

RETHINKING CRITICAL APPROACHES TO THE PERSISTENCE OF
INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION

Aaron Cooley

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Approved by:

Dr. Lynda Stone

Dr. Fenwick English

Dr. George Noblit

Dr. Hill Taylor

Dr. James Trier

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ABSTRACT

AARON COOLEY: Rethinking Critical Approaches to the Persistence of Inequality in
Education
(Under the direction of Lynda Stone)

In the decades since *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), critical educational scholarship has vigorously attempted to understand why educational inequality still persists. These approaches have been diverse, but they all maintain a substantial and passionate interest in making educational resources, opportunities, and outcomes better for all students. This dissertation attempts to address the complications within each of the traditions' conception of and attitude towards educational inequality and its persistence. As an alternative perspective, this dissertation offers the application of the writing of political philosopher Brian Barry as a theoretical framework. His work links to elements from each tradition to craft a perspective that attends to values of each approach; however, the proffered framework extends beyond the traditional boundaries to build a broader coalition for social justice and greater egalitarianism. Fundamentally, the thesis of this project is that the language, discourse, and politics of the dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship must find new ideologies, new ways of thinking, and new approaches to social action to advance the causes of their underlying values in order to effectively confront the cultural, economic, and political forces that seek to increase inequality in education and society.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

D'Angelo: Ya'll don't understand man. Ya'll don't get it. You grow up in this s*** . . . All my people, my father, my uncles, my cousins—it's just what we do. You just live with s*** until you can't breathe no more. I swear to God, I was courtside for eight months and I was freer in jail than I was at home.

Pearlman: What are you looking for?

D'Angelo: I want it to go away.

Pearlman: I can't...

D'Angelo: I want what Wallace wanted. I want to start over. That's what I want. I don't care where. Anywhere. I give a f***. I just want to go somewhere where I can breathe like regular folk. You give me that and I give you them.

Season 1 of *The Wire* (2002), Episode "Sentencing," Scene "A Way Out"

Richard: My neighborhood is mostly about drugs. For real, people out there doing drugs, sticking needles in their arms messing up their blood. I know I'm smart. If I'm not around stupid and dumb people. But, see, I can't let them get here [pointing to his temple]. Let them stay out there. And I don't want my brother, my baby brother anyway to grow up in no, no projects with no drug dealers. I don't want him to. But, you know, I'm strong. I'm a strong man. Like, uh, what's his name? Fredrick Douglass. I'm strong just like him. Tell you I'm strong. What I'm willing to do is get away from here. I can't wait until I go to Baraka.

The Boys of Baraka (2005), "Richard: 13 years old"

These are strange times. At no point in the past have the scale and scope of inequality in the United States been so glaringly apparent and has the information of inequality's growth and destructive elements been so widely available (Ansolabehere &

Snyder, 2008; Bartels, 2008; Bogle, 2005; Page & Simmons, 2000). For a relevant example, consider the mountains of evidence of the decline of one American city, like Baltimore, which has been detailed in fiction in *The Wire* (2002) and in the tragic documentary *The Boys of Baraka* (2005). The individuals represented in these epigraphs and the urban environment of Baltimore will serve as a reference point throughout this study. They will also provide a counter example to the idyllic educational opportunities offered by certain private schools such as St. Paul's, which are discussed later in the introduction. Consequently, it is necessary to further describe the conditions young people face growing up in these environments.

The Wire (2002) was a critically acclaimed HBO series that has been lauded as the best television program in the history of the medium. It has become the focus of numerous college courses and sparked academic debates germane to crime, drug policy, urban devastation, and education. The scene in which the first epigraph occurs is a story trajectory where D'Angelo has finally been caught in a drug conspiracy that involves his uncle, mother, and friends. What makes the scene and series remarkable is the way it conveys the embedded social complexity of life opportunities and choices that are provided to marginalized youth. Unlike numerous fictional representations and news accounts of the drug war that paint such problems in overly simplistic terms, *The Wire* displays the challenges faced by these youth and relays the lack of opportunities and choices that they often have in their lives. Instead of blaming these marginalized youth for their choices to lead such lives, the scene demonstrates that their hands can be tied in wanting to step out of the family business. Without adequate opportunities and support for such students to make positive choices, they are left to fend for themselves and to

attempt to survive any way they can. Further, this scene from season one foreshadows the extended attention that educational institutions and the broader community receive in season four. To sum, the first epigraph is meant to illustrate the difficulty marginalized young people often feel in the social environments in which they grow up, which is easily contrasted with students who attend elite schools.

The second epigraph is from the documentary film *The Boys of Baraka* (2005), which follows several young men from Baltimore who were selected to attend a boarding school program in Kenya. The program was established to provide a radically different set of opportunities for students who demonstrated that they were interested in changing their lives and committing themselves to their education. The epigraph poignantly opens the film and describes the rationale for why Richard sees this as an opportunity to get out of the environment that he worries is going to damage his future. Later, the perceived successes of the program are hampered as the school's future becomes uncertain with a bombing in a nearby area and increased U.S. military actions abroad. The underlying point in opening this study with these statements is to relay the gravity of the educational opportunities in the lives of young people and the absolute need to question the common sense assumptions and rhetoric that demonize those affected by inequality without seeking answers to why such inequality still exists.

It is important to now continue with a discussion of how these challenges encapsulated by the epigraphs materialize in the lives of young people. From an extraordinarily high murder rate to above average levels of unemployment, the dangers faced by young people are substantial, and the future careers to choose from are increasingly few. At the same time, there seems to be increasingly little that is even

attempted to be done about the growth of inequality in almost every area of social, economic, and political life (Ackerman, 2000; Page & Jacobs, 2009). The government and public endlessly read reports and watch news programs about the scourges of hunger, poverty, and homelessness; however, there is a continued failure to make progress on positively and substantively changing the equation between those who struggle and those who do not care that others are struggling (Allen, 2005; Salverda, Nolan, & Smeeding, 2009). Further, it seems that many people have little to no interest in trying to change the dire circumstances that separate and divide the populations of individuals in the United States (Alperovitz & Daly, 2008).

What should shock society into action when confronted by the images, stories, and data of these inequalities is now rationalized into the status quo through half-hearted policy prescriptions and is unfairly justified through political rhetoric (Shor, 1986). This failure is compounded by the mainstream media's faulty and paltry coverage of inequality, which does little to inform and less to educate the public about the underlying causes of these disparities. Further, the media propagates all manner of divisions in society and contributes to the blaming of victims of irresponsible economic and social policy for a lack of personal responsibility in their own lives (Bagdikian, 2002; Baker, 2007; Herman & Chomsky, 2002).

Nowhere in American life are these inequalities more apparent, abhorrent, and devastating to individuals' life outcomes than in the diverse educational institutions of this nation (Anyon, 2005). A simple comparison of St. Paul's in New Hampshire, one of the most elite private schools in the country that counts presidential candidates as alums (see also <http://www.sps.edu/>), with Harbor City High in Baltimore City, a public high

school ranked as one of Maryland's worst and one that D' Angelo or Richard could likely attend (see also <http://www.hclc.sailorsite.net/HarborCityHS.html>), demonstrates this concept. This comparison gives a stark picture of inequality that mirrors and helps to replicate the most insidious trends in our economic and political systems. It will be helpful to keep each of these schools, as well as D' Angelo and Richard, the young men in the opening quotes, in mind throughout this dissertation. If one falters in trying to sort out what educational inequality looks like in America, these examples will remind the reader of the disparity in the education that students receive. They serve as reminders that some children are born into families and communities where education can be encouraged in bucolic settings, such as Concord where St. Paul's is located; other children are confined to forgotten zones like Baltimore, often referred to as "Bodmore, Murdaland" by the young people who inhabit it. This comparison demonstrates that "the accident of birth," to use J.S. Mill's phrase (1873), still predominantly rules the day when it comes to social mobility and life outcomes (Kozol, 1992, 2005).

This dissertation argues that, at the most fundamental level, education and politics are inextricably intertwined and that political theory and educational theory must be connected in new ways that go beyond the existing boundaries upon which each field often draws. Fundamentally, the thesis of this dissertation is that the discourse of the dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship must find new ideologies, new ways of thinking, and new approaches to social action to advance the causes of their underlying values in order to effectively confront the cultural, economic, and political forces that seek to increase inequality in education and society. It is crucial to note that ideology is defined here as a perspective or worldview. This is in contrast to the orthodox

Marxist conception of ideology, which is often defined as not being able to see around one's class position and class interests. As the term is used throughout this study, the lighter conception of ideology is the one employed in the study.

Building from the sense of injustice that grows from a comparison of American schools, this dissertation seeks to better understand the theoretical responses that educational scholars and theorists have developed and used to confront and combat inequalities in the educational institutions. Brian Barry's (1961, 1966, 1981, 1990, 2002), the 2001 Johan Skytte Prize winning political theorist and former professor at the London School of Economics and Columbia University, egalitarian views of social justice are threaded throughout the dissertation. A brief discussion of the key elements of each of the chapters follows, along with the research questions and a statement about the contribution to the field.

Chapter Outlines, Delimitations, Research Questions, and Contribution to Field

Chapter Outlines

This introductory chapter outlines the structure of the dissertation and discusses each of the chapters. The chapter then lays an initial foundation for the study by considering the following themes: 1) the organic philosophical process of discovery that led to the selection of Brian Barry as the central theorist of this dissertation; 2) what is meant by a critical tradition in educational scholarship; 3) how Barry defines equality; and 4) a short historical discussion of the persistence of inequality in education.

The second chapter has two aims: 1) to analyze and discuss the state of educational inequality that presently exists in America and 2) to discuss the roots of these inequalities in public policy that have furthered their expansion via neoliberal ideologies.

Overall, the chapter draws on diverse sources to establish that inequalities in education have numerous negative consequences for students well beyond their school years. This connection is crucial to make as the following chapters discuss varying critical traditions that all agree that the educational system in the United States requires substantial reconceptualization and reconstruction to succeed in remedying these injustices.

The third chapter provides an introduction to the work of Brian Barry (1965/1990, 1973, 1989, 1999, 2005) as the theoretical underpinning for the dissertation. Until his recent death, Barry's work over the last 40 years displayed a passionate commitment to the reduction of entrenched power and unjust inequality in all forms. From his first major work *Political Argument* (1965/1990) to his *Why Social Justice Matters* (2005), he refused to allow political philosophy to wander aimlessly into ever more abstract and inaccessible technical discussions that forgot the point of thinking through political problems—to make people's lives better. Vittorio Bufacchi (2008), a political theorist at University College Cork, Ireland, puts Barry's role into the context of changes in the field: "analytical philosophy is done by specialists primarily for other specialists, a truth that leads Rorty to speculate whether Anglophone philosophy no longer has any relevance to anything else in the intellectual world" (p. 256). Bufacchi sees Barry's contribution as analogous to Rorty in that he energizes the importance of putting philosophy to work in the real world of lived experience. This is a critical point in understanding the role that Barry plays in the history of political philosophy.

Further, what Bufacchi is driving at is that there is risk in not seeing the larger picture or Socratic elements of political thought that must keep a connection to the politics of the societies one is discussing and analyzing. This is confirmed by Bufacchi as

he continues this line about the overspecialization of political philosophy and Barry's contrasting view: "The issues debated by professional political philosophers in specialized journals have become sophisticated to the point of alienating the non-initiated, being written by specialists for fellow specialists...there is the risk of missing the forest for the trees" (p. 256). This theme of political philosophy needing to remain relevant to politics is clearly important to Bufacchi, because it was important to Barry.

Bufacchi (2008) provides the following description of how Barry's work should be seen as providing a critical bridge from the debating theories of politics and government to the next step of having these discussions be meaningful for the governmental programs and initiatives that affect the lives of people: "political philosophy ought to strive for three main goals: to locate the nature of the social and political problems inflicting our societies; to set the agenda for future social policies; and to indicate solutions to these problems" (p. 262). This push for political philosophy to become more active and engaged with a public political conversation and discourse has been mirrored by a few other political philosophers such as Benjamin Barber (1984, 1992, 2007), Walt Whitman, Professor of Political Science Emeritus, of Rutgers University, and Michael Sandel (1982/1998, 1996, 2009) of Harvard University. However, it is far from the standard view, and it is one of the keys to what makes Barry's contribution so important, as well as why his views should be considered by critical educational theorists and activists. For Barry, political philosophizing is a waste of time unless the speculation is grounded in real world politics and geared towards contributing to the public dialogue on political issues. This critical connection will be made in this study between education and critical educational scholarship.

Barry's ideas accommodate many of the key values of the dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 (Class), Chapter 5 (Autonomy), and Chapter 6 (Identity). The focus of each of those chapters will be on elements of critical traditions, and Barry's work will be threaded through each of them. The aim of each chapter is to discuss the goals and values that each tradition holds and prioritizes, as well as the language used in their attempts to improve education through the advancement of their agendas. Each critical tradition has something significant and important to contribute to the educational discourse and conversation; yet, there are elements that can undercut the potency of their critique. Further, their theoretical insularity can make them inflexible to changing conservative political strategies that seek to block the reduction of educational inequality (Hess & LoGerfo, 2006; Hess & Lowe, 2007). Last, they all share a common modernist inclination and rhetorical structure.

The fourth chapter will discuss the work of individuals who appeal to the concept of class in seeking to understand and eliminate inequality in education and economic life. Of particular interest will be the reasons educational scholars began to use the work that drew upon classic class writers such as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (1848/1978). This move towards Marx and class-based analysis of educational inequality is one of the most consequential trends in the critical educational literature. In particular, the work of Michael Apple (1979/2004), Henry Giroux (2005), and Peter McLaren (2005) will be discussed.

The fifth chapter examines critical educational scholarship that theorizes about reducing and eliminating educational inequality through appeals to autonomy. This work

is the closest to Barry's training in the tradition of political liberalism. The discussion provided will explore the work of Harry Brighouse (1996, 2000, 2006), Eamon Callan (1997), and Rob Reich (2002). Although these scholars are usually not seen as a "critical" tradition, this dissertation holds them to the meaning of their texts, which all assert that the present educational institutions are producing far too many negative outcomes. Therefore, their perspectives, which seek to produce autonomy in students and allow them to have flourishing lives, are critical in a sense of the term—a perspective that critiques the status quo and offers strategies and a rationale for a better educational system in the future. More on this point of defining them as a critical tradition will be addressed in that chapter.

The sixth chapter analyzes the work of scholars who make appeals to identity in understanding and attempting to reduce educational inequality. Scholars who work in this area have brought to the forefront of the educational debate issues related to the biases inherent in American social life; these are biases that have had and continue to have deleterious consequences for groups and individuals on all matters of difference, including, but not limited to, those of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, religious affiliation, and disability. This work has made substantial progress in highlighting the prejudices that have hampered equal treatment for individuals based on identity in education and in social life. This work is particularly important as each of the above mentioned groups were excluded from majority educational institutions until the near present. Even when educational rights were granted, educational opportunities were not priorities and were drastically less than equal. In the wake of the numerous legal victories that have led to greater access, there has been a significant backlash against these groups,

which are often labeled carelessly as multiculturalist; disregarded as simply identity politics; or, worse, designated as an example of having to be “PC” or politically correct. Of special note in this area will be the work of Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009), Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007), Goodman (2001), and Cochran-Smith (2004).

The final chapter briefly speculates on what may happen if inequality continues to grow unabated without any intervention by the government or call to action by a coordinated social movement. After discussing these harmful trends, Barry’s (2005, 2008) work will be returned to directly. The argument for his work to be seen as a needed platform for critical responses to the endemic social problem of educational inequality will be advanced as his ideas are sensitive to the three appeals made in critical educational scholarship. Additionally, elements of the values that underlie these trends will be expanded as those views advance the cause of social justice in education and society.

Delimitations

Although the scope of this work is admittedly wide and intentionally broad to relay the interrelations between educational theory, political theory, and inequality, the study is delimited in the following ways. First, it is restricted to the traditions that are discussed. There are several more recent theoretical developments that will not be discussed directly. Second, as a conceptual work, this study does not directly move to policy reform. It is geared towards casting a critical eye upon where critical educational scholarship has come from and where it may need to head. The policy connections and political strategy are needed, but they must come in another work. Finally, this is only one view into how these traditions play out in the educational discourse. The positionality

of the author is that injustices of the present educational system are unjust. This assertion may be disagreed with or others may think the existing traditions do not require reassessment, but, in the author's view, action must be taken. The first step towards this type of action is understanding this underlying ethical commitment.

Research Questions

The central research question that this proposed dissertation investigates is: What elements in the work of Brian Barry are applicable and useful to understanding the persistence of educational inequality that also take into account ideas from the dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship?

Each of the chapters addresses a component of the overarching research question alongside each chapter's specific questions as listed below:

Chapter 2 – What does educational inequality look like in schools today and what are the economic factors and trends that have shaped the educational system over the last thirty years?

Chapter 3 – What can Brian Barry's work on meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity offer educational scholarship in understanding and confronting the persistence of educational inequality?

Chapter 4 – What are the elements of critical educational scholarship that appeal to class in understanding educational inequality and what aspects are at play in Barry's work?

Chapter 5 – What are the elements of critical educational scholarship that appeal to autonomy in understanding educational inequality and what aspects are at play in Barry's work?

Chapter 6 – What are the elements of critical educational scholarship that appeal to identity in understanding educational inequality and what aspects are at play in Barry’s work?

Chapter 7 – What does the future look like, given ever increasing inequality, and what can Barry’s work in summary contribute to the critical educational discourse on inequality?

Contribution to Field

This dissertation seeks to contribute to the body of scholarship that confronts and critiques inequality in American education. Further, it attempts to understand existing theoretical frameworks that discuss educational inequality and to offer a new perspective geared towards reducing inequality. As there still has not been a groundswell of political will to significantly revamp educational politics and structures towards equality, more attention to the realities of inequality both through academic circles and the larger public discourse must be given. The dissertation aims to add to this conversation and to renew the call for an educational agenda geared towards equality and social justice, even in the face of numerous barriers and challenges. The next section discusses the selection of Brian Barry as the central theorist of this study.

Why Brian Barry?

Dissertations are a process of discovery that seeks to bring new knowledge to the foreground or to add novel perspectives and interpretations on old questions. This dissertation attempts to achieve this aim through philosophical investigation and analysis of texts and debates that surround the educational discourse of inequality. Specifically, the introduction and application of the work of Brian Barry can be viewed as the

contribution of this dissertation to a theory of politics of education. The selection of Barry as the primary theorist came from an organic process of exposure to and engagement with the writing of the dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship. The criteria for selection were developed in an *ex post facto* fashion that allowed for a perspective that discusses the complications of each existing tradition. It includes a theoretical position that accommodates the realities of economic and material difference (class), acknowledges the role of personal action (autonomy), and recognizes the power disparities and difference among populations (identity). These criteria link onto the selected critical traditions that are discussed in each chapter.

Each tradition deserves respect and appreciation. The critiques of them offered via Barry's contrasting views are in no way meant to diminish their contributions or to disregard the wealth of strength and empowerment that many teachers and scholars receive from employing them. The analysis is done in the spirit of solidarity against a common set of forces that increases educational inequality to which all these traditions respond significantly. Further, this dissertation is not an attempt to create a synthetic theory out of these traditions per se. In fact, the overriding point is that one can agree with the empirical realities they want to confront, but the discourses in which this is done must be rethought given the barriers that are faced in achieving justice and reducing educational inequality.

Another element that makes Barry's work important to turn to is its lack of attention by both political scientists interested in education and education scholars as a group. A ProQuest (<http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.lib.unc.edu/en-US/>) search of the full text of dissertations provided only 64 results for "Brian Barry" and "Barry, Brian."

When further refined to search for those combinations with education as a term in the abstract or keywords, the results are reduced to one dissertation that focuses on religious education and political authority. A significant reason for selecting Barry is his political drive and intellectual tenacity to argue for social justice, equality, and educational progress in a world that seems not to care for any of these concepts. This last rationale is political in the most vital sense. Barry's reading of Orwell's classic "Why I write?" is pertinent here as it is the motivation for his work as well as my interpretation of it. Orwell contends that one writes for a "political purpose—using the word 'political' in the widest possible sense. Desire to push the world in a certain direction, to alter other people's idea of the kind of society that they should strive after" (Orwell, 1946/1956, p. 390). This impulse is echoed throughout the study.

What Is Meant by Critical Tradition and Why Choose Class, Autonomy, and Identity?

A preliminary task of this chapter is to attempt to define the meaning of "critical tradition," to which is made reference throughout the dissertation. The term "critical tradition" is used to describe the work of educational scholars who are dissatisfied with the educational processes and institutions that they discuss in their philosophical work. This broad interpretation of the term beyond the traditional bounds of "critical theory" is meant to identify multiple ways and theoretical perspectives that confront hidden power structures, as well as to critique governmental and private institutions that limit educational progress and support unjust infrastructures that increase inequality across the social and political spectrum.

The connection to a "critical tradition" is least obvious for Chapter 5, which deals with autonomy and a general sense of criticism towards present forms of education.

However, there is a deep connection to this meaning of critical in that many scholars in the liberal tradition have strongly supported the teaching of critical thinking to students. The use of the term autonomy and its definition in this tradition are geared towards cultivating a critical attitude in students about themselves, the world they inhabit, and the choices they make in it. Autonomy is nothing if it does not have a critical element. Therefore, even though many political liberals may discount being called members of a critical tradition, they certainly are members if for no other reasons than their direct Kantian ties (many of his major works were titled as *Critiques*) and their Enlightenment heritage, which uses reason to undermine mere tradition and superstition.

At this point, it is also necessary to establish boundaries for the scope of this study. The concepts and critical traditions selected for discussion might seem to have some omissions from other recent efforts in educational scholarship. For example, the contributions of so-called postmodernists, poststructuralists, and critical race theorists have been bracketed off from the analysis. At certain points, these works may be touched on, but they are not the focus of the analysis. This bracketing off is in no way a response that undermines the intellectual worth, creditability, and saliency of these contributions. Simply, the diversity of theorists, trends, and concepts used is too great to be adequately considered in conjunction with the concepts that are drawn out in this study.

The concepts of Class, Autonomy, and Identity have been pulled out for discussion and analysis, because there are several elements that link them together. These elements are their reliance on a foundational sense of epistemology, an often essentialist view of culture and identity, and modernist ideas about historical change. Further, the implementation of their educational agendas relies on a prescriptive formula of

philosophical inquiry that posits their views as a solution to educational problems. Additionally, they position themselves as having a vanguard status among the other competing critical traditions. Each tradition also presumes a particular level of correctness about their ideas that allows for the disregarding of evidence that conflicts with their positions. These common features bind them together temporally as well as formally through their philosophical presuppositions.

Barry on Equality

Having bound the study and discussed the central term of “critical tradition,” it is important at this stage to detail Barry’s description of equality to give a base to the foregoing discussions of inequality, meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity. Barry’s discussion is quoted at length, but this is vital for understanding how equality can be defined in the context of a strong conception and a weak one. From *Political Argument*, Barry (1965/1990) states, “By ‘equality’ I am referring to a distributive notion...in other words that *some* principle or other must be invoked if people are to be treated differently. If you like, you can say that ‘fundamental’ equality underlies equality in other senses” (p. 119). At the outset, Barry clarifies his intention to understand equality on the basis of treatment. Groups are unequal when one group receives a different treatment from some individual, authority, or group. The follow-up is that this quickly becomes unjust when the inequality of treatment is based on some type of non-impartial judgment.

Barry continues describing the way that the meaning of equality gets confused. This is especially true in a common misunderstanding in equating equal treatment to

identical treatment. This is not the case, and Barry (1965/1990) attempts to clarify the difference between equal and identical treatment:

Those who wish to disparage the distributive principle of equality often seek to do so by suggesting that its adherents are committed to holding either that men *are* 'equal' in their personal characteristics or that they *ought* to be 'equal.' Then, since 'equality' of personal characteristics does not seem to make much sense it is suggested that equalitarians presumably mean 'identical' when they say 'equal.' As this idea is absurd distributive equality can be conveniently dismissed as an unintelligible concept. The cosy conclusion can then be drawn that when people demand 'equality' they are either confused or they are demanding 'fundamental' equality; that is, for some group (perhaps the human race) to be treated as a reference group. What equality 'really means' it is claimed is that some reason or other must be adduced to justify treating people differently. The incoherence, however, lies not in the concept of equality, but in the hostile formulation itself. To say that people should be equal is to say that their opportunities for satisfying whatever wants they may happen to have should be equal. Whether or not one agrees with the claim in any particular case it surely cannot be denied that is a reasonably intelligible one, and one not involving any implausible prescriptions or descriptions involving uniformity and identity. . . . Thus—to take what I shall call the 'weak' sense of distributive equality—asking for racial equality between black and white does not entail asking that everyone should be an identical intermediate colour, nor does asking for equality between the sexes entail asking for universal hermaphroditism. What one is demanding is that a person's chances of satisfying his wants should not be affected by his or her skin colour or sex. (p. 120)

Barry's tongue in cheek comments here reflect a deep passion for making clear that equality is desirable without asking for personal conformity to some developed standard of individual or group habit. The gist of his position is that one can have any personal characteristics that are varied—including both inherited and self-selected, developed ones, but these characteristics should not be allowed to justify unequal treatment.

