discovered that criminal involvement increases after dropping out if the youth were unemployed (Lawrence 1998). But, "more is learned about the dropout-delinquency relationship by considering the differences based on reasons for leaving" (Jaroura 1993).

Many theories over the past half of a century have tried to examine and explain why youths dropout. "Strain theory," as theorized by Cohen (1955), noted that working-class youths, in trying to meet middle-class standards, grow frustrated with their experiences in school. Cloward and Ohlin (1960) suggest that the lack of equal opportunities to achieve educational and occupational goals caused these frustrations. Elliott and Voss (1974) said that failure in school leads to alienation from school and association with other dropouts. "Although there is not total agreement on the exact nature of the causal relationship between delinquency and dropout, it is clear that the two are associated" (Lawrence 1998).

Hirschi (1969) said that youths with weak bonds to social institutions (like school) are more likely to become delinquent, whereas youths that have high educational aspirations, and get involved in school, are less likely to be involved in delinquent behavior. Jay MacLeod's landmark study of

educational aspirations of low income youths seems to support Hirschi's theory.

In *Ain't no Makin' it* (1987), MacLeod finds that the Brothers aspirations for education and jobs are high because they see an open opportunity structure, yet most do not achieve their dreams and goals for themselves. The Brothers, unlike the Hallway Hangers, have both high aspirations and high expectations. The Hangers, on the other hand, have aspirations but lack high expectations because they understand their place in the system. From the beginning they saw a much more closed opportunity structure. As for school involvement, the Brothers were fully connected and involved, respecting standards, their teachers, and other school officials (91), while most of Hangers have dropped out (96). The Hangers were also involved in much more criminal activity than the Brothers.

The point that MacLeod is trying to make here is that those who are connected to and understand the system best, often fail at it. When some find that they can not conform to cultural standards, they develop a subculture, in this case, one that involves delinquent behavior, in order to create an alternative source of self affirmation.

This would affirm Hirschi's assumption that youth with weak bonds to school (the Hallway Hangers) are more likely to become involved with delinquent activity. Also, it proved that youth with strong bonds to school (the Brothers) were less likely to engage in delinquent behavior.

I have shown that current philosophical trends lead to school practices that are related to a high drop out rate and the drop out rate is an important variable among those individuals who commit crimes. So how do we intervene in this correlation?

Solutions

...we c[an] not hope for real educational improvement while leaving the basic structure of the schools untouched.

- Lauro Cavazos, Secretary of Education under
President George Bush in 1989 (Wirth 1992; 98)

There are many possibilities that could be used to remedy this situation, although granted current political framework, there are few that could be actually put into practice. It is not the purpose of this section to explain proposals that are widely well-received and pragmatic, but to offer some possibilities of what "should" be done to create the desired outcome (Wilson 1996).

At first glance, it would seem the first and most helpful approach would be to change educational philosophies. Current economic structure and capitalist development in this country is unstable because we are in the middle of an age of transition and change. Although workers for jobs that require high technical efficiency are in greater demand, this country has been described by many to be in transition from industrialist to a service economy; one in which information management is crucial. In this service economy,

the need for well educated workers with strong critical thinking skills is even being voiced in the corporate sector. "A viable work force depends on having employees who have strong number and literacy skills - and above all the ability to learn, to think abstractly and contextually, and to collaborate in problem solving" (Wirth 1992; 42).

Robert Reich (1991), in *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for 21st Century Capitalism*, argues that new skills for work and learning are now required. Such things as abstraction, system thinking, experimental inquiry, and collaboration are skills that today's work force must have in order to succeed (Wirth 1992: 185). The current educational philosophy does not provide for any of these skills.

As mentioned earlier, a Freirean approach would revolutionize education as we know it today, I believe for the better. Freire sees many problems with today's system of education. Students in these systems are more passive and do not develop a strong critical consciousness with which they could transform their world. There is no partnership between the educator and the student, hence the educator's role is to regulate what gets deposited. Finally, this way assumes a dichotomy between humans and the world.