The sense of equality that Barry describes presents a robust picture of how equality and, inversely, inequality will be used throughout this study. These distinctions are vitally important and therefore require additional exploration to understand the difference between strong and weak equality and the move from wants to goods:

One use of ‘equality’ in a distributive context is, then, to deny that a certain characteristic (generally one which people can’t do anything about) should be taken as a basis for treating people differently. ‘Equality of x ’s’ (where x is the characteristic in question) is, as I have pointed out, a common form in which ‘equality’ occurs here. ‘Equality of opportunity’ refers to a subclass of cases, where the irrelevant characteristics are whatever characteristics that give rise to a background of unfairness by improperly influencing the results of context or authoritative determination. . . . But equality in respect of one quality (say, colour or sex) is perfectly compatible with great inequalities in respect of other qualities. And ‘equality of opportunity’ is sometimes expressly defined as ‘equal opportunities to become unequal.’ Let us therefore distinguish this ‘weak’ sense of ‘equality’ from a ‘strong’ sense which comes into play to describe or demand a state of affairs in which all the members of a group get an equal share in some (tangible or intangible) good, regardless of any personal characteristic. In this use, when the phrase ‘equality of x ’ is employed, the x refers not to a personal characteristic which is to be irrelevant (race, sex) but to a good which is to be equally shared (‘equality of income,’ ‘parity of esteem’). In the adjectival form of the phrase, instead of ‘racial equality’ or ‘sexual equality’ we have ‘economic equality’ or ‘social equality.’ The full implementation of the principle of equality in this ‘strong’ sense would of course often conflict with the full implementation of other principles—not only aggregative principles but also other distributive principles. (p. 121-122)

This clarification of the demands of equality based on context are important especially in considering how unequal educational resources are allocated or how unequal chances for students from certain marginalized groups to succeed are covered up by the rhetoric of “equal opportunity.” Further, Barry is not interested in objections to his egalitarian views that rely on a contradiction between this principle and others as requiring a completely non-contradictory set of principles would not be likely or possible. Therefore, this argument against strong equality would fall flat.

To sum, Barry’s use of equality in this context is important in framing the overall discussion of inequality in education and society. Strong equality must be promoted to nurture the political and social attitudes necessary for lasting change and reform. This is a central holding of Barry’s work and the one furthered in this dissertation is that inaction against inequality is fundamentally unjust, undemocratic, and unacceptable.

Historical Sketch on the Persistence of Inequality in American Education

The final section of this introductory chapter provides a historical sketch about the struggle for educational equality and the political trends that affect it. It serves as a necessary foundation against which Barry and the varied critical traditions respond in their attempts to theorize about better educational institutions and political attitudes than presently exist and to find new ways to combat and reduce educational inequality.

The American educational system has a long history of being viewed as a site for democratic training, as a set of institutions that socialize immigrants to their new country, and as a social arena charged with providing students with knowledge and skills for future employment (Au, 2009; Bankston & Cladas, 2009). These aims and the achievement of them have been criticized for a variety of reasons by academics, politicians, and business leaders throughout the twentieth century (Callahan, 1962; Counts, 1969; Cubberly, 1915; Darling-Hammond, 2002; Elmore, 2004; Goodlad, 1984; Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The pressure on the educational system has only increased in the new century with the passage and implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) (Abernathy, 2007; McGuinn, 2006; Rebell & Wolff, 2008; Vinovskis, 2008). In fact, the one item that all educational critics and observers, from Henry Giroux (2005, 2007, 2008) on the left to Charles Murray (2008) and David Horowitz (2007) on the right, seem to agree upon is that something must be done to remedy the ills of the broken system (Lareau, 2003; Law, 2006). Of course, the recommendations for educational policy reform range widely and, here, contradictions between the extremes of the right and the left are the starkest.

Between these two poles, centrist reformers have taken hold of the contemporary educational policy discourse. These centrists are plowing forward with a regime of increased accountability but with a less aggressive tone (Lipman, 2003)—for instance, promoting a light version of school choice that seeks to pressure the public schools without alienating teacher unions (Abernathy, 2005) and seeking involvement from the business sector in planning and funding reform (Cuban, 2004). For example, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan was picked by Barack Obama specifically for his inclusive attitude towards the demands of the business community in education (Giroux, 2009).

What is unfortunately missing from the educational policy arena is a sustained and sincere effort at reducing the vast inequality of educational opportunities that frames the experience of many students across the country (Hart & Risley, 1995). In the late 19th and 20th centuries, the main blocks to these efforts were legal barriers to educational equality in terms of institutionalized racism. Of particular relevance were the decisions in the cases of *Dred Scott v. Sandford* (1857), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), and *Cumming v. Richmond County Board of Education* (1899), all of which sanctioned segregation and ensured inequality in educational and economic life. Even breakthroughs such as *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), which made de jure segregation illegal, had substantially less impact on desegregating districts around the country than reformers had hoped, and inequality continued to expand in many districts (Tushnet, 1995) while at the same time setting back successful schools that served marginalized populations (Siddle Walker, 1996).

In addition to race, school funding as a criteria of educational equality has also been poorly served. The opportunity for the Supreme Court to take a federal stand for

equality in school funding was dismissed in *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973), leaving educational equality to the states (Sracic, 2006). State finance litigation has seen some success in terms of legal victories and the appropriation of additional funds to remedy gross inequalities in financing among the districts of a state. Yet, because of unequal and unjust funding, three decades after *San Antonio* and fifty years after *Brown*, America's public schools provide vastly different educational opportunities to the students who arrive at their doors (Johnson, 2006). This is evidenced by dramatically different high school graduation rates among urban and suburban districts, college admissions, and future employment.

Political responses to educational reform did occur during the middle of the 20th century—not to address the aforementioned inequality in terms of racial segregation or school funding, but to preserve national pride and military superiority. With the Cold War dominating politics, most politicians cared little for domestic policy, until the Soviet Union launched Sputnik. This kicked off a wave of interest in educational reform geared to making sure the United States was able to train enough engineers and scientists to compete militarily with the Soviets. Of particular note in the educational policy dialogue was the work of Admiral Rickover, especially his *Education and Freedom* (1960), which stressed the reorientation of American education towards greater efficiency in the training of students in math and science.

In the 1960s, progressive effort in social and domestic policy succeeded in passing and implementing President Lyndon Baines Johnson's Great Society initiatives. These included the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 and Voting Rights Act of 1965, which improved the conditions under which students could seek greater representation

and education. However, the barriers and foes of educational equality were resolute with the glaring example of James Meredith being refused admission from the University of Mississippi until a political deal allowed him to attend.

The 1970s saw an increased use of the federal courts in deciding educational policy. Two cases had substantial effects for educational equality. In *Swann v. Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education* (1971), the Supreme Court allowed for busing to be used to integrate the public schools even in cases where segregation was based only on geography and not a stated policy. In contrast, *Milliken v. Bradley* (1974) put limitations on busing and prohibited plans that required inter-district busing unless there was a calculated policy aimed at segregation.

In the 1980s, several political and economic changes affected the direction of educational policy and further exacerbated the inequalities of the educational system. The election of President Ronald Reagan ushered in a new era focused on deregulation, supply-side economics, and deficit spending, all of which undermined a strong public school system (Rayack, 1987). At the same time, there was a tide of educational reform treatises published during that period and its aftermath. Two exemplars that had arguably the greatest influence on the public discourse of education were the National Commission on Excellence in Education's *A Nation at Risk* (1983) and Secretary of Education William Bennett's *Our Children and Our Country: Improving America's Schools and Affirming the Common Culture* (1988). *A Nation at Risk* (1983) revived the 1950s Cold War attitudes of national pride and fear of decline to reframe educational reform in terms of international economic competitiveness. Its narrative asserted that this deterioration would lead to economic stagnation and threaten America's national security. Bennett's

speeches and writing often used the same devices of a crisis mentality and the threat of national decline, but his central themes were the eroding of traditional public school curriculum and the need to teach “character” to students.

Significantly, in each publication and the debates surrounding them, the focus was not on steps towards educational equality. Looking back at this period, one can see that the reforms inspired by *A Nation at Risk* (1983) did not succeed in making America’s schools more equal. This should not be a surprise given that equality was not the report’s political aim. Bennett’s work also did not contribute to a discussion of educational inequality in a positive manner. Quite to the contrary, his writing and speeches were fuel for the culture wars. His views on character instruction conceived of one’s success in school and life as simply products of mental determination to succeed, and, conversely, failure in school and life was a reflection of one’s lack of will and strong moral fiber (Bennett, 1988).

By the 1990s, the political center and right emerged as the controlling voice of the public discourse around education; this trend continues into the present (Kumashiro, 2008). At every turn, the bully pulpits of education Governors, Secretaries of Education, and Presidents worked to frame educational issues towards centrist business inspired reforms. These efforts were often organized around the priorities of state business roundtables and, at the national level, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce. Further, reforms were usually discussed in terms that illustrated them as inevitable and necessary for competitive improvements in outcomes (like standards, character education, and school choice). In contrast, alternative recommendations were painted as naïve political fantasy

(like equality in funding and widespread integration of urban districts) that did not merit serious consideration.

With the passage of the bipartisan NCLB, educational inequality has become an issue that many observers think demands attention (Rebell & Wolff, 2009). The unacceptability that public schools were failing to provide students with similar levels of education was allegedly written into the law (Rothstein, Jacobsen, & Wilder, 2008). Yet, years after its implementation, the results of this legislation are mixed at best, and an underfunding of the mandate will continue given the recent economic recession (Abernathy, 2007). Inequality in education will likely continue to grow. The next chapter discusses the persistence of educational inequality.

CHAPTER 2

THE PERSISTENCE OF EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

In 1954, the United States Supreme Court declared, “Today, education is perhaps the most important function of state and local governments” (*Brown v. Board of Education*, 1954, para. 9). This statement from the landmark *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision still rings true and could only be updated with the possible addition of the federal government to the list of governments involved in education. The Supreme Court decision continued, asserting “it is doubtful that any child may reasonably be expected to succeed in life if he is denied the opportunity of an education. Such an opportunity...is a right which must be made available to all on equal terms” (para. 9). Over the last half-century since these statements were made, demands for equality and a public commitment to education’s importance have not been lived up to by politicians and policymakers. At present, America’s public schools still fail to demonstrate that education is a paramount governmental service and that it should be equal among all citizens. The failure to succeed in attaining these goals results in massive numbers of citizens who are not able to fully participate in social, economic, and political life. This state of affairs is unjust and threatens to erode the foundations of American democracy as mentioned in the first chapter.

This chapter describes inequality in the public schools and later life outcomes along with the economic policies and factors that contribute to it. It is helpful to frame this discussion of inequality against the background of critics and policymakers who do

not prioritize the reduction of inequality in their writings about politics and education. Several of these counter-perspectives are offered to begin the discussion.

Old Political Barriers That Are New Again

One of the most potent problems in the persistence of educational inequality is that of the political roadblock of American conservatism. These elements of conservatism show up in the commentary from the political right that privileges responsibility over equality. (This is a theme that Barry critiques passionately and figures in the following chapters.) Several examples of the attitudes of the right both from recent months and historical sources are necessary to communicate the right's efforts to block substantial educational and social reform. The perspective often offered by conservatives places blame for inequality on individuals due to their lack of success in a meritocratic system, failure to take personal responsibility over their lives, and not taking advantage of having an equal opportunity to achieve a higher standard of living.

The first example comes from Thomas Sowell (2009), an economist turned op-ed columnist who works at the Hoover Institution. The following comments are directed to those citizens who fail to succeed in his eyes because of lack of will and other personal characteristics: "Whether the particular issue is education, economics or medical care, the preferred explanation tends to be an external explanation - that is, something outside the control of the individuals directly involved" (para. 1). Sowell believes that everyone, including children, should take responsibility for what happens to them and that external factors that play a role in success should be discounted. Of course, many of the policy spheres he mentions are outside of any individual's control. To think that a person has a determinate role in what medical care is provided to them is often not true and the same

rationale applies to education as well. This form of theorizing is the legacy of Ayn Rand (1957); further, it would suggest that a child born with a severe disability should be as responsible for his or her position as someone who chooses to eat a high fat and cholesterol diet would for his or her health problems. As Sowell moves from this general rule directly to education, he expects children to take their bad education and just do something like work harder to succeed in a system that he admits is not doing a good job (this rhetoric is quite similar to President Barack Obama's 2009 speech on the first day of school): "Education is usually discussed in terms of the money spent on it, the teaching methods used, class sizes or the way the whole system is organized. Students are discussed largely as passive recipients of good or bad education" (para. 2).

To hold the children harmed by inadequately funded schools in impoverished communities completely responsible for their lack of success seems to be a case of blaming victim. He continues in this line, stating that "education is not something that can be given to anybody. It is something that students either acquire or fail to acquire. Personal responsibility may be ignored or downplayed in this "non-judgmental" age, but it remains a major factor nevertheless" (para. 3). Clearly, Sowell is expressing a desire to return to the glory days when students did as they were told and they were judged by society for mistakes they made. This perspective, however, is the inverse of reality as students' life outcomes are much more harmed by actions and success in their youth than in the past. The examples here are legion (two big examples are trying children as adults in criminal lawsuits and having educational attainment increasingly determine economic success), but these are unlikely to persuade those sympathetic to Sowell line's of thought.

Sowell continues this barrage and attack by relaying what he thinks the outcomes of many students' lives will be:

After many students go through a dozen years in the public schools, at a total cost of \$100,000 or more per student - and emerge semi-literate and with little understanding of the society in which they live, much less the larger world and its history - most discussions of what is wrong leave out the fact that many such students may have chosen to use school as a place to fool around, act up, organize gangs or even peddle drugs. (para. 4)

This understanding of children, adolescence, and the economies of the communities he is discussing is insufficient. Here, it is important to see that these remarks are being directed towards schools like Harbor City High and not St. Paul's, as a circular bias is revealed in his statements that blames one's social and economic position on one's inability to pull oneself out of one's social and economic position. Interestingly, many schools, such as St. Paul's, have struggled with similar incidents of drug abuse, hazing, and other problems, but their social position and standing allow them to spin bad press when it manages to leak out of these private and secretive schools (Peretz, 2009).

In sum, Sowell's views are just the opinion of one man who espouses conservative beliefs that students should get their acts together to be successful, and, if they do not, they should not blame anyone else for their life outcomes. Yet, these views have deep roots in American conservatism. They are also vital to understanding the dominant public philosophy of the American political system.

The neo-conservative perspective that arose since the 1950s has had a dramatic and sustained impact on American politics. The popular faces that emerged out of the broader conservative movement, including Senator Barry Goldwater and President Ronald Reagan, will be discussed subsequently, but it is important to discuss the roots of

the neo-conservative movement at this point. The connections of this perspective to the work of Nozick come through as well.

In *The Neoconservative Mind: Politics, Culture, and the War of Ideology*, Gary Dorrien weaves together the lives and ideas of Irving Kristol and Norman Podhoretz, among other less known writers. What is of interest to this study is how these authors migrated from rather leftist positions early in their lives to what one would now consider the standard views of the Republican Party, including a rejection of governmental programs aimed at redistribution and a promotion of the free market. This rise of neo-conservatives came in the wake of the efforts of President Lyndon Johnson to expand opportunities through governmental intervention. These neo-conservatives were decidedly opposed to such efforts and began using numerous periodicals to gain popularity among the public and aspiring political candidates alike.

Since this emergence of the neo-conservatives, their effect on America politics has only become more acute with the growth of cable news and internet news sites. Although they seemed to have stumbled in their policy recommendations during the Bush years, they have recovered in their vehement opposition to the efforts of the Obama administration.

With this background laid out, Sowell gives us the strain of conservatism that dismisses outside factors towards success in education and Barry Goldwater sets Sowell up by laying the rhetorical (not actual) libertarian platform to build all sorts of political campaigns against activist government from the local to federal levels. The political roots here go back to the rise of conservatism in the form of Goldwater's *The Conscience of a Conservative* (1960/2007). His philosophical compatriot Robert Nozick's (1974)

Anarchy, State and Utopia comes under direct attack from Barry in the next chapter.

Goldwater puts his philosophy and (Nozick's as well) in easy to understand, at least superficially, and powerful language:

Thus, for the American Conservative, there is no difficulty in identifying the day's overriding political challenge: *it is to preserve and extend freedom*. As he surveys the various attitudes and institutions and laws that currently prevail in America, many questions will occur to him, but the Conservative's first concern will always be: *Are we maximizing freedom?*

(p. 6)

These words are meant for the average voter, but access to this freedom may only be available to the privileged and elite members of society. The value to which Goldwater appeals is the economic freedom for the owners of stock in corporations and family businesses. His proclamations would be quite different if they were followed by a discussion of the ways in which everyday people could maximize their liberty ala FDR's Four Freedoms. In short, Goldwater's freedom is freedom for some and economic and political confinement for others.

The educational consequences of this focus on freedom to the exclusion of any other political values are substantial as this perspective adds to the fervor over school choice, neighborhood schools, and the overall devaluing of education as a public good. The high watermark of this view is illustrated by former Vice President Richard Cheney's comments (2004) in a town hall meeting. In response to a question about divisions in America, he responded with characteristic elitism covered up as the "common sense" of the masses: "But the fact is that we all start, I believe, in the United States...with the opportunity to achieve whatever you're capable of achieving, that is; for the most part, a meritocracy" (para. 60). The deleterious effects of this attitude of an ostensibly equal playing field or even starting gate for people born into this country are a

huge barrier to reducing inequality in education and across American society. Each of these individuals—Sowell (recent), Goldwater (founding), and Cheney (implementation of ideology)—represents aspects of the roadblock of conservatism to achieving greater egalitarianism, and it is important to realize that large portions of the American populace agree with them. Understanding these political attitudes and their derivative policy positions are essential to understanding the persistence of educational inequality. One must remember that there are real people who are not even ambivalent to inequality's amelioration; instead, there are people who actively and ambitiously promote a social, political, and economic program that increases inequality under the banners of meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity. The next section of this chapter focuses on what these inequalities look like in America's educational environments.

Educational Inequality in the United States

This section discusses educational inequality along several interrelated horizons that affect students' lives in and out of school as well as their long-term life prospects. Each is connected through the continuum of educational services students receive as they move or are unable to move from K-12 institutions onto higher education. After a discussion of the general overarching elements of educational inequality—like discrepancies in funding, poorly trained teachers, and lack of additional support resources, the next aspects discussed in this section are: 1) educational achievement and economic impact; 2) high school graduation rates; 3) college graduation; and 4) civic participation. The data and information discussed come from several recent reports and

books from a variety of educational researchers and think tanks. It is meant to give a broad picture of educational inequality from a diverse range of sources.

One of the main aspects of educational inequality is de facto racial segregation in America's public schools (Lowry, 2002; Stulberg, 2008). One should be shocked that the racial divide in America's public schools gets such meager attention from policymakers, but, given the country's history of racism, such perspectives are naive (Kozol, 2005). The inattention to the racial question is unfortunately nothing new and is made all the more dramatic when one contrasts schools in the country that are often not that far apart in terms of distance, but worlds apart in terms of opportunities and resources (Kozol, 1992, 2005). For example, schools that Kozol visits have constant problems with teacher turnover, inadequate facilities, and administrators focused on test scores at the expense of everything else.

Inequality of educational experience does not stop at racial and ethnic segregation. The systematic environmental factors of poverty lead all too often to poor "choices" being made by students in the most under-funded schools (Orfield & Ashkinaze, 1991; Noguera, 2008; Tatum, 2003). For instance, students from communities with high unemployment often seek out jobs to contribute to the family income. Making due for the short term often creates barriers to long term educational success. Here, it is important to question the notion that much of educational inequality as measured by achievement tests is a direct result of bad choices and poor personal responsibility of the marginalized students; in fact, this inequality is the result of a host of complicated additional factors that inhibit success (Orfield & Kornhaber, 2001; Orfield, Losen, Wald, & Swanson, 2004; Noguera, 2003, 2008).

Another component of educational inequality is the community in which the unequal schools exist. The fact that educational communities are shaped by the economies of their surroundings is not surprising (Rank, 2004). The extent to which this is true can be surprising, especially as it relates to the ways in which urban areas have been devastated by a lack of investment from both the public and private sectors. Cities across the United States have seen substantial movement of manufacturing and other industries from city centers to cheaper areas. Residents that are left behind after these jobs disappear are left to fight to maintain their standard of living often by piecing together several part-time jobs. One of the educational consequences of this deficit of sustained investment is a lack of political platforms to voice dissent about inequality and to call politicians to account for their lack of leadership in improving a community's public schools (Allen, 2005). To remedy this, some scholars have suggested pursuing larger coalitions of community involvement towards the goal of a new social movement (Anyon, 2005) that would tackle economic inequality on the way to tackling educational inequality.

One of the most significant recent meta-studies of the disparate impact of inequality in education has been David Berliner's study (2009), which demonstrates the effects that out-of-school factors (OSFs) have on educational achievement. Race, poverty, and community have been included as important OSFs. Early on in the report, Berliner raises the complication of imprecise educational policy reforms that seek a universal strategy to improve education. He writes:

Many schools have a one-size-fits-all orientation, not easily accommodating the myriad differences in talents and interests among youth or helping them cope, in ways that youth find nurturing or useful, with school as well as non-school factors associated with family, community, society, and life's problems. Such non-school

factors, in fact, exert a powerful influence on student behavior and school learning, and those that are harmful (for example, having a mild birth defect) hurt impoverished youth more frequently and with greater severity than they do youth in middle-class or wealthy families. (p. 3)

The critical point is that the differences between students' success in school is compounded by out of school factors. These elements of advantage and, conversely, disadvantage accumulating and compounding are one of the most pernicious and often least discussed aspects of educational policy and reform. This is also a key theme in Barry's work about the justness of governmental institutions and the societies that create them. A just society cannot neglect the paradox of cumulative disadvantage and maintain any reasonable orientation towards social justice.

Berliner (2009) highlights the key areas, in which external factors disproportionately affect students in school performance, are health problems and their lack of treatment. He provides the following statement:

[C]hildren in poor families in most states are six times more likely to be in less than optimal health, experiencing a wide variety of illnesses and injuries, as compared with children in higher income families. Even in middle-income families, children in some states are twice as likely to be in less than optimal health than those in higher income families. Health and income in America are strongly correlated. As a result, schools that serve the poor, whether urban or rural, almost always have more challenges to meet because of untreated medical problems among students and their families. This OSF impinges on the social relations and academic productivity of a school. (p. 14)

This should not surprise the reader that the poor have worse health outcomes, which will affect their ability to learn. Yet, this is rarely raised as an educational issue. In the health care coverage debate of 2009, there is scant mention of anything outside of the cost, let alone any assertion that there should be universal coverage to assist students in having a better chance to succeed in school.

Berliner (2009) does not stop there and continues to hammer the health theme vigorously even on issues many on the political right want to forget in their quest for freedom. One significant example is lead paint. Predictably, this paint continues to adversely impact the poor and their educational achievement:

The urban Northeast is home to a high percentage of housing built when concentrations of lead in paint were at their peak (before 1950)—and these buildings are now home to high concentrations of poor and minority children. Not surprisingly, the problem of lead poisoning is especially dramatic in these locations, and their schools face significant challenges related to lead-poisoning of the children. (p. 21)

Another factor is the air students breathe in some parts of the country compared to the air in other areas. Again, one can remember the previous example and think of Concord's blue skies and clean streams compared with Baltimore's industrial air pollution and polluted harbor. Berliner relays what one comes to suspect, "There is the issue of air quality, which affects poor children and their families in larger numbers than it does wealthier children. The South Bronx...has one of the highest incidences of asthma hospital admissions in New York City" (p. 23).

This concern for health continues beyond strictly environmental factors to family and community violence. Berliner states that "estimates are that between 3 million and 10 million children witness family violence each year" (p. 25). Students who witness violence or who are victims of it suffer substantial physical and dramatic psychological consequences. These consequences often lead to cycles of violence and negative educational outcomes as a result of stress and trauma from the incidents.

Berliner's conclusion is that OSFs matter, and this is often understood by educators who have experience with students from these communities. This on-the-ground experience is backed up with his aggregated data. Empirical evidence is available

and open to anyone who takes the time to visit and interact with students in their schools.

Berliner (2009) discusses NCLB before moving to a radical conclusion:

Inputs to schools matter. As wonderful as some teachers and schools are, most cannot eliminate inequalities that have their roots outside their doors and that influence events within them. The accountability system associated with NCLB is fatally flawed because it makes schools accountable for achievement without regard for factors over which schools have little control. In part, for this reason, NCLB is failing to show reductions in the achievement gaps on which it is focused. A broader, bolder approach to school improvement is indeed required. It would begin by a reasonable level of societal accountability for children's physical and mental health and safety. At that point, maybe we can sensibly and productively demand that schools be accountable for comparable levels of academic achievement for all America's children. (p. 40)

The policies necessitated by a call, such as that of Berliner's, for accountability in the circumstances for disadvantaged children exceeds the arena of educational policy.

This issue makes educational reform such an intractable problem, because policymakers with little knowledge of education demand that schools solve achievement gaps among student groups and unequal outcomes without any connections to the rest of society. This process of educationalization of social problems (Labaree, 2008) is one that is destructive and pernicious to expressing the need for a broader perspective on how to improve educational achievement and outcomes.

Unfortunately, this call for a more sweeping set of social policies to make the educational equation more equal (and, therefore, reduce many of the most challenging aspects of the educational process) is unlikely to be met by NCLB policies. The roadblock here, beyond the ideology expressed at the beginning of this chapter, is that of an increased level of ahistorical scientism in public policy circles. This perspective has been glaringly brought to the forefront of research debates at American Educational Research Association conferences and through numerous journal article exchanges

(Reihl, 2006). The new scientism of public policy and think tanks that have urged that educational research must produce results similar to agricultural and medical research is misguided. What is wrong with this comparison is that children are neither plants to be grown nor diseases to be cured, and, as such, they do not respond even in the most Pavlovian educational settings to interventions in the same way. The inputs as Berliner mentions are crucial and discounting those factors can be harmful.

From a radically different source than the scholarly work of Berliner, similar data and conclusions are found in a report issued by the McKinsey (2009) consulting group about the economic impact of inequality in education. Clearly, the discourse to which this report contributes is one that prioritizes the need for academic success as a prerequisite for economic success (which is a priority for Berliner in a general sense as well). They begin their critique of the status quo in this manner:

Avoidable shortfalls in academic achievement impose heavy and often tragic consequences, via lower earnings, poorer health, and higher rates of incarceration. For many students (but by no means all), lagging achievement evidenced as early as fourth grade appears to be a powerful predictor of rates of high school and college graduation, as well as lifetime earnings. (p. 5)

Domestic concerns around inequality also relate to the global condition of education: “If the United States had in recent years closed the gap between its educational achievement levels and those of better-performing nations...GDP in 2008 could have been \$1.3 trillion to \$2.3 trillion higher. This represents 9 to 16 percent of GDP” (p. 5). What the report does not mention here in sufficient detail is the evolution of the value of a college degree relative to the job opportunities that exist (see also Anyon, 2005). This aligning of education as economic development is a substantial weapon for calling for more attention to a national movement towards educational equality. Yet, this movement

has not been realized in any substantial form even with the economic imperative. This is not to mention that many progressive educators would worry that the reforms suggested by these sectors would be overly authoritarian and business-minded, which would not necessarily be in line with their views of social justice and democratic education.

The report then moves from the impact on the economy to the realities of educational inequality. Conclusions showcase the depressing state of affairs of our educational system at present. They relay that:

On average, black and Latino students are roughly two to three years of learning behind white students of the same age. This racial gap exists regardless of how it is measured, including both achievement (e.g., test score) and attainment (e.g., graduation rate) measures. Taking the average National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) scores for math and reading across the fourth and eighth grades, for example, 48 percent of blacks and 43 percent of Latinos are “below basic,” while only 17 percent of whites are, and this gap exists in every state. A more pronounced racial achievement gap exists in most large urban school districts. (McKinsey, 2009, p. 9-10)

As this chapter has indicated, however, inequality is not confined to race and ethnic background. The multiple axes of inequality also adversely impact poor students from their early years to college admission and graduation (these last factors are of substantial concern in the following sections of the chapter). The report asserts:

The achievement gap among students of different income levels is equally severe. Impoverished students (a group here defined as those eligible for federally subsidized free lunches) are roughly two years of learning behind the average better-off student of the same age. The poverty gap appears early and persists over the lifetime of a student; only 9 percent of freshmen in the nation’s 120 “Tier 1” colleges (whose total freshman enrollment is 170,000) are from the bottom half of the income distribution (p. 12)

While attending a Tier 1 college is not the only path to educational success, economic independence, and happiness, the McKinsey report documents a trend that closes off certain options for students before they even know what they will be missing. That these

inequalities are tied directly to race, ethnicity, and income demonstrate that present educational institutions all too often give the most to those who already have advantages by not giving adequate support to marginalized students in all the years before college admission.

The gaps are most glaring when comparing the highest achievers with those who struggle the most in schools. The disparities in this instance are unconscionable:

Black child poverty rates and black achievement levels underscore the income achievement gap among black students as a phenomenon separate from the racial gap between all black students and all white students. As a result, low-income black students suffer from the largest achievement gap of any cohort. NAEP data suggests that the average non-poor white student is about three and a half years ahead in learning compared to the average poor black student; this gap increases to roughly five years when comparing top-performing New Jersey with low-performing Washington, DC. (McKinsey, 2009, p. 13)

These disparities, as has been discussed, have lasting effects and often lead to more difficult educational challenges in the future. If interventions are not taken at an early stage, the harm done to students' education can take years to remedy.

The next point the McKinsey (2009) group analyzes is related to political involvement: "Education levels are also linked to civic engagement. High school graduates are twice as likely to vote than people with an eighth grade education or less. College graduates are 50 percent more likely to vote than high school graduates" (p. 20). One of the most bitter ironies of this example takes the discussion right to the heart of democracy. Teachers in the poverty-stricken areas of D.C. must struggle to increase the civic engagement of students about how they could one day redress grievances about their government to elected representatives. Students in these classrooms must enjoy retorting that this is a political luxury that they, as D.C. residents, will never be able to exercise. Consequently, the report's point about civic engagement needing to be vitalized

is well-taken, if only for the furthering of the interests of groups that require the most strident and resolute elected leadership to attack educational inequality.

However, there are many avenues of political and community involvement that are not necessarily reflected in the voting patterns of a population. The discussion as usually framed around this topic of differences in voting is referred to as a civic deficit. However, given the multitude of ways in which people can interact with each other civically, there could be substantial rethinking of how to measure and account for other forms of political and community participation.

That being said, these efforts can only hope to reinforce Campbell's insights in *Why We Vote?* (2006), which aims to understand what factors help students to become civically minded in a broad sense. Efforts, such as this one that look at a variety of criteria from volunteering to extracurricular activities, help to pose the question in terms that do not overly rely on a deficit metaphor, but that instead seek an alternative way of looking at civic involvement and participation.

The final part of the report explores the inequalities associated with the top achievers and the other groups in the United States back to international comparisons. At this level, the authors conclude that the satisfaction many suburban parents and politicians have that their schools are "globally competitive" is misguided. They contend:

A large part of the economic cost associated with America's educational achievement gap is borne by poor and minority communities whose members are unable to reach their potential. But the magnitude of the international gap suggests that the broad middle class in the United States pays a severe price for failing to match the performance of nations with better educational systems. In our observation, parents in poor neighborhoods are all too aware that their schools are not performing well, but middle-class parents typically do not realize that their schools are failing to adequately prepare their children for an age of global competition. Our findings suggest this middle-class complacency is unjustified and should be challenged. (McKinsey, 2009, p. 21)

Another recent call to action for public education took place in a report (Swanson, 2009) issued by America's Promise Alliance, which is backed by Former Secretary of State Colin Powell. Its main concerns are the abysmal high school graduation rates in the United States. After recounting what Berliner describes about out-of-school factors and what the McKinsey report relays, it is not surprising that under-resourced districts have lower graduation rates than their suburban counterparts. Few aspects of educational inequality are more glaring than the data communicated in this work. They encapsulate their data in the following way:

Specifically, we examine graduation rates in the school districts serving the nation's 50 most-populous cities as well as the larger metropolitan areas in which they are situated. Results show that graduation rates are considerably lower in the nation's largest cities than they are in the average urban locale. Further, extreme disparities emerge in a number of the country's largest metropolitan areas, where students served by suburban systems may be twice as likely as their urban peers to graduate from high school. (Swanson, 2009, p. 1)

These graduation rates are meant to illustrate the intellectual, emotional, and physical confinement that many youth feel in their communities. It is useful to recall the epigraphs from *The Wire* (2002) and *The Boys of Baraka* (2005) when considering the following information from the report, which relays that "in Baltimore [the] urban [rate is] 34.6% [and the] suburban [rate is] 81.5%" (p. 11). Each narrative expresses the incalculable pressure that kids feel and that often manifests itself in negative ways. The point here is twofold: the rates matter as a measure of inequality, but they also matter because of the real lives these statistics represent.

The conclusion of the report presents the massive scale of the problem. As such, one may assume that if the problem is this large and complex, it is likely to not be dealt with in any substantive way. They continue:

Our analysis finds that graduating from high school in America's largest cities amounts, essentially, to a coin toss. Only about one-half (52 percent) of students in the principal school systems of the 50 largest cities complete high school with a diploma. That rate is well below the national graduation rate of 70 percent, and even falls short of the average for urban districts across the country (60 percent). Only six of these 50 principal districts reach or exceed the national average. In the most extreme cases (Baltimore, Cleveland, Detroit, and Indianapolis), fewer than 35 percent of students graduate with a diploma. . . . Further analysis demonstrates that the extremely low graduation rates for these large school systems contribute disproportionately to the nation's graduation crisis. The principal school districts of America's 50 largest cities collectively educate 1.7 million public high school students – one out of every eight in the country. However, these 50 education agencies account for nearly one-quarter (23 percent) of the 1.2 million students nationwide who fail to graduate with a diploma each year. (Swanson, 2009, p. 8)

These reports support the proposition that where one is born and to whom should not determine one's social, economic, and political position as much as it presently does. Of course, one cannot forget that, for many parents, politicians, and political theorists, this coin toss theory of achievement could be overcome if students just "worked harder." More cynically, one could assert that these advocates are not interested in educational equality as that would not be in their self-interest or in the interests of their children since increased educational equality would expand the competition for slots at elite colleges and jobs further down the line.

To this point, the discussion of educational inequality has dealt primarily with the territory of preK-12 disparities. A shift of focus is now warranted to take into account the fact that some type of higher education (community college, technical training, or four-year degree) is now considered to be vital to educational and economic success. It is disturbing that the inequalities that exist in preK-12 education only become more acute when one contemplates the increasingly small circles of power and achievement that America's elite colleges and universities produce as well as the inadequate graduation rates at other, less selective colleges and universities. Inequality in preK-12 education

expands and continues in later years through the intellectual and psychological distance that exists among these communities even though the communities' physical distances from each other is often very small (continuing the Baltimore example, consider Johns Hopkins University is only a few blocks from scores of abandoned row-houses and struggling schools).

Nevertheless, students who succeed, despite dramatic odds, and beat the coin toss to graduate often find themselves at community colleges, colleges, and universities facing similar barriers to graduation and academic success at the collegiate levels that they faced in high school (and this is so at many of the flagship institutions of their state systems). As the following discussion attests, the majority of these students who attend higher education institutions will struggle to graduate, and these numbers are skewed against the backdrop of race, ethnic background (the numerous undocumented students who are forbidden from even attending higher education cannot be forgotten), and income.

A report from The American Enterprise Institute found that the likelihood for college freshman to actually graduate in four or six years is far lower than might be expected, providing that “[a]t each point in the distribution, postsecondary institutions perform worse than high schools. While American high schools graduate about three-fourths of their students in four years, American colleges graduate only about half of their students in six” (Schneider, 2008, p. 3). Graduation rates are frustratingly low. Worse are the effects of non-graduation as students are saddled with debt (as tuition costs have skyrocketed in recent decades) and often few skills that will improve their longer term job prospects, given that much college attrition happens before students can take the types of advanced courses that would allow entry into higher paying jobs (Anyon, 2005).

Again, as the numbers break down for different racial and ethnic groups, the inequality surrounding who goes to an institution of higher education and graduates is now familiar:

Black graduation rates are the lowest for each type of postsecondary institution. At private for-profit institutions, the median black graduation rate is less than 25 percent. While higher at both public and private nonprofit institutions, the black graduation rate still hovers only around 40 percent. Hispanic, Asian, and white graduation rates at for-profit institutions are higher than the graduation rate of black students but still lower than at either public or private nonprofit institutions. Even more disturbing is the number of institutions that graduated not one student within six years . . . there were twenty-seven postsecondary institutions that had a zero graduation rate. But even more striking are the figures for minority students. There were over 140 schools in which no black student completed in six years and well over 150 schools in which no Hispanic or Asian student graduated in six years. (Schneider, 2008, p. 4)

Overall, these graduation rates document the substantial disservice that is done to students who take several years of coursework (often complicated by the need to complete developmental courses which do not count towards graduation) and who cannot finish because they have run out of time and money or because they are unable to complete the required courses while maintaining the required grade point average. The report raises a final point, which is a substantial one and which is a question that is rarely discussed in educational policy circles: “if the failure of American high schools to graduate no more than three-quarters of their students is enough to warrant national attention . . . is not the failure of America’s postsecondary schools to graduate only half of their students worth equal attention?” (Schneider, 2008, p. 7).

Another recent perspective on these issues of higher education completion comes from Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson’s (2009) *Crossing the Finish Line: Completing College at America’s Public Universities*. They note early on that the public and personal emphasis on wanting to achieve higher education has succeeded in raising aspirations as

more and more young people across the social and economic spectrums want to go to college:

One possible explanation for the surprisingly stagnant state of overall educational attainment in the United States can be rejected out of hand: the problem is not low aspirations. Students of all family backgrounds have high (and rising) educational aspirations. The Education Longitudinal Study of 2002 shows that in 2002, 80 percent of 10th graders expected to earn a bachelor's degree or higher—with 40 percent expecting to earn a graduate or professional degree. In 1980, just half as many 10th graders had similarly high aspirations. Especially noteworthy is the evidence of rising aspirations among students of low socioeconomic status (SES): whereas in 1980, 22 percent of these 10th-graders aspired to a bachelor's degree or higher, in 2002, three times as many (66 percent) had such aspirations. In 2002, 77 percent of black 10th graders aspired to earn a bachelor's degree or higher. The conclusion is simple: there are no longer pronounced aspiration gaps by race or SES. (p. 6)

This is an unequivocally positive trend. The best parts of the governmental and educational apparatus of the country have succeeded in continuing to break down access barriers to all types of students in terms of young people seeing themselves as college students. What is negative about this trend is how poorly the educational and economic systems have adapted to this change to assist students in developing the skills to be successful in college and in the evolution of the workplace to value the skills that higher education institutions attempt to teach. The effects of this disparity of implementation in developing sufficient support for students to achieve their aspirations are demonstrated by the following evidence:

For present purposes, it will suffice to compare the national educational attainment rates (defined here as the percentage of eighth-graders who went on to earn a bachelor's degree by age 26) of students from the two groups just mentioned:

1. Thirty-six percent of white women earned a bachelor's degree by age 26 compared with 22 percent of black women and 13 percent of Hispanic women; just under 30 percent of white men earned a bachelor's degree compared with 11–12 percent of black and Hispanic men.

2. Sixty-eight percent of students from families in the top income quartile with at least one parent having received a college degree earned a bachelor's degree by age 26 compared with just 9 percent of those from families in the bottom income quartile with neither parent having received a college degree. (p.8)

Bowen, Chingos, and McPherson (2009) have an inclination that the system of education is unjust because it produces such variation in outcomes. They claim that the “long-term health of our country depends on the existence of social mobility and a widely shared confidence that students from racial minorities and poor families have a real opportunity to move ahead” (p. 10). Further, these authors assert that the current “increasing inequalities in income and wealth . . . highlight the importance of ensuring that educational opportunities close rather than widen disparities in access to the most powerful as well as the most highly remunerated positions in society” (p. 10). The authors sum up their narrative in the following terms and lay the challenge of meeting the needs of students who have been marginalized in the K-12 systems:

It is up to policy makers at state and national levels to provide both moral support and the tangible assistance that will allow many of these institutions to improve overall levels of educational attainment and reduce the stark disparities in outcomes related to race/ethnicity and SES that are so problematic. (p. 238)

Clearly, institutions do value improving their graduation rates because they are often linked to institutional prestige and service to their students (Bowen, Chingos, & McPherson, 2009). Yet, most efforts at retention programs at institutions are fraught with difficulty in demonstrating that they successfully help students succeed because the factors described throughout this chapter that contribute to success are so complex. It must also be mentioned that many educational critics are fine with students exiting from their institutions or not even going to higher education. For example, former George W.

Bush speechwriter and conservative pundit David Frum (2009) illustrates the logic used to justify rethinking higher education as an aspiration for many students:

The 2006 Economic Report of the President presents a remarkable fact: Between 2000 and 2005, the average wages of college graduates declined after adjusting for inflation. From an economic point of view, in other words, a college degree costs more and more and returns less and less. Kind of like a hot stock with a price-to-earnings ratio of 32, it's a prelude to a crash. (para. 3)

Of course, those with longer memories than Frum would remember that this has been a constant concern of economists and educators for decades. Yet, he has identified the fact that a college degree is no longer a ticket to professional lifetime employment.

His next section hits on another aspect of the inequality inherent in the educational process that demonstrates that even college graduation is not what it once was:

Why are the wages of the college-educated declining? A big part of the answer is that the pool of college graduates is rapidly expanding. It's not surprising that as college becomes more universal, the return on a college education falls. (para. 4)

It is presumed that a college degree is worth substantially more than just a high school diploma. However, this educational policy maxim gained new currency when a figure was put on it by the College Board. After several years of it being a taken-for-granted fact, some researchers became curious of where this \$800,000 figure came from and who had originally reported it. It turns out that, even though it had been repeated numerous times in numerous sources, no one could find the cite from the original report. After recalculating the data, several researchers asked that the figure be removed from the report and website because it might be closer to \$280,000 reported because of factors like the cost of receiving the degree.

Frum continues by opening another line of attack on higher education via the subjects that students study:

As the number of job applicants with degrees rises, employers become more sophisticated in assessing the value of any particular degree. The degree itself matters less than the institution that granted it, the subject areas of concentration, and the grade point average earned. A 4.0 math degree from Cal Tech is a very different thing from a 2.8 communications degree from San Francisco State University. (para. 5)

One cannot argue against this point too much, but it also demonstrates the vast inequality among institutions of higher education and their relative worth among employers.

The final comment he has continues these last points by demonstrating his bias of experience towards elite schools, “Will consumers become more sophisticated too? Tuition, room, and board at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill cost about half what they cost at ... Duke. Is a Duke education really twice as valuable as one from UNC?” (para. 6). The question of choosing Duke or the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill based on price is a difficult question. The larger question of quality differences between those two institutions and other campuses in the UNC system or between them and community colleges raises the larger question of access to elite colleges and universities, which is not even on his radar. This exemplar of wanting to restrict educational access demonstrates yet another impediment to educational equality and the active cultivation of anti-education views that harm society’s most vulnerable individuals.

In sum, this section of Chapter 2 has presented elements of what educational inequality looks like in schools and higher education institutions through a discussion of out-of-school factors that affect academic achievement, high school graduation rates, college admission, and graduation rates. Each of these areas is meant to highlight the

dramatic and stark contrasts that exist in the many educational institutions of the United States. These systems consistently produce outcomes that disproportionately harm students in the most challenging educational settings. Given the locations of many of these communities, the political power required to dramatically change them is hampered due to economic underdevelopment and traditional prejudices from more powerful constituencies of cities and states that control policymaking and resource allocation. Further, the final part of the section raises the conservative impulse to pull back from educating more people even at the college level with the not-so-hidden aim of further stratifying the workforce. The last section of this chapter will now be undertaken. It reopens the discussion initiated at the start of the chapter in linking conservative ideology, which is a stumbling block to educational equality and greater egalitarianism, to changes in economic policy and the rise of neoliberalism in the United States, which have undercut opportunities for substantial educational reform.

Economic Policy and the Roots of Educational Inequality

The remainder of Chapter 2 attempts to understand and explain the economic changes and trends that have shaped the educational environment of the last thirty years. Building from the growth of wealth inequality in the United States to the expansion of neoliberalism, this section connects economic trends to the persistence of educational inequality. It concludes by summing up the chapter's overall aims.

Inequality of wealth is one of the most continual problems of the human predicament (Ackerman, 2000). In the recent era, things have gone from bad to worse (Ehrenreich, 2005). Inequality in and among social groups is rapidly growing in the United States and around the world (Chang, 2007; Collier, 2007; Singer, 2002, 2009).

The evidence supporting this claim is vast, substantial, and, at bottom, frightening (Brook, 2007; Collins, Di, & Williams, 2008; Ehrenreich, 2001; Frank, 2007).

Emblematic of this in the United States, wealth is dramatically shifting upwards (Fraser & Gerstle, 2005; Gates & Collings, 2002; Gilbert, 2008). In describing a recent report, Nobel Prize winning economist Paul Krugman (2006) states:

Between 1972 and 2001 the wage and salary income of Americans at the 90th percentile of the income distribution rose only 34 percent, or about 1 percent per year. So being in the top 10 percent of the income distribution, like being a college graduate, wasn't a ticket to big income gains. But income at the 99th percentile rose 87 percent; income at the 99.9th percentile rose 181 percent; and income at the 99.99th percentile rose 497 percent. No, that's not a misprint. (para. 7-8)

This change in wealth accumulation and the benefits of economic growth going to ever richer elites is not just the work of a free market. In fact, specific governmental policy has set the United States on this course towards greater inequality. Led by business-minded think tanks and lobbying groups, the United States government has moved away from the social democratic policies of the New Deal and Great Society and towards the fulfillment of a neoliberal agenda during the last thirty years (Soss, Hacker, & Mettler, 2007). These moves in economic and social policy often also come with a political rhetoric that devalues the public sector and that actively works to dismantle the welfare state (Shulman, 2003).

The crucial period in which these changes occurred was the 1980s which was discussed in the first chapter. The Reagan Administration initiated the rise of economic policies that favored the rich over the poor and middle-class in extreme ways; these policies were implemented through tax structure, devolution, and deregulation (Baker, 2006; 2007). One of the most substantial changes was the halving of marginal tax rates,

which “between 1932 and 1980 . . . was on average equal to 80.2%” (Piketty, 2009, para. 10). This policy thoroughly changed the economic climate of the United States.

These changes in the economic and political terrain have increasingly framed education as primarily a private good for economic competition in the job market and not as a public investment towards common prosperity. Further, Reagan era initiatives succeeded in pushing educational institutions into a mode of constant crisis (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). PreK-12 schools have been under sustained pressure to improve student achievement at all costs (Noddings, 2007; Cochran-Smith, 2004), and higher education institutions have had to scramble for research dollars while facing battles over their purpose and efficiency with state and federal political leaders.

An additional effect of the Reagan era policies is that Americans, in general, have increasingly felt economically stretched (Schor, 1998; Warren & Tyagi, 2003). Yet, the major media outlets rarely delve deeper into this fact than reporting the latest unemployment or stock market crises. This failure of the media to contribute to the public dialogue by emphasizing macro-level policy changes (Bagdikian, 2002; Chomsky, 1989; Edwards & Cromwell, 2006) leaves many citizens unaware of this effort to eliminate the public investments that favor the poor and middle class over expenditures that benefit the rich (Ebert, 2009; Welch, 2001). These changes in economic policy, including the reduction of tax rates for the highest income earners, privatization of government functions, and obstructionism to raising the minimum wage, have all contributed to rigging the economic system in favor of the wealthy (Baker, 2006). Ultimately, these trends undermine the economic base for an educational system that could ensure equality (Anyon, 2005).

These emphasized changes to tilt wealth upwards were not even enough in the eyes of many politicians and policymakers who serve elite interests (Krugman, 2003). For them, the pace of growth in wealth inequality can never accelerate too quickly (Krugman, 2003). Yet, this rapid increase in economic disparities imperils education at its core. For example, in recent years, George W. Bush expanded Reagan's policies of deregulation and tax cuts to the wealthiest members of society (Brantlinger, 2003; Sullivan, Warren, & Westbrook, 2000). The long-term consequences of these economic policies that favor moneyed interests, especially in the tax code, will result in increased federal deficits and a larger national debt (Krugman, 2007). In the future, the public mandate to fulfill existing "entitlement" obligations such as Medicare and Social Security (IOUSA, 2008) could come at the expense of increasing funding for public education as the population of the country ages and, concomitantly, as fewer middle class students enter the public schools (Glass, 2008). At the state level, things are even more risky as most states are constitutionally bound to balance their budgets. One result is that economic downturns can be the catalyst to de-fund educational programs and institutions (like research centers, the arts, or philosophy departments) that would not have been as easily eliminated if it were not for financial exigency (Bouquet, 2008).

One of the primary aspects of these macroeconomic trends that have increased inequality is the move to neoliberal economic policies during the last thirty years. David Harvey (2005) provides the following definition of neoliberalism to help frame the discussion: "Neoliberalism is ... a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private

property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2). In the United States, the political right and, now, even the majority of Democrats endorse neoliberalism through the rhetoric of free markets. However, the rhetoric of free markets does not match reality even though it is popular among Nozick, Sowell, Goldwater, Cheney, and Frum. Some progressive observers have called for liberal minded politicians and policymakers to drop their tacit support and expose the tax breaks and incentives that have benefited corporations over the poor and middle class (Galbraith, 2008). The underlying story is that so-called free markets have been systematically gamed by elites (who claim that there should be little or no governmental regulation or interference in the marketplace), which breeds greater inequality and shifts economic risk to the middle and working classes (Hacker, 2006; Hacker & Pierson, 2005). The discourse around the language of markets has been perverted as well. The ever-growing cult of Adam Smith is based like most cults on fiction, misrepresentation, and ideology over fact (Chomsky, 1994).