...man is merely *in* the world, not *with* the world or with others; man is spectator, not re-creator. In this view, man is not a conscious being (*corpo consciente*); he is rather the possessor of a consciousness: an empty 'mind' passively open to the reception of deposits... (Freire 1981: 62)

He suggests the need for widespread educational reform, but in contrast to the banking concept of education, the other type of education he calls

problem-posing education. He states that this liberating concept is all about cognition and creativity, not just the transfer of information. It entails the constant uncovering of reality and “strives for the emergence of a consciousness and critical intervention in reality” (68). It stirs people toward true reflection and action on reality. So people are authentic beings only when practicing “inquiry and creative transformation.” It also sees people and reality as unfinished; in the process of becoming which means the character of education must be ongoing and changeable.

In *Freire for the Classroom*, Ira Shor (1987) describes this philosophy as “participatory, critical, values-oriented, multicultural, student-centered, experimental, research-minded, and interdisciplinary”(22). He goes on to propose a Freirean plan for education that includes: dialogue teaching, critical literacy, situated pedagogy, ethnography and cross-cultural communications, performing skills, being a change agent, and the study of inequality in school and society (23-26).

The advantage of this system is that education would be more relevant to the lives of the students, hence giving them more of a connection with the system. Education would be motivating because they would feel a connection between their education and their entry into society. It would also be empowering by helping them establish a consciousness of self and giving them a critical awareness of their situation. This kind of education that Freire is proposing is revolutionary in the sense that it would give students in public schools the skills they need to possibly change their lives and situation.

I propose that this type of education would be effective in changing some of those structural elements that lead to a high drop out rate.

This type of education can also be problematic for those who wish to maintain the status quo. It may create social revolution by threatening the power structure of the current public education system and society as a whole. Because of the critical nature of the "problem posing" type of education, it gives more latitude in developing and experiencing different educational situations. It can be a difficult situation for Mr. Smith, who has been teaching Calculus for the last thirty years to incorporate creative and critical concepts into his class. The relationship between students and teachers, and students and administrators would be transformed. The power structure of the schools would have to be severely altered if this system was to be enacted. It is for this reason that I do not believe that this alternative educational philosophy will replace the current one any time soon.

The second and other quite obvious approach would be to increase the amount of funding that our schools receive, whether from the local, state, or federal governments. This would, in turn, help schools provide better teachers and resources, and develop new curriculum and programs to increase overall student achievement and help students see the value of their education. Many of the current programs are geared toward dropout prevention. This is a problem "precisely because these programs do not change what students and teachers do every day, they have had little effect on student achievement and school completion" (Aaron & Schultze 1992: 195).

The advantages of an increase in funding are great, if the money is spent on the right things. As mentioned earlier, textbooks, computers, and other such educational aids are in great demand in some schools. Some of this money could also go toward the recruitment and training of talented teachers who would give high quality instruction for all students, including the disadvantaged and deviant (*ibid.*).

Educating the educators is a much talked about possible solution among current educational reformers. John Goodlad (1994) describes in great detail a center of pedagogy for the education of teachers in his book, *Educational Renewal*. He sees the need to reform not only our schools, but at the same time our teachers. William Wilson suggests that not only would teacher education programs need to be reformed, but also, the state government would have to,

...ensure that highly qualified teachers are distributed in local school districts in ways that provide all students access to excellent instruction. In some cases this would require greater flexibility in the public school system, not only to attract and hire qualified teachers, but also to displace those who perform poorly in the classroom and lack a dedication to teaching. (Wilson 1996: 212)

Following this, another approach would be to change the current practices of our educators and administrators. This approach does not require an increase in school funding, although more money can always help. The first step in this, I think, is to get rid of the academic tracking process of students, precisely because of the problems that it creates, as outlined earlier in this piece. Consequently, the practice of labeling students would be curtailed because the teachers would not have a structural basis to label them.

If labeling were to still occur, it would stem from more abstract attitudes and expectations of the students, not from their track assignment.

Some people might argue that tracking is in place here at the University of Redlands and other similar institutions that have different programs of study, for example, between the Johnston Center and CAS students. I disagree with this. Tracking is the practice of dividing students into separate classes, groups or schools so that those students can work at their own level and pace based on past achievement. But in tracking, students are *placed* in tracks by their teachers and/or counselors. Here, the students *get the choice* of whether or not they want to be a Johnston or CAS student. There is no choice of track assignment for the lower classes.