The hold of neoliberalism on politicians and its effects on the economy that funds it undercut public education. A variant of this version of neoliberalism is what social critic Naomi Klein (2007) has termed “disaster capitalism.” The essence of her notion is that, under the cover of a disaster, policymakers can force through changes in policies without constitutional checks and balances (Alperovitz & Daly, 2008). This type of crisis atmosphere is often also associated with other means of hiding policy changes until they have been finalized under the banner of national security or a national emergency (Freeman & Minnow, 2009). These changes to public policy have recently occurred under the chaos of a catastrophic event, such as Hurricane Katrina (Verkuil, 2007), or a planned invasion and its chaotic aftermath, such as the Iraq War (Verkuil, 2007). Klein’s

work identifies the many ways in which even the steady march towards greater economic inequality is not as profitable as unfettered capitalism that takes advantage of disasters or crises to overhaul markets and institutions to favor the rich and well-connected.

An example assists here. A disaster created an “opportunity” for the post-Katrina New Orleans educational system, which has largely become a patchwork system of charter and innovative schools. This was considered by many conservatives to be a chance to remake New Orleans schools in a way that they have always wanted to try. The outcomes have been less than what they expected from their experiment with a more free market system. Unfortunately, the larger narrative is that the educational investments needed to revive the region and its educational system have long since been forgotten among the more pressing economic priorities across the country.

A final aspect of the neoliberal agenda is the importance of increasing the consumption and brand marketing of all products and services, even in education (Baudrillard, 1970/1998; Baumnan, 2008). Efforts to market and sell certain harmful products to young people are often publicly denied by their producers, as in the case of tobacco. Yet, many other arguably harmful products, such as junk food, are marketed directly and openly to children (Barber, 2007). Everything, from video games and sneakers to sodas and cell phones, is geared towards ever younger groups of students at home, on television, the internet, and, increasingly, at school itself (Barber, 2007).

The focus on consumption from such an early age once again is not mere chance or the invisible hand of a free market. Instead, it is a sustained and well-financed effort to have children learn the patterns of status climbing through the accumulation of objects. One of the many downsides of this trend is the level of debt that younger and younger

people acquire that further delimits their future academic and career possibilities (Newfield, 2008).

To sum, this section has briefly relayed the state of educational inequality that exists in the United States. Further, it has demonstrated that the economic policies of the Reagan Administration and the expansion of neoliberalism in the last thirty years have substantially changed the terrain on which an equitable educational system can be pursued. The unfair tax policies of this era have disproportionately harmed the poor and middle class and have eroded public funds for educational improvement. This chapter has also provided a floor for the discussion of the persistence of educational inequality in the United States. It has explored the ideology of conservative beliefs, the realities of educational inequality in terms of educational outcomes, and neoliberalism's effect on education. As such, it serves as a jumping off point for the task of discussing Barry's political philosophy and the critical traditions in educational scholarship.

CHAPTER 3

RETHINKING MERITOCRACY, PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY, AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY: BRIAN BARRY, POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY, AND EDUCATION

This chapter builds on Chapter 2 and turns directly to the work of Brian Barry and the applications of his writing on equality, political theory, and everyday political problems to the field of educational theory. Upon Barry's recent death, obituaries were published by a number of his colleagues—both old and new—in major British newspapers as well as in political science journals from around the world. These obituaries demonstrated that Barry made a significant contribution to the field of political science and that his ideas influenced other fields as well. His unwavering commitment to concepts like democracy, equality, and social justice came through in all of his writings even in an age in which these concepts are all too often disregarded or hollowed out by politicians and governments.

This chapter begins with a discussion of Barry's early work and then focuses on the implications of his ideas for critical educational scholarship. Next, the chapter describes how Barry fits into the canon of political theory via a discussion of his critiques of John Rawls and Robert Nozick. This is done to provide a sufficient level of depth in the discussion of Barry's work to make connections between his political ideas and to merit its use in educational studies. The exploration of Barry's ideas begins in this chapter, but it does not stop here. His ideas will continue into the following chapters, as each critical tradition in educational scholarship is discussed. Barry's work will be

brought to bear on the values and philosophical positions of each tradition in attempting to understand the persistence of educational inequality.

Barry and Critical Educational Scholarship

To fully grasp Barry's philosophical positions and their evolution, it is vital to start at the beginning of his long list of books with his first book, *Political Argument* (1965/1990). This is also useful in understanding the educational implications of his ideas. *Political Argument* came out as a much reduced version of Barry's doctoral thesis completed under H.L. Hare at Oxford University. The scope of the volume is vast and, if Barry had reviewed his own volume, he might have called it unwieldy. Nonetheless, it was far-ranging in its sweep across the language and meaning of political terms including justice, fairness, and the public interest. It provided a foundation for the substantial turn towards the issues of political structure and outcomes that would become central to contemporary political theory. In looking back at the release of the volume 25 years earlier, Barry paints the following picture of the work, "This is a study of the relation between principles and institutions. Its focus is analytical rather than causal. It is concerned mainly with the institutional (practical) implications of certain principles" (p. lxxiii). This aim of matching up of principles with the institutions that should be embodied in them is a key element of Barry's early work and a theme that carries forward to his last writings. It is also an important link to education as the matching of the principles that underlie the American educational system often are not coupled to the institutions that provide public education.

In trying to sort out how and why inequality in education remains such a persistent problem, it is useful to apply Barry's critique of the present political discourse,

which has retreated from discussions of inequality. His way of thinking about inequality and justice takes into account the realities of life experience that are often neglected by other political theorists. Further, Barry's views support and can extend portions of the dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship. Barry's work can therefore be viewed as a theoretical perspective that attends to the importance of the touchstone concepts of each tradition while drawing a new path in critical educational thought.

Barry's (2005) *Why Social Justice Matters* directly addresses the growing inequality in the United States and the United Kingdom as well as the distribution of rights, opportunities, and resources in society. One of Barry's most salient contributions is his clarification of how to think about societal institutions. Instead of judging them in a Rawlsian/Nozickian fashion by their design, Barry suggests that "we have to work back to the justice of institutions from their contribution to just outcomes, which are assessed by their contribution to a just distribution of rights, opportunities and resources" (Barry, 2005, p. 17). This movement from just design to just outcome builds the essential bridge in Barry's work from his liberal brethren to the insights offered by multiculturalists, post-structuralists, and critical theorists who have done so well to demonstrate what unjust and unequal educational settings look like in communities around the country.

Barry's work supports the assertion that the educational environment is the primary territory where young people learn the mindset that tolerates substantial inequality and justifies it as inevitable. Barry takes apart three key ideas in the political discourse that prevent the reduction of inequality in society; these ideas are meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity. Further, each of these notions maps onto a critical tradition in educational scholarship: meritocracy with class, personal

responsibility with autonomy, and equal opportunity with identity. For Barry, each of these concepts is misguided and is used by conservative (and even centrist) politicians to legitimize inequality as the function of a level playing field or equal starting gate where some people end up better off because of working harder, being smarter, and making better choices. Barry sees this logic as radically flawed under the current social, economic, and political systems, which do not remotely resemble a level playing field or equal starting gate. Further, these notions move public debate and media attention away from the unjust institutions and outcomes of policy and onto the moral failings and bad choices of individuals. Barry deconstructs these notions to show that they are much more complex than the ways they are used in the present political discourse.

The first area that Barry addresses is the conception of meritocracy (which was mentioned in the section on Vice President Cheney in the first chapter). After identifying the entry of meritocracy into the political discourse, Barry reminds the reader that, “although the term ‘meritocracy’ caught on, its emphasis on rule by the meritorious was downplayed in popular usage, and its originally negative connotations forgotten” (p. 109). Barry is unsatisfied with these claims and rejects the presuppositions that proponents of meritocracy assert. Barry attacks the notion of genetic inheritance implicit in the rest of the argument for meritocracy:

I shall seek to show that all the propositions underlying the theory of meritocracy are flawed. Let me begin with the claim just discussed, that over the last century, and at an accelerating pace, western societies have undergone a filtering process that has concentrated those with high IQs more and more in the top jobs and those with low IQs at the bottom. If the genetic assumptions of meritocracy were correct and this had been happening, we should find that, in each succeeding generation, there will be a bigger gap between the average IQ of the children of those in the high status occupations and children with parents in low status occupations. In fact, however, the gap in the USA between the average IQ of children whose parents are in the top third of the occupational hierarchy and the

average IQ of those parents are in the bottom third has stayed the same. It stood at almost exactly ten points in 1948, 1972, and 1989. (p.120)

Overall, this notion demonstrates one of the ways in which inequality is furthered by the reliance on outdated assumptions that seek to provide rationalizations and unwarranted justifications for one's social position and career success. In fact, the equation is much more complicated, and such notions simply obscure the fact that inequality exists not because of merit lifting up some, but because of inattention to factors that truly would level the playing field on which achievement is based.

This notion of meritocracy and Barry's rejection of it as presently conceived reveals a similarity towards the values that underlie the critical tradition in education that is discussed in Chapter 4 and that centers on class. This connection, however, only goes to the point that each rejects the idea that individual merit is the key to improving the educational and economic circumstances of individuals. From there, they diverge and the critique of their ideas emerges.

The second area in which Brian Barry's work connects to a critical education tradition is through a discussion of personal responsibility. This concept has become a political catchphrase meant to explain away the inequalities of society as justifiable because those who end up with less obviously did not take personal responsibility over their lives. Barry concludes that this conception of personal responsibility is nothing more than political rhetoric of the worst kind—what Orwell (1946/1956) in "Politics and the English Language" termed, "a defense of the indefensible," meant to hide the structural imbalances in education that lead to inequalities later in life. Barry (2005) contends age matters in decision making and responsibility as, "a child's 'decision' not to go to school cannot be held to be its responsibility, whatever the cause, because this is not

the kind of choice that a child can make in a way that gives rise to responsibility” (p.136-137).

The vital point here is that Barry takes a view of personal responsibility that challenges the easy step of blaming the victim of an unjust system for the consequences of his or her actions when the choices the individual has had to choose from are not substantively equal to other members of society. Barry is not interested in giving students who make poor choices a free pass on the bases of the fallacies of social and economic determinism. Instead, he suggests remedies to reduce educational and societal inequalities that remove the importance of choice from the equation. This translates into providing young people, regardless of where they grow up, with a set of choices that is compressed to ones that are positive and equal to those of other individuals across social strata, thereby limiting the possibility of making negative choices that harm themselves and others.

The third notion of equal opportunity connects to the discussion of identity. It requires individuals to think differently about how to judge if someone truly had an equal opportunity to achieve in a school or be selected for a job. Barry (2005) frames his discussion around equal opportunity by way of an example dealing with the pool of applicants for a position. He contends that “appointing the best person constitutes equal opportunity only if there was an earlier time at which millions of people had an equal opportunity to be the best candidate” (p. 40). If candidates for a job cannot be reasonably judged to have had equal opportunities to get qualifications, one then must turn to the educational system that prepared some applicants well and others poorly. The implications for education here are particularly pertinent as numerous debates have raged

about affirmative action in college admission, but a deeper analysis demonstrates that the ways in which students' educational resources are distributed before students reach college age affect their future life chances and possibilities for college admission. Barry will be useful to argue for an expansion of the dialogue around educational rights into a conversation about equality of educational opportunities.

Barry on Rawls

It is important to place Barry into the context of political theory over the last half century to round out how his broader ideas of egalitarianism and justice as they relate to inequality in education. This is a crucial step to see how Barry's work contrasts with two of the major political philosophers that have had a dramatic effect on social and domestic policy and politics. In Barry's critique of Rawls and Nozick, his values continue to emerge, and they can be moved from the general discussion of politics to educational politics and, similarly, from justice to social justice in education.

At the outset, it is important to recall Barry's description of *Political Argument*, which places the work into the context of liberal political theory and foreshadows the discourse that John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971) brought to the forefront of the field. However, Barry is not hemmed in by the often staid boundaries associated with liberal and analytical philosophy in America and Great Britain from the post-World War II era until the linguistic turn. His work is always passionate and pointed even when delivering brash and sophisticated critiques of other philosophers' views.

It is important to understand how Barry sees Rawls' work; in doing so, Barry takes up a very progressive position towards governance and its foundational, or in this case, nearly anti-foundational basis. He states the importance of Rawls' opening of the

political discourse and then moves to what the point of political theorizing (and further, what the point of educational theorizing) should be: “What Rawls...put before us is the task bequeathed us by the Enlightenment. We have to show that political principles are consistent with reason...but in the sense that they are worthy of the assent of reasonable people” (Barry, 1965/1990, p. lxxii). This slight embrace of Enlightenment values should not be viewed as a detractor as the philosophical position being asserted is remarkably pragmatic and sympathetic to the view that the laws that govern behavior in societies across the globe should be held up to a critical judgment of the people who are governed by them. This can be done without demanding conformity of values among diverse populations and, if done, could dramatically reduce the inequalities rampant in most societies.

Yet, as important as the contribution of Rawls’ work is, Barry is far from an unapologetic Rawlsian. Quite to the contrary, Barry’s *The Liberal Theory of Justice: A Critical Examination of A Theory of Justice* (1973) is still one of the best analyses of Rawls’ classic text. Early into the analysis, Barry describes what he sees as a coherence problem in Rawls’ theory: “The general drift of this book, as the reader will discover, is that Rawls’ ‘theory of justice’ does not work and that many of his individual arguments are unsound” (Barry, 1973, p. ix).

Still, even as Barry acknowledges, the importance of Rawls’ work has only grown over the years since its publication, and it is the starting point for most contemporary debates in liberal political philosophy. While there are many critiques of Rawls’ work—often from non-liberal philosophers who have been discounted by others because of their lack of membership in the field, Barry was one of the first critics from within the

tradition, and the critique that Barry offers is still the most salient. Much of the text of Barry's critique is written as if Barry would like to go along with Rawls' ideas, but he is too grounded in the real world and the problems incumbent in Rawls' hypothetical situations. In Barry's eyes, Rawls' massive thought experiment consistently fails to achieve its aims. A principal and telling insistence of Rawls' incoherence comes through in the following discussion of the vaunted original position that is the foundation of Rawls' theory. Barry draws out the following situation to demonstrate Rawls' error in the original position:

Suppose that two people are put into an 'original position' and told that one of them is white and the other black and that in ability and training they are identical. They are also told that they have a choice of being in one of two societies. In the first (e.g. Lesotho) both will be paid £ 4 a week for doing the same work (for which they are trained), while in the second (e.g. the Union of South Africa) they will be paid different amounts, the white £ 40 a week and the black £ 5 a week, for doing the same work side by side. On Rawls' premises about motivation in the original position, which include the postulate that neither will be upset by relativities as such (in other words that each person's utility depends on his own income alone), both parties will clearly be rational to choose to be in the second society rather than the first. But arrangements of the second society are not just because paying people different amounts for doing the same work side by side on account of their having different coloured skins or more generally being of different 'races' is inherently unjust. (Barry, 1973, p. 16-17)

Here, Barry breaks from Rawls and much of liberal political philosophy in two respects. One is on psychological motivation and the other is on the importance of acknowledging structured inequality among groups as being unjust. This is especially important considering how relativities (in wealth, for example) among groups are often assumed not to affect political choices. The second point is that the choice to pick the second society would be unjust as it would be treating two groups differently. Yet, this kind of inequality has been sanctioned with laws, by tacit governmental approval, and, more recently, through ineffective governmental regulation to prevent such

discrimination. In both instances again, it is essential to reject Rawls' suggestion that picking the second society is reasonable or just because of the inequality that it would allow to exist and grow. It is not difficult to take this idea directly to the educational arena and to create a similar example that would have a society in which two schools receive \$10,000 a year to educate each student or a society in which one group receives \$12,500 a year and another gets \$100,000. Clearly, this example's stark inequality demonstrates that absolute differences in resources and relativities among individuals and groups do matter to the justness of a set of institutions.

Barry is sympathetic to the beneficent aim of Rawls' theory and his principle of justice. Unfortunately for Rawls, a beneficent aim does little to advance the soundness of one's theory. The grounds for skepticism about this view are raised by Barry (1973) in the next discussion. The first point is something often overlooked in talk of equality over longer periods of time in Rawls' work as "the maximization of income of the worst off section of the population might entail spending nothing on investment, and this would make the next generation worse off than the current one. A rule is therefore needed for intergenerational equity" (Barry, 1973, p.43). Barry thinks that Rawls falls short on this mark, and one can extrapolate this failure to the limited perspective Rawls is taking once again on the practicalities of remedying inequality even through the well-intentioned ideas of helping the most disadvantaged. Barry also attacks Rawls on his rather simplistic view of economic inequality. For Barry, inequality of incomes is but one symptom of an overall structure of inequality in the economic sphere. It is possible and likely that Rawls is aware of varied investments that further skew inequality, but not mentioning or sufficiently discussing them is a glaring omission as they are vital to deeply

understanding that wealth and economic inequality are not just based on income. Barry relays the problem in the following manner: “Economic inequality is a complex matter since there are many ways in which people may have different claims on resources: private property invested in various ways to bring in dividends, capital gains or fixed interest...perquisites of all kinds” (Barry, 1973, p.43). In short, Rawls’ lack of discussion of other forms of wealth demonstrates how it does not play a large role in his thinking and, further, how wealth inequality is generally under-theorized since he fails to address its complexity.

As unfortunate as these missteps in Rawls’ theory are, they are not the only ones for Barry; the theme of Barry’s overall critique begins to emerge even more clearly in discussing these additional aspects. For instance, Barry does not think that Rawls goes far enough on numerous fronts to reduce the possibilities of inequality and unequal outcomes that result in institutionalized injustice. In short, Barry does not think Rawls is sufficiently radical. An example of this contrast is relayed in the following passage regarding poverty: “Indeed, in the absence of specially directed and vigorous efforts by the state, there seems to be a tendency for those hit by these sources of poverty to fall ever further behind as the society’s average wealth increases” (Barry, 1973, p. 50-51).

Barry’s efforts at appraising Rawls’ criteria demonstrate the biases in Rawls’ work that would allow considerable inequality to exist and continue unabated. This reliance on setting the rules at the beginning of Rawls’ experiment in justice, then letting the market take over, and hoping that things go well misses the lessons of history that suggest that people would fall significantly behind others in absolute terms. This is both destructive to democracy and unjust. Additionally, other critics of Rawls, ranging from

Michael Sandel (1982/1998) to Raymond Geuss (2008), have pointed out that people do not exist as unencumbered individuals nor are they likely to always act reasonably.

Barry's view of justice comes through here in his active egalitarianism towards social policy being geared to address inequality and the unfair slanting of resources away from ostensibly a market of distribution with some basic floor to minimal social service. This is a particularly salient point, and Barry continues ratcheting up the level of importance that he thinks should be placed on everyday issues of justice, like what people have to do to make a living. Barry forcefully asserts that working conditions should matter to justice:

It is noteworthy that Rawls does not consider the question of improving the working conditions of the bulk of the population as one of justice... One is forced to conclude that he must believe market forces to have some inherent tendency to bring them about, which is completely contradictory to experience. (p. 164)

Rawls' tacit acceptance of the so-called free market to get a fair distribution of jobs and to better the conditions of those positions is a glaring mistake, given the governmental regulations needed in the developed world and the existing exploitation that exists in countries without such governmental safeguards. For everyone with an interest in improving working conditions, this would seemingly be one of the most important factors in a reasonable theory of justice. Barry ventures into the breach with his usual flair for presenting a truly just idea that stands almost no chance of becoming a political actuality; in simply suggesting such plans, he reveals how fundamentally unjust our present political apparatuses are, as well as how impoverished the aims of leading political theories are. In response to Rawls' omission, Barry lobbies:

Since Rawls does not suggest ways of improving things, let me mention two, and let me say also that the question is not merely one of monotonous or routine jobs but jobs that are filthy, exhausting and injurious to health. The first line of attack

would be to spread the nastiest jobs around by requiring everyone, before entering higher education or entering a profession, to do, say three years of work wherever he or she was directed. (This would also have educational advantages.) (p. 164)

This suggestion for bad work to be required as compulsory service in a job outside one's usual aspirations could do much to improve the conditions for the workers who may end up in these positions, as those who would move on might actually see that individuals who perform such work should be paid more, get greater respect, and not be subject to unsafe conditions. What is remarkable about Rawls' massive tome is how few suggestions, such as Barry's, are presented in a similar form.

In Barry's view, Rawls has an all too rosy picture of human nature, forgets the lessons of history, and even neglects the conditions of the present—as his theory would not need to have been conceived of if people acted in the manner he ascribes to them throughout the work. In contrast, Barry is quick to see that the most likely pattern of leaving work to market conditions will be bad for those employed in the worst jobs and that thoughts that companies will regulate themselves without independent government supervision are naïve. In this instance, Barry suggests active solutions where Rawls defers to the caprice of the market:

The invariable trouble with regulatory agencies is the danger of their becoming too sympathetic with those they are supposed to control. What is needed, I suggest, is the creation of a negative points system for the monotony, unpleasantness and danger of jobs, and legislation providing for the automatic deduction each year in the number of points a job can score and still be permitted to exist. In the advanced industrial societies few [other] lines of reform, I suggest, hold a great prospect for the advancement of human well-being. (p. 165)

Such a system of calculus of bad work may seem naïve in his presentation.

However, this is precisely the type of active egalitarianism that Rawls' work lacks and what makes Barry so important. What is pointed out with this example is that societies

that do not seek to improve conditions of work for those who have the worst positions do not have an active interest in justice and often only want to ensure that they or their children do not end up in one of those positions. This example has a similar educational analogue; if students were forced to attend a school in the district and were not allowed to exit to the private sphere, one would imagine that the schools would improve or, more cynically, one could imagine that parts of certain schools would improve.

To sum, this section has explored Barry's work via his critique of John Rawls and has demonstrated Barry's much more active view of governmental intervention that is needed to succeed in creating greater egalitarianism in society. This contextual background demonstrates that rethinking educational institutions and the services they offer is vital to the social and political reform that Barry seeks.

Barry on Nozick

It is now crucial to move from Barry's treatment of Rawls' work to his discussion of the other major pillar of political philosophy in the contemporary liberal tradition, Robert Nozick and his *Anarchy, State and Utopia* (1974). This discussion is vital to understanding how Barry's later work on social justice is relevant to educational studies as a response to conservative views. Further, the political discourse furthered by Nozick, which Barry rebuts, is a discourse that must also be actively confronted and rejected in educational scholarship.

Nozick considered himself to be a libertarian, but his views place him at the extreme right of political liberalism due to his perspective that government should provide only the enforcement of contracts and minor policing functions. Barry's discussion of Nozick comes in the form of a book review that is much smaller in scope

than his discussion of Rawls, which took an entire book. The famous review was published in *Political Theory*. This shorter form was due to Barry's lack of interest in focusing on Nozick's ideas for an extended period of time. Specifically, Barry found Nozick's views to be so morally repugnant and philosophically specious that they only merited a few pages of rebuttal. What Barry finds unfortunate about Nozick's work is that it has provided a shell of philosophical legitimacy to what he considers to be brutish and unthoughtful views. What is even more unfortunate, for Barry, is how influential Nozick's ideas have been in American politics (and indirectly in educational policy) in the decades since the book's publication. Both of these issues are stressed in Barry's biting review.

Barry's first charge in the review is that Nozick's ideas, which include a plea for extremely limited government, often known as the nightwatchman theory of government, are rather common and unoriginal. In contrast, Barry thinks Rawls may have erred in the development of his theory, but that Rawls did not have a similar lack for originality.

Barry (1975) takes Nozick to task for trying to separate himself from less sophisticated commentators with essentially the same ideas:

The book's [*Anarchy, State, and Utopia*] conclusions are not in the least unusual. They articulate the prejudices of the average owner of a filling station in a small town in the Midwest who enjoys grousing about paying taxes and having to contribute to "welfare scroungers" and who regards as wicked any attempts to interfere with contracts, in the interests, for example, of equal opportunity or anti-discrimination. There will be nothing unfamiliar in the conclusions of the book to those who have read their William F. Buckley or their Senator Goldwater or have ever paid attention to the output of the more or less batty crusades and campaigns financed by wealthy Texans and Californians. The only thing that is new is that these views are being expressed by someone who is a Professor of Philosophy at Harvard. (p. 331)

These easy allusions to the work of William F. Buckley (1951), Ayn Rand (1957), and Barry Goldwater (1960/2007) are vital elements to understanding this strain of political thought and action in American politics. Importantly, these three individuals are the intellectual forebears of President Ronald Reagan, who was shown in Chapter 2 to have played a significant role in the expansion of inequality in America during the 1980s.

Further, Barry is offended by how Nozick makes his argument. To present his views in such a nonchalant manner disgusts Barry. It is as if Nozick has not even considered the possible negative effects if his ideas about limited government took hold. In this section, Barry reminds the reader about the stark inequality that could occur if Nozick's ideas were fully implemented:

Finally the intellectual texture is of a sort of cuteness that would be wearing in a graduate student and seems to me quite indecent in someone who, from the lofty heights of a professorial chair, is proposing to starve or humiliate ten percent or so of his fellow citizens (if he recognizes the word) by eliminating all transfer payments through the state, leaving the sick, the old, the disabled, the mothers with young children and no breadwinner, and so on, to the tender mercies of private charity, given at the whim and pleasure of the donors and on any terms that they choose to impose. (p. 331-332)

The revival of Hoover-era notions of leaving the poor out in the cold with no government safety net is appalling to Barry. Barry is so shocked by Nozick's words that he is tempted to think that there is a Swiftian quality to the work as someone with Nozick's knowledge and intellectual pedigree should not have been able to arrive at this perspective. However, there is no irony at all in the creation of Nozick's ideal state, despite the fact that his view of utopia would create certain chaos and suffering for everyone living in it, except for the most elite members of society. Barry relays this view that Nozick cannot actually believe all that he is saying, especially given the implications for social and economic policy:

“My own personal inclination would be to treat the book as a joke, but since it is only too clear that others are prepared to take it seriously, I shall do so as well” (p. 332).

This acknowledgement is powerful in understanding the appeal such a work has for many people, especially those of the highest economic strata. It is more difficult to understand how many groups who would be even more systematically disadvantaged by the elites accept and promote this ideology. Here, it is important to recall Rousseau’s (1754/1985) warning from *Discourse on Inequality* that explains that the rich convince the poor to believe in private property (and therefore its protection as being a central government function), because if they do not, the poor will lose what little property they own. The modern media techniques that elites use for this process today have been detailed by Herman and Chomsky (1988/2002) for the past several decades. With these existent trends, the Barry and Nozick exchange only becomes more acute and powerful.

In the follow section, it becomes clear that the lines of conservative thought are quite connected regardless of Nozick’s attempt to distance himself from others with similar views. Barry (1975) critiques: “I have said that the political position of the book amounts to no more than the mean-spirited conventional wisdom of middle America pushed to its logical conclusion...If you loved Goldwater, you’ll love Nozick” (p. 332). As reflected here, Barry’s initial review, which is admittedly harsh, led to a response from a supporter of Nozick who criticized Barry for having an emotional response to Nozick’s work. Barry defended himself by saying that basically any caring or reasonable person should have an emotional response to a political theory that ensures sweeping inequality and, then, insultingly suggests that it is somehow just.

Barry's comment near the end of the review sums up his view that Nozick has not presented much that is new to political theory other than revive the idea that might makes right. Barry (1975) states, "Justice for Nozick, as for Thrasymachus, is the interest of the stronger... If Nozick is discontented to find that his views put him in nasty company, he should... reflect on the possibility that the reason is that these are nasty views" (Barry, 1975, p. 334). Barry's argument against Nozick here is easy to spot. Justice for Barry means greater equality. Justice for Nozick is whatever occurs in the market with minimal government intervention or protection. When one thinks of the educational implications of these political philosophies, we can see how important this philosophical divide is to educational theory and policy as some observers advocate for greater equality in funding and resources while others suggest that the governmental role in education should be reduced or outsourced to private interests.

The final section of note brings a turn towards the future of American politics and is spot-on in its description of present political trends:

Nozick's vision of "utopia" as a situation in which advantaged reinforce their advantages by moving into independent jurisdictions, leaving the poor and disadvantaged to fend for themselves, could be regarded as the work of a master satirist, since it is in fact merely the logical extension of pathologically divisive processes already well-established in the United States: the flight of the middle classes to the suburbs while the inner city decays from lack of resources, and the growth of "planned communities" for the wealthy aged and other specially selected groups who are able to shed much of the usual social overhead. Unfortunately, there is no sign that Nozick, jokiness personified in other respects, sees this particular joke, but, thanks to the direction given to public policy by Nixon and Ford and their Supreme Court, the American people have an increasing opportunity to enjoy the joke personally. Robert Nozick is the thinking man's Gerald Ford, or, if you prefer, the rich man's John Rawls (since he could hardly be the poor man's John Rawls). (p. 336)

Based on the political drift of the country since the mid-1970s, Barry's understanding of American politics is prescient. Barry might have deemed these trends to be personified in

the vice presidential candidacy of Sarah Palin in 2008 (see also Palin 2009), as he would likely claim that Palin represents the worst view of a governing public philosophy—detached and uninformed about essential issues while at the same time unapologetically self-confident and misguided as to the belief that big government is evil. The educational and political consequences of Nozick’s ideology that Barry rails against continue to present challenges to educational equality and egalitarianism and, unfortunately, these will likely continue into the future.

In conclusion, this chapter has introduced the work of Brian Barry in contrast to the major pillars of contemporary political philosophy and the justness of institutions and outcomes in society. Further, it initially explores several of the concepts that are of central importance to extending his ideas into the critical approaches in education. Of particular concern are the ways in which he questions meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity—each of which play a part in the related educational discourses. His work will be returned to in the following chapters, which explore differing critical perspectives on the persistence of inequality in education. The next chapter turns to the discussion of class in critical educational scholarship and Barry’s views of class and material inequality.

CHAPTER 4

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION: APPEALS TO CLASS

This chapter provides a discussion of the work of the leading proponents of a class based notion of critical educational scholarship. The chapter begins with a brief definitional exercise of how the term class is used before proceeding to discuss how class has become an issue in this area of scholarship. Then, texts of scholars in this area will be analyzed to draw out the values and positions that underlie their work and its relationship to education. In response, Barry's contrasting views on class will then be discussed.

Interestingly, Barry's (1989, 2005) critique of meritocracy is complementary to the class based critical tradition's aim to undercut the notion that success in society is the exclusive result of the achievement of individuals over others based on merit. However, from this empirical agreement, Barry's interpretations somewhat diverge by fleshing out the philosophical and political complications within the class based critical tradition. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion about the differences and commonalities among the arguments offered, as well as their implications for education.

Michael Apple, Henry Giroux, and Peter McLaren, who will be discussed in this chapter, all rely upon notions of class in understanding material inequality in society and how it affects education. "Class" is used throughout this chapter in this orthodox manner, in that it trumps other characteristics of social status, and it is used in the sense of one large social group being exploited by a small elite group that benefits from the larger

group's labor. Despite this study's definitional bounding, it is important to note that other scholars have adapted the meaning of the term class to encompass a diverse set of other characteristics and that there have been theoretical advances to expand class beyond this modernist conception. Such advances have come from some post-structuralist authors. Yet, even when the authors discussed in this chapter have attempted a similar theoretical move in their recent work, this effort has been somewhat muted by the traditional elements of class. This is especially true in the case of McLaren, whose bottom line in social and political critique is always to define class on material grounds and who still regards it as fundamental to any significant social and political progress.

With the establishment of this definition of the term class to this line of critical educational thought, this section will now look at the origins of class's entry into the discourse and will discuss why this critical educational tradition emerged at the time it did. The question of why these scholars turned to a focus on class and material inequality in educational thought has several related origins. A substantial background condition was the fading idealism of the 1960s, alongside the continued promotion of schools as great equalizers and engines of democratic and economic improvement. This rhetoric began to wear thin as educational and economic realities did not match what had been promised through traditional means of education. As these divergent circumstances confronted educators, links began to be made between the social reconstructionism of Theodore Brameld and George Counts; critical theory influenced by Karl Marx from Max Horkheimer, Theodore Adorno, and Herbert Marcuse; and the reconceptualist movement in curriculum theory initiated by William Pinar.

From this convergence came a focus on schools as institutions that needed to be radically reformed, restructured, and rethought for them to be useful in changing society for the better. At this tradition's base was the contention that simply promoting any one version of democracy in schools would not substantially reshape society in a progressive way. These scholars began to analyze schooling as much more than the venue for the transmission of knowledge of one generation to another. They began to view the curriculum, the cultural processes, and the economic positions of teachers and students in a much more holistic manner. To them, schools could no longer be viewed as entities that transmit an objective, value-free canon to students and that inculcate positive civic attitudes. Instead, schools were to be considered institutions worthy of critique as indoctrination centers that promoted capitalistic values and that prevented social progress.

Since the emergence of this tradition, it has grown substantially and spawned its own terms. In particular, critical pedagogy has become a discourse in which the connection between critical theory and the educational task of teaching students intertwine. However, the influence of this critical tradition in teacher education programs is often contested and, outside the academy, is often even less strong. There are teacher-led, school-level efforts that exist in implementing critical pedagogy, but the overriding trend in educational policy towards the deprofessionalization of teachers and the use of centralized curriculum continues to hamper its use in the public schools. Further, many politicians and certain factions of the population have sought the removal of or censure of teachers who are too overt in employing critical pedagogy.

With the provision of this background, the chapter now will discuss the work of Michael Apple and Henry Giroux before focusing on Peter McLaren and his collaborators. The extended attention given to McLaren is warranted because of his exemplar status within this class based critical tradition and his authorship of a popular social foundations text that reflects this tradition, *Life in Schools: An Introduction to Critical Pedagogy in the Foundations of Education* (1989/2006).

Class and Critical Educational Scholarship

This section briefly discusses the work of Michael Apple in *Ideology and Curriculum* (1978/2003), Henry Giroux's comments upon Peter McLaren's contributions, and the ideas of McLaren (2005) and his collaborative efforts with other supporters of the class based critical tradition. The following sections will provide a discussion and analysis of these key texts and their underlying ideas within the critical tradition. This work has been tremendously influential in understanding how education contributes to the indoctrination of students into capitalist culture. However, before getting to that more radical call for change, it is vital to take a look at how this perspective evolved and how the links between economics, school, and the workplace came to exist, as well as the symbolic value of education to class politics.

Here, Michael Apple (1978/2003) is invaluable in presenting how class and education have come to be understood in a more nuanced manner than some of his colleagues:

I think we are beginning to see more clearly a number of things that were much more cloudy before. As we learn to understand the way education acts in the economic sector of a society to reproduce important aspects of inequality, so too are we learning to unpack a second major sphere in which schooling operates. For not only is there economic property *there* also seems to be symbolic property—cultural capital—which schools preserve and distribute. (p. 3)

This finer lens in understanding education and schooling's role can also be traced to rather sound Marxist, class based thought, and the influence of Basil Bernstein.

Specifically, Apple's discussion of institutional arrangements around education as having multiple functions that contribute to controlling society without outright repression and violence mirrors Louis Althusser's (1971) distinction between ideological state apparatuses and repressive state apparatuses. So, this more complex understanding of education is one that can be seen to have strong class and Marxist foundations.

There is additional evidence for this class based approach being an underlying motivation. Apple admits to drawing heavily on Raymond Williams, whose class based politics were clear in works such as *Marxism and Literature* (1978) (Williams will also appear in works of McLaren). Further, one cannot forget that Apple used the term "ideology" in his title, which cannot be missed in showing his early and ongoing commitment to class through the use of language and method. With this said, Apple's position has evolved to more fully appreciate the differences among populations of students in relation to society in a more robust manner than often comes through in the work of the other scholars of this class based tradition. Here, he makes sure to acknowledge that not everything may fit together as tightly as he would like, and, therefore, his use and definition of class is less closed off than McLaren's use. He writes,

We say there is a one-to-one correspondence between economics and consciousness, economic base "automatically" determining superstructure. This is too easy to say, unfortunately, and is much too mechanistic. For it forgets that there is, in fact, a dialectical relationship between culture and economics. It also presupposes an idea of conscious manipulation of schooling by a very small number of people with power. (Apple, 1978/2003, p. 3)

This parsing out of the elements of difference only would become more important to the field of education in the decades since the work was first published. In the preface to the second edition, Apple shows that there are additional factors that must be taken into account, and these elements challenge the old rigid understandings of class: “Class dynamics are of immense significance and cannot be ignored. However, I have become more and more convinced that *gender* relations—and those involving *race*, which in the United States and in so many other countries are critically important” (Apple, 1978/2003, p. xxiii). Apple is compelled here to acknowledge the changes that have occurred in issues of economic difference also have social components. This turn to race and gender marks an important change in how class and Marxist theorists can address issues of human diversity. This theoretical change and response to critics was vital to making the critique of existing educational structures relevant to emerging demographic trends in schools and society. Further, Apple’s migration to this position shows his inclusivity.

In general, Apple comes to a view that is much less narrow in the understanding of class than in previous decades and much more relevant to the present political conditions than that of McLaren. He is even willing to admit that Marxist analysis made errors, which McLaren is reluctant to do. This more open attitude is on display in the following passage: “Now, parts of some Marxist traditions were sometimes reductive or even wrong, but without the easy availability of a good deal of the material it is difficult to develop a rich and nuanced critical position based on these traditions” (Apple, 1978/2003, p. 184). Again, this acknowledgment of the possible constrictive tendencies in this tradition is an important theoretical advance.

Having given a glimpse of the evolution of some class based critiques, it is important to look briefly at Peter McLaren's *Schooling as Ritual Performance: Towards a Political Economy of Symbols and Gestures* (1986), as this volume and its reception provides insight into his views to see that they have not developed in the same way. The text's place and how it fits into this framework of class based critical educational thought are described by Henry Giroux (1986) in the Foreword:

The major ideological concern that informs McLaren's story is one that has preoccupied radical educational work for the last fifteen years...the major task for radical educators has been one of trying to unravel *how* schools reproduce the logic of capital through the ideological and material forms of domination and privilege that structure the lives of students from differing class, gender and ethnic groupings. Needless to say, the challenges that radical educators have posed to traditional theories of schooling, along with their analyses of how schools contribute to the reproduction of capitalist societies, has opened up a new debate around the meaning of schooling and its place in the Western democracies. (p. ix-x)

Giroux's placement of McLaren's work into the process of peeling back the layers of education in understanding the reproduction of capital connects to the way that Apple urged a more nuanced understanding of class and Marxist inspired educational scholarship. However, Giroux's contribution to this critical tradition goes well beyond commenting on McLaren's work. His numerous volumes have expanded the educational conversation around class, and he has ushered in many aspects of critical theory into the educational discourse. Yet, Giroux seems to have taken a somewhat similar path to Apple in that he now practices a more nuanced version of the class based tradition than that of McLaren.

This more nuanced version and understanding to class is relayed in the following statement by Henry Giroux from *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education* (1992/2005). He states, "Is class important? Yes. Is it any more important than

race? No, I don't think so... I find myself being concerned about the inter-relationship among categories more than I do on the legitimate focus on single narratives such as class" (p.197). The admission form Giroux must be seen as marking a difference between him and McLaren.

It is now useful to directly focus on the work of Peter McLaren and his collaborators for the rest of this section. This is needed as he is the leading voice of the class based critical tradition, and he exemplifies it more than any other scholar. Even as other scholars have moved from the narrow definition to more enlightened versions of class that take into account other forms of diversity, McLaren holds to an orthodox notion of class as being the fundamental and defining feature of existing society and education. He does occasionally open up this narrow definition, acknowledging the importance of other factors, only to return to class as the fundamental unit of analysis.

The first work that exemplifies the critical tradition on class is McLaren and Ramin Farahmandpur's (2005) *Teaching Against Global Capitalism and the New Imperialism: A Critical Pedagogy*. It connects Marxism and critical theory into educational discourse via globalization. Their work provides a grand explanation to educational inequality against the backdrop of global capitalism. In the book, they relay their frustration with the absence of discussion of class in public life and political debate. Here is their assertion: "Seldom do politicians, intellectuals, or the media openly discuss class inequality in a language that situates it within the larger problematic of global capitalism" (p. 173). They see this omission as a grave error that must be remedied to improve societal conditions through educational reform.

McLaren and Farahmandpur continue on a related line that demonstrates that even when they say class is not all that matters, they retreat to that notion quickly: “We want to make clear that we are not subordinating race, ethnic, and gender struggles to class struggle. We are simply saying that without overcoming capitalist relations of production, other struggles will have little chance of succeeding” (p. 175). Their caveat clearly demonstrates the primacy of class as their touchstone concept and as one that trumps competing concerns for diversity.

In moving from political struggle to education, McLaren and Farahmandpur (2005) view teachers as agents of change in a societal confrontation between members of the working and elite classes. As such, they are dismayed by the lack of discussion of certain political issues in teacher education programs. They state that “teacher education programs have failed to engage students in dialogues about class exploitation and oppression. Often times class power is sanitized and its powerful effect on the life chances of working-class students is denuded or made invisible” (p. 8). McLaren and Farahmandpur perceive the absence of discussion of class in other academic fields as foreshadowing a similar void in teacher education and preparation programs. For these authors, the push towards non-higher education based teacher preparation programs and the removal of social foundations coursework from many other programs leave new teachers underprepared for the economic and class inequalities they will confront in their classrooms.

Similar themes of class and capitalist social relations are explored in *Capitalists and Conquerors: A Critical Pedagogy Against Empire* (2005). In this work, McLaren and Scatamburlo-D’Annibale (2005) discuss why the class based perspective has struggled

for acceptance. In short, they pin Marxism's failure in educational theory and politics on a postmodernist and misplaced notion that scholars moved away from class in cultural studies. They perceive that the academy has given up on class and that this has been a mistake in the fight for social progress. They contend the following:

In many respects, class has actually been hidden from analytical and political view by the "postmodern" turn in cultural studies. While we would not dispute that cultural studies have made great inroads in addressing the previous dearth of cultural investigation into gender, sexuality, race, and ethnicity, it has come at considerable cost and has led to an evacuation of the key concern that gave birth to cultural studies in the first place—namely a profound commitment to class. (p. 118)

This sets McLaren and his supporters against many cultural studies and multicultural scholars who might otherwise be more sympathetic to these class based views about the exploitation of workers and corporatization of education. It could also be argued that McLaren overlooks many critical educators and scholars who rely on analyses of material inequality and class while accepting advances in social theory that might fall under the broad moniker of postmodernism.

McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2005), having identified the omission of class analysis from colleges and universities, again move to revive its use in teacher education and educational studies. They repeat the claim that their mode of analysis is needed given the paucity of class based critique: "Despite post-Marxist claims to the contrary, Marxist theory still has a key role to play in generating ideas that challenge intellectual orthodoxies and rationalizations for educational inequalities" (McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2005, p. 121). For them, education is tied to a greater struggle in which capital must be overcome through revolutionary means. Education and teachers

are to play central roles in curbing consumerist and exploitative tendencies in society, and they are to act as change agents and cultural workers in this process.

McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale (2005) then turn back to the larger political struggle by relaying how education plays the key role of assisting in the defeat of capital: "It requires creating the social and material conditions that can help to shape and educate class consciousness in the pursuit of socialist futures... resistance requires a democratic and centralized class struggle in order to transform state power" (p. 126). These elements of resistance have a significant educational component to pursue their aims. McLaren's means of getting towards this socialist future require intervention from educators to help students reveal the commoditization and fetishizations of society. For McLaren and his cohort, education is not communication of the canon of knowledge, but, instead, it is a political act that intervenes and hopes to remedy distorted class relations.

They continue with a focus on teachers as being the vital connection in this critical tradition. They put the role teachers must play in this historical change in the following manner:

The key for critical educators is not only to become involved in making the process of cultural commodification less invisible to those whose subjectivities are formed within it, but to become involved in creating the kinds of social, political, and educational conditions that . . . shape the development of working-class consciousness. (McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale, 2005, p. 131)

Assessing how teachers negotiate these boundaries is difficult. Additionally, teachers who adhere to these ideals will face the complications of administrators and policymakers who may have very different ideas about the role of teachers. Further, the fact that many teachers come from middle-class backgrounds may provide resistance to the consciousness raising that McLaren and Scatamburlo-D'Annibale desire.

A second piece from *Capitalists and Conquerors* explores similar themes, but it also moves into education's broader social and political functions. The key ideas are similar to ones expressed previously, but here they are spelled out more directly. The following passage relays these authors' view of education in modern society:

Education plays a key role in the perpetuation of the capital relation; this skeleton in capitalist education's dank basement. This is just one of the many reasons why, in contemporary capitalist society, education assumes a grotesque and perverted form. It links the chains that bind our souls to capital. That it is uncomfortable for educational theorists, researchers, activists, and practitioners to talk about such unsavory topics is not surprising. However, only by uncovering the lid on this issue can Marxist science hope to advance. (Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski, 2005, p. 136)

This quote demonstrates how important class is to the authors and the way they view the present educational system. They see educational reform as being a necessary step towards a socialist future. These authors assert that the capitalist interest in schools is well known and that most educational reform of the past several decades has been strongly influenced by business roundtables. Consequently, the point they are trying to make is that the function of schools in a capitalist society are rarely acknowledged in wider public debates on education.

This point on schools' capitalist nature relates to Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski's (2005) claim that, because the class based perspective is not too difficult to understand, it should have more power in gaining adherents. Yet, ease of understanding does not override resistance based on numerous other factors. Regardless, Allman et al. (2005) suggest:

No one would deny that there are bits of Marx's *oeuvre* that are difficult, but his concept of class is not one of these. However, since it appears to be widely misunderstood or ignored and also because it is absolutely fundamental to all sorts of political—including educational—struggles, it is important to discuss this concept. (Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski, 2005, p. 140)

Again, this concept can be useful and can have resonance within the proper context. This tradition's interest in reviving its debate is central to the overall program of educational, political, and economic revolution.

Indeed, for McLaren and his cadre, their revolution comes through education, which requires substantial political, economic, and social change. This revolution must be spurred on by a new educational strategy that reveals the many ills of capitalism. They label this new program as revolutionary critical education. They assert that the time is ripe for this movement to come to the fore of education and society, and they are distressed that even many of their supporters seem to have given up on class. They do seem to be stuck in a paradox of sorts in that the time is right for revolution, but the revolution will not come unless their supporters can overcome the resistance to revolution and the retreat from class.

Again, they consider the possible complication that is often given for why this tradition has not been more successful:

if workers understood how capitalism actually functions—something that will only happen when and if revolutionary critical education becomes widespread—they would understand both what is happening to them and why it is happening. And educators, one of the professions experiencing this process [exploitation], would also be able to better understand what is happening to those they teach—how not only they but the labor-power of the future is being groomed for the needs of capital. (Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski, 2005, p. 146)

Yet, this critical step in the educational process is one that remains difficult to accomplish given the circumstances that teachers employing critical pedagogy face from administrators, parents, and external mandates.

Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski's critique then switches back to capitalism as an economic system with less of a focus on education. There is a strong and consistent

movement back and forth between the educational and the political argument here. In doing so, they seek to deconstruct the taken for granted notion that capitalism produces the best outcomes of any possible economic system. Further, they explain an interesting point about scarcity being essential to capitalism, which speaks volumes for educational scarcity in present society.

McLaren and his comrades are convinced that schools perpetuate class and capital reproduction. They could urge active resistance against them as did Ivan Illich, or they could support private or charter schools that could serve as counterweights to accountability regimes that restrict the public schools. Instead, they present the case for resistance through public education. In their eyes, this new form of public education would do something to challenge capital and class relations. The difficulty of which they are aware is in transforming public education into a new formulation. Changes of the magnitude that they believe in have many barriers and the coalition behind their revolution knows that the changes they suggest will take time and numerous levels of capacity building.

From here, they turn again to the inability of class based critiques to overcome the challenges to their acceptance and the role of progressive educators: “the lack of success of the educational left is not so much the result of the conflicted sensibilities of critical educators as it is a testament to the preening success of Western...efforts in indigenizing the cultural logic of capitalism” (Allman, McLaren, and Rikowski, 2005, p. 152-153). This indicates that the steps to revolutionary critical pedagogy will continue to be a hard sell to the masses that increasingly see all education as vocational training.

Critics will ask what these challenges to capital will look like, but McLaren is confident that teachers who have been exposed to critical pedagogy will develop an activist and creative mentality to change the educational dynamics in their schools. Further, he would not want to superimpose a structure of resistance that would not accommodate the individual situations in which teachers confront these trends. So, McLaren concludes with a renewed call to activism in education from his class based views:

A rustle of wind stirs up memories of antiwar demonstrations on the streets of Los Angeles where workers, students, socialist, anarchists, priests, ministers, and antiglobalization activists found common ground in the struggle against U.S. imperialism. It is this spirit of *communitas* at work in the picket lines, in the demonstrations for peace, and in our social justice classrooms that will continue to provide the spiritual fuel for the challenge ahead. It is this surfeit of liminality, this excess of life that cannot be commodified or codified, controlled or captured that connects us to our collective struggle. Echoing Raymond Williams, it will be a long revolution. (McLaren, 2005a, p. 335-336)

This final passage encapsulates the educational, political, and economic discourse of the class based critical tradition. By relying on the language of class as the basis for their analysis of educational inequality, these scholars have attempted to draw greater attention to the circumstances of the most disadvantaged and marginalized students. Moreover, their underlying critique of class and capitalist relations draws in a much broader set of issues to educational policy debates. Yet, to have these issues taken seriously by policymakers remains a challenge.

The next section shifts the focus to Barry's views of class and his related critique of meritocracy as it relates to educational inequality.