Parents' and citizens' involvement is another factor that might help, but is lacking in most school districts. Gene Maeroff (1982), found that "taxpayers are simply too willing to delegate all responsibility for the schools to the few people who are willing to take on the burden of school board service" (Lawrence 1998: 136). School administrators and teachers grumble over parents' apparent lack of interest and support for them in dealing with their child's attendance, performance and behavior problems. A lot of parents see education as the main responsibility of "paid professionals" and so are hesitant to become better involved. But to educators, parental and citizen involvement in school decisions and policies is not a desirable solution (Lawrence 1998: 136).

I would like to briefly go over why I do not suggest or advocate national performance standards for public schools. I believe these standards were developed with good intentions, that is "to remedy one of the identified shortcomings of educational policy: that schools and teachers do not know exactly what is expected of students, and thus, of them" (Hanushek 1994: 139). But creating these standards has produced two major problems. First, there is no trusted, or valid method to measure progress toward these standards. So even if we had them, we would not know how to see how we were doing. Second, going by national standards, "local districts will have no choice but to follow the national notions of what schools should be doing, instead of meeting standards laid down by local school boards and parents" (*ibid.*).

This second problem is at the core of many of the topics discussed in this piece. Students and teachers have no control over what is being taught, which can make both of them unhappy. Poor schools may not have the resources to help their students reach these standards. If they do, and this goes for all schools, actual student learning is relative. Studies have shown that students always learn more than what is tested, and they do not learn everything that is tested (Hancock & Kilpatrick 1993).

There are many other possibilities and solutions out there to this multifaceted problem, but remembering that "our society is structured to create poverty and extreme economic inequality..." and that "...there are simply not enough jobs to go around..." (MacLeod 1995: 238), it would seem that the structure of society needs to be altered if we are going to see a change.

I do not think that there is only one solution that would fix everything, mostly because the problem is so complex. I think the most effective solution for our country would be the Freirean one, yet it is not the most likely.

The most likely solution, or the one that I think would come about with the *least* amount of opposition, would be to change the current practices in schools that are leading to alienation and drop out. Tracking, reliance on standardized tests, national standards, and other meritocratic systems of evaluating students must be replaced with practices that encourage creativity, inquiry and reflection. This sounds a lot like Freire but without the social revolution. I would call it the incorporation of “degrees of Freire” into school policies. I think that the addition of certain parts of Freire’s educational system over time would be less repellent to those in power than changing the whole thing at once.

Whatever solution we choose, I think Richard Lawrence put it the best when he said,

There is room for improvement in American education. Educators can re-assess school structure and the educational process. We can develop more and better ways to assess students, what they need to know, and how best to teach them. We can develop better ways to use time, materials, and teaching methods. More collaboration with industry and business may help. More support from parents and community leaders would also help. Surely the future of our young people, and the future of our country deserve our best efforts in improving our education system. (Lawrence 1998: 138)

Conclusion

The reality of today's educational system is Ritzer's "McDonaldization" and the Freirean notion of the "banking concept", in that, students that are good "containers" do better than those who are not and consequently have more opportunities to do well. This difference in opportunity effects, as I talked about earlier, the levels of academic achievement between students. Those with greater availability of opportunity and higher academic achievement have more opportunity to go on and reach President Clinton's goal of a college education.

On the other hand, those with limited opportunity and poor levels of achievement have been shown to be more likely to drop out. Following this line, because those who drop out of school are more likely to become involved in delinquent or criminal activity, it can be reasoned that the banking style of education contributes to the crime rate in this country.

So to fix this problem, we must first figure out what the purpose of education should be in today's society. Do we want a system that fosters social reproduction of class and power, or are we looking for a system that might bring about social revolution. These are difficult questions, but they need to be answered if any meaningful solutions are going to be implemented. If change is wanted, the next thing we need to discuss is how badly we want it. Then, and only then, can we really do something about it.

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