Barry on Class

In analyzing how Barry (2005) deals with questions of class and the work of Marx, the connections between his disgust with inequality and that of McLaren and his brethren are apparent. The points of agreement are on the injustice of some groups and individuals in society having so much more than others, especially when these resources are gained through unjust means. Similarly, they both are clearly interested in reducing inequality, but their readings of Marx are quite different. McLaren is critical of educational institutions and capitalist relations, yet he is not so critical of Marx. Barry, on the other hand, is willing to accept certain premises and conclusions in Marx, but he also achieves a critical distance and identifies areas where Marx neglects certain vital philosophical concepts. In particular, Barry is quite critical about the lack of discussion of rights in Marx's work. Barry (2005) states:

During the nineteenth century, a number of people who saw the critical importance of opportunities and resources denigrated negative rights altogether: in the ideal socialist or communist state, to insist on rights would be an expression of egoism and would be pernicious. Fatefully, Karl Marx was numbered among these who took this line. We cannot know if the course of the history of the Soviet Union (and after 1945 its Eastern European satellites) or China would have been different had Marx emphasized the permanent importance of individual rights. But we have only to call to mind the horrors unleashed by Stalin and Mao to recognize that Marx was tragically mistaken. (p. 22-23)

For Barry, it would be a great step forward for proponents of the class based critical tradition if they were able to reconcile the disjuncture of relying on Marx and economic class as a method of analysis of society and education and the importance of individual rights. However, this is not attempted; McLaren and his supporters simply take what they want from Marx and leave out the missing parts—like a theory of individual rights.

In Barry's 1989 piece, "Is it Better to be Powerful or Lucky?", from *Democracy, Power, and Justice*, he relays that he understands Marx's main insights, especially on power and class. He identifies two groups,

The 'pluralists', who are really individualists, look at a situation and point out that no single actor—no single banker or industrialist, say—could have made much difference to what happened. They conclude from this observation—in most cases a perfectly reasonable one—that 'nobody has power'. The 'elitists' on the other hand insist that, if the whole group of bankers or industrialists wanted something different to happen they could make it happen, and tend to move from this to saying that individual members of the elite have power. Karl Marx showed a better grasp of the concept of power than either of these recent antagonists when he maintained both that the capitalist class has power and that individual capitalists are powerless. (p. 291)

The insight from Marx that Barry takes from this quote is the difficulty in separating power from economics and class. It is the embedded nature of power that is relayed in thinking about how the members of a class collectively wield considerable power, but an individual would be crippled by the group if they attempted to use their power outside the defined boundaries of the class.

Further, this demonstrates a point of agreement of Barry and the class based critical tradition in their views of how economic class works and the bounds it puts on individual agency. Barry acknowledges the insights of Marx and asks how Marxist ideas have played out in a society that has adopted systems inspired by his work. Where Barry diverges from McLaren and his colleagues is in the latter's lack of emphasis on the individual. This is a critical difference between Barry and this critical tradition, because, when the conversation moves directly to education, McLaren is left with little room for developing strategies for educational reform that take into account individual rights. McLaren may not think these are necessary, but Barry's comments require that this

implementation be incorporated as an essential element of reducing educational inequality.

Again, it is important to reiterate that Barry stands with the class based critical tradition in its rejection of inequality in terms of power, resources, and opportunities that position some classes of individuals over others based on arbitrary, capricious, and lucky events. Yet, his disgust with the historical and present realities of material inequality in wealth and its distribution does not jibe with all aspects of the philosophical and political territory of this critical tradition. The main objection is that these critical scholars discount a theory of individual rights and, for Barry, this is a fatal flaw. McLaren and his brethren are so quick to do away with the present political system that they neglect to remember that these institutions of liberalism give them the freedom to express their dissenting view as individuals. These institutions are fraught with problems, but they do provide more protection for individual rights than the system that is advanced by McLaren.

Barry sees the connections of Marx to class and universalism in a way that retains a similarity to McLaren. Barry (2001) puts it this way: “Marx shared with contemporary Victorian liberals the notion that there was a universally valid notion of progress. He believed that the key to emancipation of human beings from oppression and exploitation was the same everywhere” (p. 4). This point on universalism is important to critical educational scholarship as one of the main critiques of class based and Marxist inspired work is that it does not adequately account for diversity in persons and societies. Barry continues this line on the value of Marx. He writes, “Nevertheless, Marxism, so long as it remained an intellectual force, provided a stiffening of universalism to the liberal cause:

the best response to the Marxist vision of universal emancipation was an alternative liberal one” (p. 4). This discussion is absent in the critical work of McLaren on education or politics.

Interestingly, Barry sees the collapse of Marxism in a similar way to McLaren as both assert that so-called postmodernists dilute the struggle for equality, but they end up at different points with different implications for education. McLaren wants to rehabilitate Marx to bring along a communist future whereas Barry seeks greater equality with an acknowledgement of rights. Barry describes what happened in the wake of the failure of Marxism: “With some distinguished exceptions, the ex-Marxists themselves led the way by embracing various forms of relativism and postmodernism rather than a non-Marxist version of universalistic egalitarianism” (p. 4). This is an interesting observation for understanding the present differences in political theory.

On this point of rights, Barry (2001) again contrasts his perspective with Marx and McLaren in “the idea that rights are important.” (p. 13). For Barry, this denial can be connected to the intellectual roots of Marx and his class analysis. It is important to see how Barry thinks Marx fits into the western intellectual tradition to understand why rights are left out of his social, political, and economic critique. Barry (2001) asserts, “Marx represented the left wing of the Enlightenment. This is so in two respects. First, Marx did not reject the slogan ‘liberty, equality, fraternity’; on the contrary, he claimed to take it more seriously than did those who originated it” (p. 14). This interpretation is quite a different view than the one McLaren represents as McLaren’s Marx is not often perceived to have this type of origin.

Additionally, the allegations of universalism towards McLaren and the class based tradition can be seen to have their origins in Marx's universalism. This is further detailed by Barry (2001):

He [Marx] was just as much of a universalist as was any Enlightenment figure: he was as fully persuaded as was Condorcet that all societies would pass through the same stages and finish up at the same destination, though Marx's conception of the stages and the destination was different from that of Condorcet, and he envisaged the process as being driven by different forces. (p. 14)

Again, Barry sees the break in Marx from other social theorists in this rejection of the rights discourse. Clearly, Marx thought it was an elite indulgence to consider rights. Barry delineates: "Where Marx was distinctive was in his position on civil and political rights: he was not content to point out their limitations in the face of great economic inequalities; rather, he denounced them as suitable only to 'egoistic man'" (p. 14). Barry views Marx's next step negatively as he thinks there must be additions to the Enlightenment legacy. Barry contends, that for Marx, "The solution was not to supplement these universal rights with others, but to abolish rights altogether. In a society of the future, social solidarity and spontaneous cooperativeness would obviate the need for 'bourgeois rights'" (p.14). Barry echoes that this attitude might make sense in a utopian world, but history would indicate that a rights discourse protects the most vulnerable and marginalized individuals and groups—a consideration of substantial importance to education.

Barry (2005) is fundamentally concerned with how inequality and differences in wealth affect class. He contends,

The more materialistic a society—the more that it is generally believed that money is the only significant goal in life—the more that people with a lot of money will feel like winners and those with little will feel like losers. This feeling

will intensify if those who are better off than others believe that they are more virtuous and those who are worse off share this belief. (p. 78)

Barry thinks a life dedicated to the pursuit of financial gain will be at the expense of others. On this element, Barry and McLaren are in seeming agreement. Barry continues, “Almost all everyday interactions are mediated by the parties’ estimates of their relative social standing. Even those who do not acknowledge their class position are affected by it” (p. 78).

In relation to class, Barry is also seeking an answer to the problem of just governance, which has implications for the educational systems in the real world of politics and economics. In light of this aim, Barry (1989a), in *A Treatise on Social Justice, Volume 1: Theories of Justice*, places Marx and the derivative class analysis into its proper context of scarcity and distribution. He asserts, “Since the subject matter of justice is the distribution of things that are in short supply (relative to the total demand) the concept of justice would have no application. This entails...that wants should be limited” (p. 154). This is a critical point to which McLaren is sympathetic, but to which Barry provides greater weight.

Again, in thinking about the implications for education, the allocation of resources remains a vital concern. Without some abatement to students and adults’ desire for things, the project of this critical tradition faces yet another barrier. It is one that does not receive the attention it deserves given its pervasiveness and gravity in present consumptive society. Barry is much less inclined to think that people will give up this desire even though he agrees with McLaren on the underlying values.

With several elements of the differences of Barry and this critical tradition discussed, it is now important to connect this discussion of class based critical tradition to

the concept of meritocracy. Barry thinks that meritocracy is a destructive concept that inhibits a society's ability to reduce inequality and that it has substantially undercut class based analysis. The important link here is that, even though Barry is critical of this Marxist inspired tradition, there is a common enemy of inequality that should not be lost in his critique of it. So, it is important to knock down meritocracy and reveal it as a notion that only seeks to provide cover and justification for complicated forms of inequality and class distinction with simplistic political buzzwords.

For Barry, meritocracy, which is understood as the best rising to the top because of their individual talents, is mere social fiction that punishes students and communities that have been historically marginalized and that are less able to change economic status. This is not to say that there are not tremendous success stories that illustrate that achievement is possible, but these examples only serve to demonstrate that the circumstances that the spotlighted individual overcame were substantial. Conversely, many other individuals just stepped into the meritocratic system with ease and rose to the top with advantages all along the process.

This notion of meritocracy is tied to class and often works in the direction of keeping the mass of individuals from achieving their potential. Barry (2005) writes:

The idea that countries such as Britain and the United States are 'meritocracies' has been propagated with great effectiveness even though it is wildly contrary to the facts. There is no reason why this association of money with superiority and inferiority should not ascend all the way up the scale: a cottage, Marx said, shrinks to a hovel if somebody builds a castle next to it; but the castle shrinks to a cottage if someone builds up an enormously larger castle next to it. (p. 78)

The consideration here is that relativities and differences among groups matter. Inequality can be reduced by having a basic minimum income, home, or any other resource such as education. It is fundamental to remember that meritocracy can only have a reasonable

meaning when inequality among groups is very small. Since inequality is presently great, meritocracy must be dismissed as a pernicious concept.

Barry is aware of the implications of the rhetoric of meritocracy and that it is often used in the discussion of individuals' opportunities for success and college admission—for example, when the person is from a marginalized background. This deployment of meritocracy is done to justify inequality and the positions of those who achieved through merit and not family connections or better initial opportunities. A perfect example of when merit can be dismissed would be the recent economic crisis in which investment bank and insurance executives received their bonuses even though they ran their companies into the ground. This proves that merit as a basis for advancement is subjective and relative to where one fits in society.

In sum, this section has discussed Barry's work in conjunction with class and its underlying Marxist foundations. His commitment to this type of analysis only goes so far as he recognizes that Marx and the critical tradition based on Marx's work do not sufficiently attend to a theory of rights, which has devastating implications for society and education. Barry does have common ground with this tradition in his related discussion and critique of meritocracy as he sees the concept as a political tool used to obscure the reasons for economic and class inequality.

Conclusion

What Barry finds problematic about the continued reliance on Marxist perspectives on class is that there is not enough attention to rights. Omitting a discussion of them (because in a communist future, there would be no need to do so) ignores intermediate steps and gives sanctuary to those who would exploit this omission. It is

interesting to see that McLaren and Barry both think that the so-called postmodernists sold out inequality and class analysis and replaced it with a less active political attitude. Although McLaren and Barry arrive at very different positions from this common point, with McLaren seeing the overthrow of capital to be essential for societal and educational progress and Barry demanding that inequality be reduced to provide for a much greater egalitarian society, they both value the importance of relativities in class and wealth among populations as being essential to understanding present and future political structures.

In contrast to theorists such as Rawls who would assert that such differences should not matter as long there is a minimum standard or Nozick who would think that such inequalities are by-products of greater efforts of some more talented individuals, McLaren and Barry find such arguments unconvincing. Further, they find such inequalities to be unjust at their core and urge intervention in different ways. The implications of this debate for education are substantial as both Barry and the class based critical tradition see the importance of reforming educational structures and agendas to provide educational opportunities that give all students the chance to succeed. Further, these opportunities must be sincere and genuine and not just be provided as a veneering of inequality used to justify the faulty logic of meritocracy.

CHAPTER 5

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION: APPEALS TO AUTONOMY

This chapter discusses a critical tradition in educational thought that appeals to the notion of inculcating autonomy in students as a means to reducing educational inequality. It begins with a brief description of how the scholars in this field compose a critical tradition. Then, it moves to a discussion of the intellectual history of the tradition and its entry into educational thought. The next section analyzes the writings of Eamonn Callan and Harry Brighouse before focusing on the work of Rob Reich. The final part discusses Barry, autonomy, and personal responsibility.

The first step is to define these liberal democratic theorists as a distinct critical tradition. Critical tradition is defined here as a body of related social and political thought that critiques existing structures and institutions of society as well as the outcomes they produce. The scholars who make up this tradition are often much less hyperbolic and not as antagonistic of the governmental apparatuses that maintain the status quo than the other traditions in this study. Further, these political liberals are much less radical than their critical theory (both class and identity focused) colleagues in that they are less prone to see the institutions of government as inherently corrupt and prejudiced. Instead of recommending that government agencies be scrapped entirely as McLaren might suggest, political liberals often urge that more modest reforms are needed to fix educational and societal problems, such as curricular changes or transfer payments like vouchers

(Brighouse, 2000; Callan, 1997; Levinson, 1999). Therefore, this tradition looks less critical by comparison to the other traditions that are identified in this study.

Nevertheless, they remain critical of the present educational structures, policies, and agendas, and, consequently, they must be considered a critical tradition.

This critical tradition arose out of several historical trends in philosophy. Specifically, the intellectual heritage of these philosophers can be traced directly back to Immanuel Kant and his moral theory. The Kantian focus on the notion of autonomy is one of his most enduring and influential legacies for western political and social thought. Much closer to the present, this tradition is further inspired by John Rawls and his moral contract theory, which is thought to have been greatly influenced by Kant. There are also strong elements of the Anglo-American analytic philosophical traditions, including Bertrand Russell, within this critical tradition. In analytical philosophy of education, the work of Israel Scheffler (1960), R.S. Peters (1973), and Paul Hirst (1965) has had an influence on and continues to shape the discourse of this tradition. Building on all of these influences, the scholars of this critical tradition employ the concept of autonomy in attempting to remedy the inequalities of the educational apparatuses of the country.

Autonomy and Critical Educational Scholarship

The keystone concept for this tradition is autonomy (Reich, 2002). Proponents of this tradition see the state as promoting and inculcating students into a mindset through education. The development of a self-critical attitude towards students' actions, beliefs, and values, as well as towards that of their parents and communities, is central to this critical tradition. The trend in this work is an attempt to achieve an educational

environment that provides all students with some level of ability to choose the ways in which individuals are able to live their lives.

The focus of this section is on the texts of several prominent scholars in this tradition. It discusses the work of Eamonn Callan's *Creating Citizens* (1997) and Harry Brighouse's *On Education* (2006). However, the majority of the discussion and analysis centers on the work of political and educational theorist Rob Reich (2002), who promotes what he describes as a minimalist version of autonomy in his *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*. Reich's work merits an extended discussion as he can be seen as an exemplar of the recent advances in this tradition.

The first offering from this tradition begins with a hypothetical educational and political situation, which bears on autonomy. Callan in *Creating Citizens* (1997) describes how the task of educating students in virtue would be necessary to promote autonomy to prevent the world from devolving into a Brave New one, which "differs from the free societies we now inhabit in that those ideals [such as democracy and civic engagement] continue to exert a substantial influence on our lives, even though their influence is powerfully opposed almost everywhere, and often defeated, by other cultural pressures" (p. 3). Callan's worry is that the present slide in civic participation may only get worse rendering future societies nearly unrecognizable in today's terms.

He expresses this concern in this way: "If the future in store for our children is not to be a Brave New World—or more likely something far worse—that can only be because many learn to accept and internalize those same ideals of character" (p. 3). The follow-on point is that the educational system would contribute to the development of virtue in citizens. This notion of developing virtuous citizens through active

governmental action is one of the first steps towards the cultivation of autonomy. The connection between the two concepts is the notion of individuals being able to make good choices after some period of reflection. This idea of reflection on one's possible choices is essential to an autonomous life.

A slightly different version and more direct exploration of autonomy as an aim of education in the critical tradition of political liberalism comes from Harry Brighouse in *On Education* (2006). For Brighouse, autonomy is a primary purpose of education, which is not sufficiently attended to at present:

I shall argue that autonomy is important enough to justify a requirement that all children be subject to an education designed to facilitate it. But I am going to do so without claiming that autonomy is needed for a life to be worth living. So my argument for facilitating autonomy has to be grounded in a deeper principle that explains why it is so important. (Brighouse, 2006, p. 15)

What is useful in Brighouse's understanding of the term is that autonomy is a stand-in for the concept of living a flourishing life. Under this approach, one's life must be flourishing to be truly autonomous. This notion will be touched on in the discussion of Reich's work as well, but Brighouse is important here because he spells out to a more explicit degree the elements of this type of life—more so than either Callan or Reich.

Brighouse moves beyond the procedures of autonomy as an educational aim to the substance and content of what life looks like through autonomous eyes. Brighouse (2006) speaks to this point in the following way: “the idea that education should aim at enabling people to lead flourishing lives, and the argument that education should facilitate autonomy depends on the ideas that autonomy plays an important role in enabling people to live flourishing lives” (p. 15-16). Brighouse's autonomy presumes a level of choice in one's life options that may not exist for many people in the real world. However, he sees

this as not a fault of his theory but, instead, as one of the unjust circumstances of present society that inhibits achieving autonomy in one's life.

In support of this overall critique and in support of his view of autonomy, Brighthouse (2006) contends that one must be consciously living and not just aimlessly wandering through life. He presents the complexity in the following manner: "having objectively good things in one's life is not enough for a flourishing life. For somebody to actually flourish, they have to identify with the life they are leading. They have to live it from the inside, as it were" (p. 16). For Brighthouse, this process of chosen actions is one that is encouraged through proper education.

The final move that Brighthouse (2006) makes is more forceful in establishing that autonomy is just a value and aim of education to get to a flourishing life. He is acutely aware—more so it seems than Reich (or, at least, he articulates it more directly)—that there are other barriers to autonomy in one's life that cannot be affected immediately by education's positive influence on life outcomes and autonomy. He states,

Suppose we inculcate in a child the skills and habits associated with autonomy. Does this guarantee to them the ability to live a flourishing life? Absolutely not. For that they need far more: they need to access material resources, and some control over their work life; they need to be able to adopt a way of life that is itself good; and they need an environment in which they can act on their judgments. (p. 25-26)

Many critics, however, think that this caveat may just get one back to the start of the problem of a flourishing life as barriers to this fulfillment can be substantial. Further, these barriers exceed the scope and ability of educational structures to provide the type of assistance that would allow for autonomous choices to be made. Here, Barry would suggest a program of resource distribution would be required to allow individuals the true ability to make autonomous choices.

Having briefly discussed Callan and Brighouse, the focus on autonomy now moves to the work of Rob Reich (2002) in *Bridging Liberalism and Multiculturalism in American Education*. Reich (2002) should receive credit at the outset for his calling attention to the ahistoricity of much of political philosophy. He states this in the introduction of his work: “political theorists often ignore the historical context in which their theories are to be applied, and even more often they ignore the educational presuppositions and implications of their theories” (p. 4). Here, there is common ground between Reich and his critical tradition and Barry’s work.

For Reich, education is particularly relevant, as is the point on thinking about the complications of individuals emerging into adulthood as autonomous persons when young people face barriers to their autonomous actions throughout childhood and adolescence. As he states, “Contemporary theorists, generally speaking, seem to assume that the persons populating a given political territory are fully functioning, autonomous adults” (p. 4). This is an important consideration in understanding the growth of students into adulthood. After the introduction and rationale of the work, Reich (2002) defines what he means by autonomy as “a person’s ability to reflect independently and critically upon basic commitments, desires, and beliefs, be they chosen or unchosen, and to enjoy a range of meaningful life options from which to choose, upon which, and to act” (p. 46).

With Reich’s understanding of autonomy clear, he describes a hypothetical example of how autonomy works. However, instead of using a child, he illustrates his view of autonomous action through an imaginary adult known as Ann, who has a midlife crisis and who is in the midst of making changes in her life. To do this, “she steps outside herself, figuratively, and assesses the values her life embodies, the commitments she has

made, and the goals and projects she pursues” (p. 101). This example reemphasizes this key point of distance and independent critical judgment as criteria for autonomy.

Reich (2002) continues the example of Ann and her newfound sense of autonomy by introducing the metaphor of living according to one’s own lights as well as why the mid-life crisis example is apt. He contends that the “mid-life crisis reveals the sense in which people can evaluate important life commitments, desires, projects, beliefs, and so on, and on reflection, attempt to alter them *or* to reaffirm them on an autonomous basis” (p. 101). It is interesting that Reich relays that the details do not matter in Ann’s autonomous crisis, because it foreshadows his priority of putting the process of autonomous decision making above the substance of choices one makes in one’s life. So, Reich is concerned with Ann acting autonomously or not. On this point, Barry and Reich would differ substantially as Barry is vitally concerned with the outcomes and substance of such decisions.

Reich then shifts his position somewhat to say that the notion of autonomy as crisis in the example is only meant to dramatically illustrate the deeper principles at stake and that every autonomous decision does not have to be a crisis. He (2002) frames the crisis and everyday versions of the point of autonomy that do not require a mid-life crisis as “moments of radical disorientation or because the exercise of autonomy demands we break with the course of our past lives... autonomous persons exercise their autonomy, though less dramatically, in everyday life” (p. 101). In Reich’s sense, autonomy is using critical thought in decision making and not engaging in cycles of angst over every decision. Further, the use of the metaphor is intended to “call attention not to their confusion but to their sense that they are in fact in control of their lives. It underscores the

deeply-seated notion that acting as pilot of one's course in life is important" (p. 101).

This underscores the active way in which an autonomous life is to be lived. However, it could be argued, as Barry does, that strict autonomy as a value is in a very formal sense amoral as it specifically rejects conceptions of the good life for a life defined as making whatever decisions one wants as long as they are self-aware and critical ones.

Reich (2002) then explores the previously alluded to notion of process over substance in autonomy and misperceptions of the autonomous good life in the following section: "What matters is the extent to which people subject their commitments, values, and beliefs to critical scrutiny, the extent to which people consent to and view their motivations as authentically their own, not the imposition of others" (p. 103). This element of authenticity is crucial as outside influences and control negate the characteristics of autonomy for Reich. It follows that the definition Reich provides for autonomy is similar to that of a general sense of critical thinking about the decisions one makes without criteria or further description of the process that should be used in making decisions. Critics could argue that there are no steps laid out and no agenda to use. Reich provides guidance in suggesting that one must subject one's values to reflection, but there is little additional insight into this metaphorical blackbox.

However, it is clear that Reich (2002) wants to eschew liberalism's past mistakes in attending to history, education, and diversity. In doing so, he refines the notion of general autonomy to his more measured concept of minimalist autonomy:

I want to emphasize, again, however, that minimalist autonomy, even when construed as character ideal, accommodates the obvious fact that a great majority of our initial commitments, values, beliefs, and so on are initially unchosen. Minimalist autonomy does not describe an ideal of persons who create themselves out of whole cloth, individuals abstracted from the sinews of everyday life. Much, after all, in a person's life is initially *unchosen*; we are never unencumbered

selves. People are born in a specific place, at specific time, to a specific family, and in specific communities each with specific histories. We do not choose our family, our country, colour of our skin, initial religion or lack thereof, social milieu, language, or historical moment. Each of these factors unquestionably colors our lives in involuntary ways. (p. 104)

What Reich is driving at in his conception of minimalist autonomy is that individuals have some opportunities to reflect and make choices in their lives. He is aware that there is much that one cannot choose; however, this does not close off the possibility of leading a flourishing life in his eyes or of making what decisions one can on the basis on the elements of minimalist autonomy. Reich is clear that the freedom inherent in minimalist autonomy is meant to support a diversity of lifestyles, and he does not hold one path or set of choices above another as long as the considerations of critical and sincere reflection have been completed.

Reich (2002) then returns to the bounding of his theory even in its minimalist construction. He acknowledges what seems like a possibly massive hole in the autonomy project:

In addition to scrutinizing one's own ends, the exercise of minimalist autonomy requires that in making a decision about how to shape and order one's life a person has real options from which to choose. Independent and critical reflection on first-order commitments would be of little value if, after deciding that one's commitments no longer commanded one's allegiance, there were not others to adopt or pursue. . . . For self-determination to have value, persons must be able to make choices from an array of real possibilities. (p. 105)

Here, Reich admits that autonomy is a nearly meaningless notion if one cannot choose anything different than one's present life. The concept of other real choices from which one can choose is vital to a sense of autonomy. Reich knows that no amount of self-reflection can alter what one's existing choices are in one's life. Hence, he endorses

social policies that encourage the development of additional resources to allow individuals to have greater chances to exercise autonomous decision making.

The final point of Reich's argument on autonomy states what constraints there are upon government's ability to encourage autonomy. Reich (2002) states that "The liberal state is limited in what it can do to promote minimalist autonomy . . . But the state *can* provide an education for all children, and it *can* set as a fundamental aim of education the development of autonomy" (p. 112). Reich acknowledges the constraints the state is under in being able to alter the circumstance that prevent autonomous decision making. Yet, he sees the greatest likelihood for success in the promotion of autonomy through educational efforts that support the development of the skills of critical self-reflection.

This section has discussed the work of a critical tradition that appeals to autonomy in seeking to reduce and eliminate educational inequality. The next section directly discusses Barry's view of autonomy and then connects the discussion to the related notion of personal responsibility.

Barry on Autonomy and Personal Responsibility

This section describes Barry's discussion of autonomy as well as his related critique of personal responsibility. It is useful to first look at Barry's (1995) *Justice as Impartiality* to see how he presents autonomy as a notion of the good, as this would seem to be critical to a flourishing life in the parlance of Brighouse and Reich:

Let us examine the conception of the good as autonomy a little more closely. According to this conception, then, what is of central importance in human life is that people should make up their own minds about how to live and what to think and that they should be able to express their beliefs freely and action on their conclusions about the best way to live, subject to rules assigning rights to speak and act that are designed to protect the ability of others to do likewise. (p. 129)

He then breaks down the concept further to flesh out his view that autonomy is a second order perspective on the good. He continues:

This is a second-order conception of the good in that it does not specify what the good actually consists in. Anything could be regarded as good (in a second-order way) so long as the person who conceived it as good (in a first-order way) had arrived at this conception in a way that satisfied the requirements of autonomy. (p. 129)

The importance of identifying this as a second-order conception is vital to understanding the difference between autonomy and other suggestions for a good life. Barry sees autonomy here as a process as opposed to a conception of the good that spells out in greater detail of how one should live.

This view of autonomy is different from the one presented by Reich and his critical tradition. For them, autonomy is an end (in and of itself) and not a constituent part of another first order conception of how to live. Barry clarifies this further: “We may thus contrast autonomy as a conception of the good with a substantive conception, for example a religiously based conception, of the good” (p. 129). This is a vital issue in the context of educational aims as Barry’s view of autonomy would place it as an important part of educational theory. However, there would need to be some extension of what this critical tradition would assert as a set first order aims about the content of the good life for Barry to accept it.

Barry (1995) is also quite concerned about how advocates of autonomy sort out other sources of imposition upon individuals outside of state control. For him, “The state is not...the only possible source of authority figures who tell people to shut up and conform. A state dedicated to the furtherance of autonomy might plausibly adopt policies designed to undermine would-be authorities of this repressive kind” (p. 130). This is a

critical issue of non-state autonomy opponents that Barry feels deserves attention, especially in sorting out how autonomy could be promoted in certain public venues and quashed in private ones. Further, for Barry, this conflict among authorities and autonomy inculcating and subordinating organizations is one that Reich and the critical tradition must address in a more substantial manner as their position that the state should promote autonomy through public education might result in more students attending private schools where autonomy would be stifled.

Barry continues by describing the awkward position that strong advocates for autonomy would be found in if they held to all of their commitments in the face of authorities that do not want to promote autonomy. He writes that “these conditions...denied to children by schools that are dedicated to inculcating some religious belief which is also that of the parents (as is normally the case), so that the two forms of authoritarian socialization reinforce one another” (p. 130-131). Here, there would be no entry point for advocates of autonomy to have the state make its autonomy mark on students. Hence, this passage indicates that autonomy advocates would have a natural bias towards ways of life and education that encourage autonomy. Conversely, they would seem to reject forms of living and learning that do not promote self-critical autonomous attitudes.

Barry recognizes this problem and relays what he sees as a major complication of autonomy in life by advocates of it similar to the critical tradition. He contends:

A conception of the good as autonomy does not imply that the pursuit of all substantive conceptions of the good is equally valuable. Only those conceptions that have the right origins—those that have come about in ways that meet the criteria for self-determined belief—can form a basis for activity that has value. It is therefore unlikely that the good as autonomy will be advanced by distrusting

resources in a way that takes not account of the autonomous or non-autonomous origins of people's substantive conceptions of the good. (p. 131-132)

The point that Barry is making centers on the contradiction in asserting that autonomy is value neutral, except in its privileging of activities and actions that encourage autonomy.

Another important point is how this critical tradition, which seeks to promote autonomy, leaves how one lives or is educated up to individuals. This is in contrast to the first tradition, which describes a conception of the good by appealing to class but leaves out individual rights. In both cases, Barry acknowledges the insights of the tradition, but he remains critical towards accepting all the elements of the tradition that may hamper broader efforts at achieving egalitarianism. What Barry says about autonomy has implications for Reich and his critical tradition, because Reich's choice to not define the good life as anything but an autonomous one leaves him open to the attack.

The point on value neutrality is crucial, as it must be addressed again in the context of a second order aim. Barry (1995) states, "Autonomy...does not lead to neutrality between conceptions of the good, precisely because value is attributed only to those conceptions with the right pedigree" (p. 133). The move suggested here by Barry is not one picked up in the critical tradition of Reich and his colleagues. If they did move to this view, their position would be strengthened as the bias towards autonomy and pedigree of how one's choices are made would be avoided. However, this would seem to be an unlikely move as they are fully committed to educational and derivative political and civic programs based on this conception of the good as an autonomous choice.

Reich actually responds to Barry at one point, calling one of Barry's comments sarcastic. Yet, Barry did not mean it in a sarcastic manner. In fact, he would argue that he was simply applying the criteria of autonomy to a hypothetical person and then

extrapolating the psychological consequences to their logical end. Barry's (2001)

comment to which Reich took such exception was:

People who exhibit a high degree of autonomy, as that is understood by Galston, Kymlicka, Gutmann, and other contemporary political theorists, might well be regarded as psychologically disturbed by the American Psychiatric Association. According to the latest edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-IV), 'the symptoms of Identity Problem (313.82)' include 'uncertainty about... long-term goals, career choice, friendship patterns, sexual orientation and behavior, moral values and group loyalties'. (p. 357)

Barry's point is that this autonomous process of self-reflection needs boundaries that are rarely given by Reich and his critical tradition—boundaries which are critically important to education. If philosophy is the playing out of ideas to their logical ends, then Barry is on target with his jab and Reich is defensive because his position is in need of thorough defending.

It is important here to relay the footnote, where Reich made his comments to Barry's statement on autonomy. Reich asserts:

37. Brian Barry sarcastically suggests that people who display a high degree of autonomy would be considered psychologically disturbed and deviant by the American Psychiatric Association. Such potshots reflect an unfortunate tendency among skeptics to view autonomy as something that leads to incessant self-questioning; see Brian Barry, *Culture and Equality* (London: Harvard University Press, 2001) 357n.65. But highly autonomous persons, in my view, do not necessarily engage in constant self-doubt. Highly autonomous persons are secure in their endorsement of their first-order beliefs, values, and commitments and feel confident that they could subject their lives to critical reflection in the future, revising or rejecting certain values and commitments should they no longer seem worthy. (p. 243)

This note is valuable in attempting to understand the difference between Reich and this critical tradition and Barry's contrasting views. Reich believes that there are reasonable limits to self-reflection, but he fails to state what criteria stop the endless questioning that

autonomous decision making starts. Barry, conversely, takes Reich's logic regarding autonomy to its endpoint and argues that there must be a boundary to autonomy's logic.

Another point of comparison between Barry and Reich, which is indicative of their different perspectives on autonomy, extends to their contrasting views about what states should do to remedy educational inequality. Reich footnoted the following section from Barry (Number 69 on p. 219), which is important because it endorses a much more radical view of governmental intervention than Reich is normally willing to grant.

Barry's asserts that, if equal opportunity were a priority, private schools would not be allowed to spend more on their students than public schools. Barry's suggestion and Reich's footnoting of it without further comment shows that Reich may have some sympathy towards the view Barry expresses. However, the radical nature of the idea would indicate that it is unlikely to play a substantial part in Reich's reform agenda.

At this stage, it is important to consider how Barry might approach the autonomy based critical tradition. Clearly, he would agree with Reich that education is a critical element and a tool in improving the opportunities of the young. However, until educational, as well as structural economic, inequalities are remedied, talk of autonomy, no matter how big or small, is just talk. Further, Barry would see this emphasis on autonomy as possibly being harmful to students in that they will continue to receive more than their share of blame for not being able to succeed in an educational system that has come to accept the logic and rhetoric of personal responsibility. A focus on autonomy could feed into this destructive notion.

For Barry, the problem with this critical tradition is not in its insistence on letting students and people have the choices to make decisions over their lives. It is the move to

promoting autonomy over other values when it is a second-order concern that is problematic to Barry. The rationale for why this is problematic has been given throughout this chapter, but, to reiterate in no uncertain terms, the promotion of autonomy does not get society to a better place, even if autonomy for all was possible. Further, the focus on processes in decision making over any significant discussions of outcomes does not rise to a sufficient sense of purpose for Barry. There are, of course, caveats in this tradition that at various time say the choices have to be real and good, but this hedging misses the point revealed late in Reich's work that education for autonomy only works if educational inequality is greatly reduced. It is unfortunate that more is not said on this point as it would be much more compatible with Barry's ideas and a broader call for social and political reform.

The value Reich places on education would be lauded by Barry. However, the ease with which he justifies limits of state action to education would not be supported. Barry would suggest that circumstance such as one's birth would not be such a determinant factor in life chances if inequality was reduced. Another difference is that Barry would not allow the state to abrogate its duty to support stronger prenatal health efforts to minimize mental and physical disabilities among marginalized populations. What Barry finds problematic about Reich's theory of minimalist autonomy is that it is too closely related to educational factors to the exclusion of greater social and political reform. Not to mention, Barry believes that Reich's theory is only a part of achieving the conditions to promote autonomy and realize autonomous decisions in people's lives.

A final point of critique from Barry (2001) comes in his leeriness of a commitment by the state to promote autonomy allegedly in the spirit of John Stuart Mill:

It has become routine among contemporary political philosophers to use the term ‘Millian liberalism’ to refer to the view that it is the job of the state to promote autonomy. Yet it is clearly a travesty of Mill’s position to identify him with any such view of the role of the state. This is not to say, of course, that Mill saw no connection between the development of an autonomous personality and the presence of liberal institution (p. 120)

What Barry thinks is interesting here is that there is such a misunderstanding about how to arrive at autonomy and what else must underlie its foundation for it to have any significant meaning. He continues suggesting that many liberals seem to be advancing two competing philosophical aims. He states:

Like Mill, contemporary liberals can, and do, regard it as an argument for liberalism that a liberal society makes individual autonomy possible. But it in no way commits them to the proposition that states should engage in compulsory inculcation of autonomy—and expression whose strangeness calls attention to the peculiarity of the whole project. (p. 120)

Of course, the entire argument Reich builds is for the state to actively promote and inculcate students in autonomy. What Barry accepts and allows for here is that individuals may choose to act in all sorts of ways, and the state should not necessarily play the role Reich desires to get autonomy inculcation into schools.

Barry (2001) is also more open to other attitudes and perspectives that are not arrived at autonomously than Reich and the critical tradition. Whereas Reich ideally would have everyone come to every decision of importance in their life by autonomous means, Barry is much more pragmatic and circumspect. He advances a view that “institutions provide the conditions under which autonomy can flourish but they do not do anything directly to bring about the ‘ideal of autonomy’... people who do not wish to devote themselves to Socratic questioning are perfectly free to do so” (p. 121). Barry’s reminder should be a crucial point for Reich and this critical tradition to remember that individuals may choose not to participate in these processes of self-reflection and may

seek a different conception of the good that is at odds with the value neutral version of autonomy.

With the differences between Barry and Reich's critical tradition established, it is important to connect this discussion of autonomy to the destructive political rhetoric concerning personal responsibility. Returning to it at this point is useful as it can be seen in greater detail how the concept of personal responsibility is furthered by this critical tradition and the discourse around autonomy. The focus on autonomy in education and political debate inhibits the reduction of inequality, because it places blame for the differences among individuals and groups on the individuals who are already disadvantaged or left behind. The reason that Barry thinks this political rhetoric is so harmful is because it serves to justify inequality based on the choices one makes in life without regard for the actual choices students are provided within their lives.

If we return to the opening epigraphs and think of the many young people like D'Angelo and Richard, one should be disheartened any time this rhetoric of personal responsibility is raised. Certainly, making decisions to run with the wrong crowd and not to pay attention in school are bad choices. However, for Barry, the notion of personal responsibility should not apply in the same way to children as it does to adults as their actions do not have the same weight of experience. Yet, the actions of children are held to a higher standard, and actions that inhibit success in school as a child have many dramatic and lifelong consequences that are not calculable for a youth. This does not stop many conservative (and sometimes moderate) social and political commentators from urging students to accept personal responsibility for their actions.

Barry sees the irony of this deleterious rhetoric as expressing that the same individuals who demand personal responsibility out of children rarely consider who should take responsibility for the social and economic circumstances of these same students. This hypocrisy is evident in a society, which elevates personal responsibility for the young while passing on any discussion of societal responsibility or discussion of the choices individuals actually have. For Barry, this paradox demonstrates the absurdity of the contemporary educational and political predicament. Consequently, this discourse of personal responsibility should be shunned as it only further blames those individuals who are already systematically punished for their existing social position. Concomitantly, those believers in this critical tradition must consider what the political consequences are of their advocacy of autonomy given a political climate of personal responsibility.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, this critical tradition and its scholars' goal of autonomy are beneficent. However, as Barry's critique suggests, the notion of autonomy is still too academic in its relationship to the real world of life chances, opportunities, and inequalities for the students in public schools. Their notion of autonomy, minimalist or expansive, could be applicable to a society in which inequality is compressed—as Barry (1989, 1999, 2005) argues for—to a degree where individuals stand a reasonable chance of attaining similar life outcomes. However, at present, the focus on autonomy misses the target as an aim of educational systems and educational theory—especially in terms of inequality. It seems that those who seek autonomy inculcating education will always be disappointed with the results they seek because those students who are most marginalized

will always start with more barriers on the path towards autonomous choices and an autonomous life.

For Barry, the values that scholars in this tradition seek to appeal to are important, but the desire for autonomy often lacks the vital steps towards social change required to improve the lot of the students who are being discussed. Even when reforms towards equality are suggested such as Brighouse's (2000) ideas about school vouchers, the political consequences are not adequately calculated. As the first examples of this tradition show, there is a certain detachment from the present circumstances of education today. This is something that is not a problem with the ideas of either the class or identity scholars, but, in the liberals' case, there is some distance from the everyday that can be off-putting in terms of the passion for change. From a philosophical perspective, this distance exists because these are thought experiments that are to be discussed and refined. For liberals, the crisis of education is often more about the problems on the horizon than immediate circumstances.

For Barry, the persistent issue that deserves further attention is that a conception of the good seems to be lacking in Reich's theory. Where do moral and ethical values enter this education for autonomy? Autonomy seems not ethically robust enough to be a central educational aim above others. Therefore, the next question that comes to mind is this: what separates the value of neutrality from that of autonomy? This seems to be a key relationship as Reich sees a substantial break from the orthodox liberal tradition that may not be as large as he would want. Again, it is problematic if Reich is going to backpedal from Rawls to say that orthodox liberal neutrality towards what the good life is in a liberal democracy is not a sufficient public philosophy. How then does creating

autonomous students who grow into young citizens who have the skills of self-reflection and critical bearings to choose whatever way of life they want differ from the kinds of autonomous people that Reich thinks political theorists have erred in using for all these years? For Barry, it would seem that Reich has fallen victim to the same problem that others (Sandel, 2009; Geuss, 2008) have taken Rawls to task for, which is not having explicit ethical attitudes towards different types of ways of living.

To sum, this chapter has described the elements of a critical tradition in educational scholarship that appeals to autonomy in service of addressing educational inequality. Further, Barry's views on autonomy and personal responsibility were presented in contrast to this critical tradition's views and aims of education. The next chapter discusses the critical tradition that appeals to notions of identity in confronting educational inequality.

CHAPTER 6

CRITICAL APPROACHES TO INEQUALITY IN EDUCATION: APPEALS TO IDENTITY

This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the origins of the critical tradition that appeals to identity in relationship to educational inequality. The next section then discusses several scholars' works that serve as exemplars of the tradition. The focus in this part is on student resistance to the discourse, authentic support for its goals, the complexity of negotiating multiple identities, and oppression. The following section examines Barry's work on identity and his critique of notions of equal opportunity. It concludes with an analysis of the implications of these ideas in the context of educational inequality.

The origins of this critical tradition grew out of a number of interrelated trends—both academic and political. The political trends grew out of the 1960s, which saw increased diversity in higher education admissions and, eventually, in faculties. As faculties and student populations began to include perspectives from marginalized populations, the importance of identity became a focus of scholarship, starting in departments of African-American, Hispanic, and Women's studies. This increased focus on identity had an influence on educational scholarship, which began to reflect the diversity of student populations in schools and the challenges faced by minority populations.

From the academic and theoretical side, a greater diversity of scholars' views began to be incorporated into scholarship, such as works by Franz Fanon and early feminist scholars, which changed the taken for granted assumptions about power, status, and identity in social relations. Additionally, college curriculums began to diversify their requirements to include non-western history, philosophy, and religion courses. Many critics, such as Allan Bloom (1987), decried these changes and claimed that the heritage of the west was being replaced with political correctness. However, these opponents did not dissuade this growing academic movement. Instead, this critical educational tradition incorporated many of the ideas of critical theory and began to adapt them for use in education with special attention given to the elements having to do with identity.

Identity and Critical Educational Scholarship

Educational scholarship that works within this tradition draws heavily on the identity discourse—specifically in terms of how one thinks of oneself and how one is perceived by others as to group membership on numerous axes of difference. Further, this concept of identity maps onto the related and interdependent fields of multicultural education and diversity. Group membership in either “oppressed” or “oppressor” social identities or in “advantaged” versus “targeted” status is crucial language in understanding this appeal to identity. This tradition of scholarship focuses on identity as being socially constructed (Hacking, 1999) often along the lines of one’s gender, race, ethnic background, religious belief, or linguistic heritage (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007; Banks, 2007; Clabaugh, 2007; Glazer 1997; hooks, 1994; Macedo, 2000; Torres, 2009).

A recent exemplar of this tradition, which relays its philosophical and strategic aims, involves identity, multiculturalism, and social justice. The piece comes as an open

letter that appeared in *Phi Delta Kappan*, where Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) expressed their frustration with colleagues who rhetorically support appeals to identity through social justice education, but who do not seem to see the gravity of such work and its importance to the discourse of inequality in education. The struggle they speak of is important as it indicates the difficulty that supporters of this tradition often face in advancing their work and the overall goals of social justice. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) relay their surprise in facing barriers from their colleagues who may lack knowledge of this critical tradition. Two factors are significant—that of student resistance as well as that of colleagues. Consequently, this critical tradition often must frame its work as meeting resistance from many sources. They believe that resistance is due to an individual or group’s lack of understanding about issues of identity and social justice. A central part of the critical tradition is educating those who put up this resistance.

From this initial point, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) then describe their conception of social justice, their underlying commitment to identity, and the discourse of oppression. They state, “Oppression describes policies, practices, norms, and traditions that systematically exploit one social group (the target group) by another (the dominant group) for the dominant group’s benefit” (p. 345). This contention is evidenced by substantial empirical data. The tradition suggests that one would have to be willfully blind to the power of elites over others and to the stratification of societies in the United States and around the world to believe otherwise.

Next, they relay how the logic of the field gets broken down: “Common shorthand within the discipline is: Prejudice + Power = Oppression” (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2009, p. 345). This statement is supplemented by their belief that prejudice, power, and

oppression do not exist in isolation. Further, they acknowledge that the elements of power implied in the equation are more complex standard accounts of top down power.

From this tack, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) then attempt to open another line of the discourse by describing how individuals can have multiple identities—some of which may be at odds in terms of power and status in society:

Individuals can belong simultaneously to both dominant and target groups, for example, we (the authors) are both women and white. The disadvantages of being women do not cancel out the advantages of being white, and a key project of social justice education is to help untangle the complexity in ways in which these locations work together to hold oppression in place. (p. 346)

Their point is that the work of social justice must be a process of reflection upon one's position and must evaluate elements of identity, as well as how these characteristics have different meanings and values in different social settings. Further, this argument shows how this critical tradition attempts to demonstrate that students must work through multiple identities as a key part of their educational reform efforts.

It is now important to focus back on the barriers to social justice and appeals to identity that Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) face in their own schools and departments. They rightly point out that many educational researchers and professors have a rhetorical and often shallow level of support for social justice and appeals to identity. For Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009), rhetorical support does not matter and faculty can halt “every endeavor toward achieving social justice if it is inconvenient, uncomfortable, or impinges on resources or positions to which we feel entitled. It is not enough for faculty to be *for* social justice in theory without concrete and intentional practices” (p. 347). For these authors, what constitutes support of social justice and identity must be actions. Hence, they would require not just using a mission statement that encourages having a diverse

faculty, but actually hiring a diverse faculty. This critical tradition demands that action be taken if the commitments to the ideas are genuine. Otherwise, expressions of support are just meaningless platitudes at best and coy obstructionism at worst. The theme of supportive action over supportive words comes through in this selection. In fact, the follow-on point is that one should not be able to claim to be an advocate for social justice without taking action to support it. They want to remove the veneer of support for social justice from individuals and institutions that appear to be for it, but that are unwilling to stand up for the cause.

Next, they move from the disingenuous attitudes that are felt from their colleagues to the institutional voice through the mission of the school itself. Here, they are critical not of the hollow support of colleagues, but in the less than active missions of institutions. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) contend that “Many schools of education list social justice as a programmatic value in their mission statements...Putting the term in your mission statement while having no specific goals, no system for measuring progress, or no accountability renders it meaningless” (p. 349). The point Sensoy and DiAngelo are trying to make is clear. They do not want something included about social justice unless it is going to be a priority and actions are taken to achieve it.

Next, it is crucial to turn to why there may be resistance to taking action on social justice in a school of education. Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) explore an example from their own experience—in this case, the addition of a male faculty person to a committee. They write, “Given the deeply embedded patterns based on our social locations, simply adding a member of the dominant group will not ensure inclusive and just practice. Dominant group members bring their patterns of privilege with them” (p. 350). They are

concerned with the addition of a male colleague appointed just for the appearance of diversity on the committee. The problem they see is that merely adding a member of the dominant group ignores the historical and continuing power dynamics of gender and oppression. Such efforts for diversity may have sincere aims, but they often show a lack of understanding of this critical tradition and its understanding of power relations.

Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) address the theme of identity and group affiliation in understanding educational inequality with this passage:

Every single measure of disparity in education is tied to group position – target vs. dominant. Special education and discipline referrals, math, science, and reading literacies; graduation and dropout/push-out rates; test scores, all of what is known as “the achievement gap” are tied to race, class, gender. This disparity is *real*. And to ameliorate such disparities and offer meaningful leadership in school contexts at all levels, we must attend to the *real*, to the concrete and active dimensions—not simply slogans. (p. 350, emphasis in original)

Again, though, the issues of how these circumstances can be changed and what rhetoric can be used to muster the political will needed to advance the dialogue are still struggling to be developed. This point is acknowledged by this critical tradition. The interventions that have been promoted to address persistent differences in achievement are still met with resistance and questions about their efficacy. In short, the rhetoric of dominant vs. target groups can have difficulty in building the broad coalitions that are needed to adequately transform the schools most in need of infusions of resources.

Near the end of the article, Sensoy and DiAngelo (2009) describe what the elements of social justice practice are and, in doing so, emphasize elements of identity. Their social justice has several key features that “address the dynamics of oppression, privilege, and isms, recognizing that society is the product of historically rooted, institutionally sanctioned stratification along socially constructed group lines that include

race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability” (p. 350). They believe that these barriers must be challenged at every stage of the educational process. Further, they assert that, “Working for social justice in education means guiding students in critical self-reflection of their socialization into this matrix of unequal relationships and its implications, analysis of the mechanisms of oppression, and the ability to challenge these hierarchies” (p. 350). Again, the reflective nature of this discourse is demonstrated especially in its focus on teaching about the overt and hidden forms of oppression that operate in schools and the workplace.

It is important to now turn from the discussion of this exemplar that describes the appeal to identity to their colleagues to a text widely used in undergraduate and graduate courses. A well known text in this critical tradition is *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (2007), which represents the main themes and trends in the appeal to identity. In it, Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) demonstrate the commonality of the tradition in the use of certain guiding concepts that are the foundations of the field, although they are quick to make sure that everyone knows that there is not one absolute definition or set of terms to use in describing social relations. The editors relay the tension in this discourse over the language that should be used. They state, “We recognize that any terminology we use to describe human beings within the phenomenon of oppression will be problematic. The binary terms *oppressor* and *oppressed*, for example, may raise resistance from participants who cannot reconcile themselves as *oppressors*” (p. xx). As such, they struggle to find agreement among the contributors for a single set of terms.

Another point of note here is the manner in which they are leery of using overly confrontational language in describing the groups that make up the system. This

alternation in using language they consider more invitational seems to be an effective strategy for attempting to build broader coalitions of support. Further, the terms are meant to be analytical ways of understanding how inequality comes to be and how it maintains its grip on people. The point of this effort would be to have the oppressors or advantaged individuals become enlightened and change their modes of prejudiced action. Therefore, this definitional exercise in the preface, which acknowledges the disagreement among social justice and identity educators, is important.

The editors then move to one of the most important contributions of the field and one to which there is less philosophical tension. Here, Adams, Bell, and Griffin (2007) describe an essential part of the identity gambit by relaying the importance of a group's ability to name itself and define its membership. They assert, "We know that naming is a necessarily fluid and sometimes confusing process as people/groups insist on defining themselves rather than acquiesce to names imposed by others...the power to name oneself is an important aspect of group identity and resistance" (p. xxi). This statement demonstrates that respecting the self-determination and choice of terms to classify oneself as a member of a group is an empowering step for those individuals and groups who are constantly marginalized by others. Further, given the often derogatory terms used to describe marginalized populations, the reclamation of terms is thought to be a co-opting of the normal power hierarchies and dynamics.

In one of the volume's first chapters, Bell (2007) begins to flesh out the specifics of identity and, here, the educational implications begin to appear. They write that "neither individual identities nor social groups are homogenous or stable. Individuals are formed partly through group relations and affinities" (p.10). This point is important as the

notion of fluidity of identity is a substantial advance in understanding human relations in and among groups. This fluid and malleable nature of identity seems to get lost by some critics of the tradition as the discussion moves from specific characteristics to broad generalizations.

Bell (2007) continues by discussing the complications that members of certain groups may feel towards individuals who transcend their oppressive membership to be advocates for equal treatment. These include:

Members of advantaged groups may also engage in horizontal hostility toward members of their own group who defy the status quo. For example, white people who openly name and critique racist practices may be labeled by other whites as troublemakers, extremists, or bleeding hearts. Pressure against rocking the boat or making trouble can discourage dominants from challenging inequality and discrimination and lead them block change. Ultimately, people from advantaged groups can perpetuate the status quo by simply doing nothing. (p. 12)

This is a challenging prospect that connects back to the earlier discussion about authenticity and commitment to social justice. That is, members of dominant groups in this instance may not want to risk their own standing and social status to serves as allies and advocates of social justice, especially considering that the consequence for inaction is often more success.

The next relevant example of this critical tradition comes from Hardiman and Jackson (2007) in *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*. They explain how advantaged individuals can come to accept a version of social justice education that alters their world view: “This is a dramatic paradigm shift from an ideology that blames the victims for their condition to an ideology that names one’s own agent group as the source of oppression...Furthermore, agents begin investigating their own role in perpetuating oppression.” (p. 26). This process is undoubtedly a positive outcome and a crucial step

towards social justice. The authors are aware that this process is quite lengthy and often pedagogically challenging, but, in their view, the alternative of letting the status quo continue is unacceptable.

Hardiman and Jackson (2007) then discuss the differences in identity that change over one's life span based on events. They contend that people have competing "social identities that are disadvantaged by some forms of oppression and privileged by others. Because our membership in oppressor or oppressed groups can change during our lifetime, our relative status in relationship to our multiple identities is not static" (p. 42). Yet, this step forward in understanding is complicated by the multiplicity of one's identity and how certain identities may understandably override individuals' perception of themselves and others. Griffin (1997), in the previous edition of the text, describes how this process of attaching to one targeted identity over a dominant one is a challenge in social justice education: "Some participants have a difficult time thinking about themselves from the perspective of their agent identities. This is often true for students who are very much attuned to and angry about one or more of their targeted identities" (p. 293). This is a crucial point as an individual's membership in one group can further social and economic standing, but other memberships would be at odds with others' viewing the individual in the same way. Further, these memberships and conflicts also have a geographical component that changes the dynamics of privilege and oppression again.

It is now useful to turn to another volume for further exploration of this critical tradition. Diane Goodman's (2001) *Promoting Diversity and Social Justice: Educating People from Privileged Groups* focuses on the importance of reaching out to privileged

individuals in teaching social justice. She speaks to why this is vital, claiming that “People from privileged groups who are allies can influence decision making, allocate funds, share needed skills and knowledge, and be role models for other dominant group members to support equity” (p. 2). Building these coalitions and connections through education is thought to be the most significant way of ensuring sustainability in this effort.

The final element of this work that is important to address and which connects back to the earlier discussion of resistance is the way in which resistance to social justice and identity ideas is dealt with in classrooms. The resistance is easy to identify in some students, but the frustration with it seems to indicate this does not happen on a regular basis in such courses—at least for Goodman (2001): “Resistance can be one of the most difficult aspects of educating about diversity and social justice. Often we feel angry at resistant behavior and frustrated with the individuals...It becomes hard to like or connect with people who are being resistant” (p. 64). Here, the added aspect is the way in which instructors must come to terms with resistance. Goodman is concerned with how educators working for these goals must balance standing up to oppressive voices while at the same time working to tear down the barriers of prejudice that students have built.

This section has discussed the critical tradition in educational scholarship that appeals to notions of identity. It has described the challenges of student resistance to the discourse, authentic support for its goals, complexity of negotiating multiple identities, and educational strategies used to confront oppression from privileged groups. The underlying connections of identity and social justice were also explored. The following

section addresses Barry's ideas about identity and relates them to his discussion of equal opportunity.

Barry on Identity and Equal Opportunity

This section presents Barry's work on the topic of identity as well as the allied concept of equal opportunity. He is particularly concerned that this latter notion is used to justify inequality and unfair treatment based on both individual and group identity. It concludes by relating each discussion back to the present educational circumstances.

A key concern for Barry (2001) in his discussion of identity and related multicultural efforts is that inequalities will grow unaddressed when group specific agendas are advanced. In particular, he raises a point on what can happen when dividing up identities leads to split interests and demands on the state. He asserts, "The proliferation of special interests fostered by multiculturalism is, furthermore, conducive to a politics of 'divide and rule' that can only benefit those who benefit most from the status quo" (p. 11). This strategy is employed on an almost constant basis by federal and state governments that require competitive lobbying for funds and resources. Barry continues this line of thought: "There is no better way of heading off the nightmare of unified political action by the economically disadvantaged that might issue in common demands than to set different groups of the disadvantaged against one another" (p.11). Barry feels this has grave implications for education action as well. Although broad coalitions do often come into existence over educational achievement gaps and the quality of education provided in urban and rural areas, Barry's core point holds because the economic coalition needed for substantial economic change has yet to coalesce into a

vibrant political movement. This lack of a base of support for substantial economic change undercuts educational reform.

Barry (2001) is further convinced that more attention to collaborative efforts of empowerment in the public discourse on a broad based progressive social agenda is required over identity based group affiliations. He is aware of the often rancorous political debates that occur around identity based public campaigns and thinks that they can provide distractions from broader efforts towards progress on economic, political, and education fronts. His point is one of concreteness and universality. He asserts, “Diverting attention away from shared disadvantages such as employment, poverty, low-quality housing and inadequate public services is an obvious long-term anti-egalitarian objective. If political effort is dissipated... it will not be available for mobilization on the basis of broader shared interests” (p. 11-12). Barry’s (2001) worry is that the politics of identity, which can have benevolent aims in both gaining respect from dominant cultures and receiving a fair share of benefits from the state, can often weaken the politics of redistribution. That is, efforts to claim special privileges and allotments from the government undercut the broader economic and social struggles that cut across other markers of difference, making economic empowerment more difficult to achieve. Hence, Barry does not think this point of redistribution is sufficiently taken up by the critical educational tradition that appeals to identity.

From a slightly different perspective, Barry is also concerned with how cultural identity is attached to behavior and action. He is quite troubled by the all too easy slide from cultural affiliation to a sense of cultural determinism. This cultural determinism implies that all members of a culture have certain characteristics in their actions and

behaviors simply because they identify as members of a certain cultural or ethnic group. It is important here to draw back to Barry's (2001) critique of culture as simply being a genetic inheritance from the previous discussion as it bears on this question of identity:

Cultural identity is, thus, attributed to people on the basis of descent...it denies what has always before been the core belief of the left (whether in its liberal or socialist forms), the idea that there is a common emancipatory project equally available to the whole of humanity and equally valuable for all. (p. 261)

The point raised is that identity and social justice scholars have to balance the aim of celebrating the diversity of populations and their unique cultural traditions with advancing a platform of social progress that may conflict with some groups' cultural norms. This is a compelling point of view, which Barry acknowledges, but he believes that it provides too much space for inequality to grow among groups because dominant groups can marginalize many small groups easier than one diverse group based on solidarity. Further, Barry is also worried that the respect that the politics of identity can give to cultural traditions per se can allow for abuses by the leaders of the groups, which are often patriarchal. Here, he is concerned with the possible misogynistic actions against the full rights of women, the exploitation of children in service of the culture, or the entrenchment of social position due to rigid caste status of certain groups that could be protected under the banner of respecting a group's cultural tradition.

Barry (2001) continues developing this theme in the following statement relating his concern about identity via the discourse of multiculturalism. He explains, "The error that I have in mind, which underlies the multiculturalist diagnosis and therefore invalidates its proposed cures, is the endemic tendency to assume that distinctive cultural attributes are the defining feature of all groups" (p. 305). It must be mentioned here that Barry is not discouraging group identity as a form of social and cultural support for

members who have been marginalized. Nor is he seeking to promote some form of cultural homogenization that would reduce diversity of cultural patterns. Quite to the contrary, Barry thinks that groups can pursue many of their self-developed goals with great effectiveness if they wage political battles for greater economic support through broader social movements. Again, he sees the overreliance on cultural identity as harming a group's long-term aims. Further, he thinks that these groups miss other causes of unequal outcomes because of the focus on group identity: "The consequence of this 'culturalization' of group identities is the systematic neglect of alternative causes of group disadvantage" (p. 305). These causes of disadvantage are rooted in structural economic and political practices that are even more difficult to overturn.

Barry (2001) furthers this line of critique in even more straightforward terms regarding how culture has come to be seen as the primary marker of inequality. He asserts that "'culturalization' of groups inevitably leads to the conclusion that all disadvantage stems from the 'misrecognition' of a group's culture. This way of thinking leads those who indulge in it to be blind to the most important causes of group disadvantage" (p. 308). Again, he sees these other causes as the systemic underfunding and resourcing of non-elite communities. He is conscious of the role played by race, ethnicity, and prejudice against marginalized groups, but he thinks that these elements only further support his point that a broader coalition is necessary to confront the inequalities that result from unequal treatment.

Barry's (2001) work is quite sensitive to the importance of understanding cultural difference and the power of individual and group identity. Yet, he (1995, 2001, 2005) is also aware of the political complications of appeals to identity in that dominant groups

often attempt to use such work and related political movements to further marginalize non-dominant groups with allegations that they are revising history, are unpatriotic, or are indoctrinating students in socialist ideology and not teaching content. Consequently, it is crucial here to move back to the underlying problem that Barry (2001) has with this appeal to identity through multiculturalism. It is that Barry cannot square the special claims groups make with the need for a broader social movement. He puts it this way:

Pursuit of the multiculturalist agenda makes the achievement of broadly based egalitarian policies more difficult in two ways. At minimum, it diverts political effort away from universalistic goals. But a more serious problem is that multiculturalism may very well destroy the conditions for putting together a coalition in favour of across-the-board equalization of opportunities and resources. (p. 325)

Barry also sees this as a possible problem in the implementation of identity politics and multiculturalism that has been seen in the political debate around school and higher education curriculums. There have certainly been increases in the diversity of sources drawn upon in both settings to have curriculums better reflect the perspectives and interests of the entire populations of students which he supports. However, even with these expansions, the levels of inequality among groups have continued to exist and, in some cases, grow. As such, Barry sees a broader coalition as the most likely way to positively succeed in achieving a group's goals for educational advancement as well as in creating a more egalitarian society.

Barry (2005) also thinks that the splintering of coalitions for public services makes the base of support for public institutions smaller, resulting in less support for all marginalized populations. He states with relation specifically to schools,

Cultural minorities might be non-competitive in getting publicly funded schools of their own or perhaps having other bits of public provision put under their control. But this kind of paternalistic focus will still tend to make cultural

minorities weak partners in endeavours to redistribute income from rich to poor across the board or to improve the quality of schools and other public services generally. (p. 325)

What Barry (2005) is most worried about is how all these identity based efforts for reform do not alter the systems that created the inequalities in the first place. He sees this as a flaw that only allows another sliver of the population to receive better treatment and some redistribution of resources. In contrast to this view, Barry wants a much more substantial change and relays his frustrations thusly: “The point about group-based preferences can be generalized. At best, all they can ever do is achieve a minor reshuffling of the characteristics of individuals occupying different locations in an unchanged structure that creates grossly unequal incomes and opportunities” (p. 326). For Barry, without a fundamental restructuring of the unjust systems that continue to disadvantage and marginalize certain groups, identity based claims will only rearrange minimal opportunities.

Further, Barry thinks that there are additional consequences that are unaccounted for by members of this critical tradition. The main one is that conservatives are able to demonize such efforts and then question the success of individuals from marginalized groups as fulfilling a quota or giving in to political correctness. This conservative gambit is what Barry wants to avoid in his pursuit of reducing inequality to levels where equal opportunity would have some genuine relevance. He writes, “Not only does it do nothing to change the structure of unequal opportunities and outcomes, it actually entrenches it by embroiling those in the lower reaches of the distribution in internecine warfare” (p. 326). In avoiding conflict and competition among groups, Barry believes the common causes of marginalized groups will be better served in politics and education.

In summing up his work in this volume, Barry (2005) reiterates his passion of promoting equality. He is not against multiculturalism for any other reason than he does not think it will help those who are supposed to be served by its promotion. He sees it as fueling an unnecessary culture war that distracts from a broader social and economic struggle, which requires a fundamental structural change of the political system. Such change requires a much broader collation than claims to identity and multiculturalism are able to offer. He concludes: “multiculturalism poses as many problems as it solves...it cannot in the nature of the case address the huge inequalities in opportunities and resources that disfigure—and increasingly dominate—societies such as those of Britain and the United States” (p. 328). For Barry, the appeal to identity underwrites the politics of multiculturalism.

It is crucial to now connect this discussion of identity to that of equal opportunity. Barry believes that equal opportunity is another concept that has been co-opted and now harms egalitarian interests similar to the previously discussed notions of meritocracy and personal responsibility. For him, the current levels of inequality in the United States and around the world cannot be thought to provide individuals from vastly different economic and educational backgrounds with equal opportunities for employment and future life chances. To think that individuals who attend Harbor City High and St. Paul’s have equal opportunities is to discount a host of factors that provides massive cumulative advantages to the latter group over the former. Barry thinks the continued use of the concept masks deeper divisions in the resources that unfairly harm individuals and groups who are already disadvantaged.

To remedy this, Barry (2005) is interested in educational and political efforts that might reduce this inequality to give the notion of equal opportunity some sense of relevance. He suggests a starting point: “If I am correct in arguing the pathologies of inequality...are especially strongly driven by inequalities of wealth, it would surely be worth quite a lot to reduce the number and size of large fortunes” (p. 192). Beyond this effort to reduce the exponential wealth expansion, he believes it is necessary to make improvements on the bottom end as well. Here, it must be remembered that Barry is a strong advocate for compressing wealth inequalities and reminding observers that differences in wealth matter. He contends, “Even if we were to give up on the possibility of promoting equalization by greatly reducing the amount of wealth at the top, we could still take measures to increase ownership at the bottom” (p. 193). This would be a good first step towards true equal opportunity.

Barry (2005) suggests that a simple wealth transfer from the richest to the poorest citizens would help to create a much more genuine sense of equal opportunity:

A way of rescuing some elements of equal opportunity despite gross inequalities of wealth would be to provide each person with a capital grant at the age of (say) 18 . . . [which] has the potential to make a big difference to the set of opportunities available. (p. 193)

The notion of these small payments raising the level of resources of those at the lower end of the economic spectrum would accomplish the critical task of beginning to compress wealth inequality. In educational contexts, Barry suggests this would provide marginalized students with the needed assistance to pursue and complete higher education, given its increasing costs, and would relieve some of the burdens of working while in college or university.

Additionally, Barry (2005) is not willing to let conservative critics off the hook for propagating the notion that unequal outcomes are directly tied to poor decisions by marginalized groups. Barry relays that there is a persistent discourse of blame in the discussion of poverty. He states that “the ideology that underwrites unequal outcomes insists that poor people are poor simply because they make dumb choices from the opportunities open to them” (p. 193-194). This notion is something Barry seeks to rebut through innovative policy solutions that support greater egalitarianism.

The final element of Barry’s ideas on identity and equal opportunity has to do with the state’s responsibility to address systematic and cumulative disadvantages that are created by the present circumstances. As discussed previously, Barry and this critical tradition do not differ on the merits of this point; instead, they differ on how best to achieve the political capacity to ensure greater support of those groups and individuals who have been marginalized. He concludes with a call for greater state action to remedy the present inequality of circumstances:

Qualifications for good jobs, in turn, should arise from equal opportunities to obtain them. We know that this condition does not hold, and could never hold fully because, even under the most favourable conditions, there would still be congenital handicaps, diseases and injuries that would hold some people back. Social justice demands compensation for these disadvantages. (p. 200)

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the work of a critical educational tradition that appeals to identity in attempting to address educational inequality. The remainder of the chapter discusses Barry’s work on identity and his critique of equal opportunity. It is important to remember Barry’s insistence that there seems to be a lack of awareness among identity advocates that, in many other places on campuses—not to mention corporate

boardrooms, conversations about cultural identity and social justice would be met with condescension and dismissiveness at the advocates' naïveté. The point here is that the least of this tradition's opponents are the colleagues at their schools and department meetings; rather, who should be considered most inimical to their values are the individuals and groups they do not know and who could care less if the social justice and identity based advocates exist at all. Barry's pessimism is not meant to attack the aims of social justice, but to simply illustrate the stakes of the battle, as well as how asymmetrical and successful it continues to be for the elites.

To conclude, as attention is diverted from a broad based struggle for greater equality, the same political forces that use notions of meritocracy and personal responsibility can use equal opportunity to marginalize each small claim for rights and resources of a special group. Elite interests can then proceed with business as usual by not addressing a broader based call for reform. Further, they can hide behind the rhetoric of equal opportunity and deny that identity has anything to do with inequality. Hence, they can state that everyone has an equal chance for success even though the conditions of educational attainment and employment remain geared to benefit those individuals who already have the most advantages. Without a move to reject this logic, the political conversation around equality will remain stuck between the bounds of these confined terms that only serve to propagate inequality. In light of this broken political conversation, the final chapter will directly return to the aims of Barry (1995, 2005, 2008) and his ideas for educational progress and egalitarianism.

CHAPTER 7

THE FUTURE OF CRITICAL SCHOLARSHIP AND EDUCATIONAL INEQUALITY

The final chapter has elements that rearticulate and sum up the aim of this dissertation, which has been to present three dominant critical traditions in educational scholarship (that appeal to class, autonomy, and identity) and discuss them in the context of Brian Barry's work on meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity. To this end, the first part of the chapter considers the consequences for education and society if inequality continues to grow. The next section reiterates the commonalities of the critical traditions that have been discussed throughout the study and reflects on why Barry's critique of their underlying positions is beneficial to a common understanding of the importance of educational and political theory. The chapter concludes by turning back to Barry's ideas from his most recent works as paths for educational reform and social progress and by articulating why a new critical discourse in educational scholarship may be needed.

Inequality Unabated

Inequalities, specifically educational inequalities, are on the rise (Heymann & Beem, 2005; Hytrek & Zentgraf, 2008). Without concrete and substantial steps to turn away from "free market" solutions to educational and economic problems, neoliberalism threatens the future of this country and its claim to democratic government (Irvin, 2008; Jacobs, 2004). As inequality increases, the potential for social, political, and ecological catastrophe increases as well (Jacobs & Skocpol, 2005). The status quo is not holding,

but this does not mean a positive revolution is on the horizon. In fact, the most recent financial bust proves the point that, even with dire economic circumstances, there are few calls to radically change the economic and political systems, structures, and institutions that led to the crisis, which now threatens educational and social spending throughout the country (Karelis, 2007; Lindsey, 2009).

There are, of course, some limited calls for reform, but these are largely the efforts of politicians trying to cash in on the failures of previous incumbents (Sadurski, 2008). Even with the economic collapse, it would be political suicide for most politicians to call for a substantial redistribution of wealth through changes in the federal tax code—for example, a return to the levels of the 1950s or even before Reagan’s Administration (Gratez & Shapiro, 2005; Royce, 2009; Shapiro, 2002). The greatest triumph of neoliberalism (and the most perverse legacy of the Reagan Revolution) is its ability to survive and thrive in the wake of its own destructive path (Lowndes, 2008; Shor, 1986). One would think that the failures of the political, economic, and educational systems based on a blind faith in “free markets” would erode as social conditions of inequality increased, but this has not happened (Baker, 2007, 2009; Sieber, 2005; Thompson, 2007). The reasons for this resoluteness in adherence to the ideology of neoliberalism are unfortunately clear (American Political Science Association, 2004; Andrain & Smith, 2006; Bartels, 2008; Herman & Chomsky, 2002). The media and educational systems are complicit in providing support to the dominance of “free market” values as the public philosophy of the United States regardless of the consequences to the poor and ever fewer members of the middle-class (Ansolagbehere & Snyder, 2008; Arrow, Bowles, & Durlauf, 2000).

The United States has never distributed wealth and political power in a just manner, but the gains of Roosevelt's New Deal and Johnson's Great Society showed the promise of using the machinery of government to ameliorate grotesque institutionalized inequality. Unfortunately, the creation and expansion of the modern welfare state spawned a heartless backlash from conservative politicians and supporting business interests (Lowndes, 2008). The conservative restoration resisted attempts at redistribution through increased educational funding of schools and higher education, as well as programs such as Head Start. Further, conservative voices sought to discredit these policies and the politicians who supported them with the epithet of liberalism. These efforts to dismantle public education and the welfare state were supported by a political strategy focused on convincing the public that economic and political inequalities are justifiable (Madrack, 2009; Philips, 2008). Perversely, the middle and working class are told that they are at risk of losing their "freedom" and "liberty" through taxation and "excessive" government spending on education for those who are less fortunate and live in other parts of town, when in fact such spending would often benefit them (Page & Simmons, 2000). The newest aspect of this agenda can accomplish contractions of public investment in education and related services, through financial exigency, when "free market" economic crises require it. Without substantial alteration to the educational and political systems, the country risks reaching a point where the spaces for democratic discussion become strained and increasingly untenable (Hindman, 2009; Sandel, 1996; Skocpol, 2003; Sunstein, 2003, 2007). At this tipping point, the social spaces that allow for dissent, criticism of the powerful, and the means to communicate one's grievances

risk elimination altogether, rendering even the appearance of democracy unnecessary to satisfy the deadened political will of the masses of the nation.

Complete amelioration of inequality of every stripe—economic, political, and educational—is utopian fantasy, but compression in the scale and scope of these areas of inequality is vital to reforming educational institutions (Baker 2009a). Underlying this project is the point that the inequalities that exist in the United States are persistent because they are deeply embedded into all aspects of the culture, which include public institutions and private organizations (Baker, 2006; Ball, 2003; Brantlinger, 2003). The educational system is a paramount apparatus for the legitimization of inequality, and, as such, it requires a fundamental retooling in order to achieve the purported democratic aims of the institutions of education. Further, this educational restructuring is dependent upon political reform and a social movement focused on reducing inequality in out-of-school factors (Beckert, 2008; Da Silva, 2007; Goldin & Katz, 2008).

There are several trends, which are substantially results of educational inequality and if which remain unabated will continue to have detrimental effects on students' long term life chances. The first is the dropout rate for low income and minority students being significantly higher than the corresponding rate for white and wealthy students (Sacks, 2007). This trend severely affects individuals' abilities to attain higher paying employment as well as to contribute to the civic dialogue on improving the conditions of marginalized populations.

The second is the competition for access to higher education (Dicker-Conlin & Rubenstein, 2007). Here, again, those students with the most advantages prior to applying for college and university admission stand the greatest chance of acceptance and success

when they arrive on campus (Kronman, 2007). Conversely, those students who emerge from an under-funded and overcrowded high school will often be at a disadvantage compared to other students in their attempts to attain higher education (Golden, 2006; McDonogh, 1997; McPherson & Schapiro, 2006).

The third trend is that poor and minority students are more likely to enter the military after high school because of limited job prospects and the rising cost of higher education (Tyson, 2005). Needless to say, these recruits enter at the bottom of the military chain of command and often face additional barriers to higher education and career success upon leaving the service.

The fourth trend is the growing number of young people who have been ill-served by their schools and communities and who end up entering the prison system (Macek, 2006). For example, the growth of incarceration rates across America's population illustrate that youth from urban and rural communities are disproportionately imprisoned compared to the rest of the population. Additionally, many of the drug related offenses have seen sentences that reflect a bias in the law regarding the treatment of the type of drug one was convicted of possessing (RTTNews, 2009).

One cannot leave the discussion of educational inequality without discussing the uneven effects of the standards and accountability regime on students (Au, 2009). Here, again, one should not be surprised by the fact that students from impoverished circumstances are most harmed by testing regimes (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). The misuse of testing as the sole indicator of educational success and the only tool for school improvement is one of the most destructive elements of recent educational reform (Nichols & Berliner, 2007). This, unfortunately, reflects that although the aims of the

dominant efforts at school reform have a public rhetoric of equal opportunity, they, in reality, often further stratify students and set students and schools up for greater failure (Berliner, 2009; Cuban, 2009; Profriedt, 2008).

The last point to be mentioned in this section is that a major consequence of and contributing factor to the persistence of educational inequality is which groups have been advocating for the improvement of the most marginalized schools and districts. Here, one encounters the frightening prospect of a declining common interest in improving all schools, which could further limit space and the audience for discussion about the future of public schooling (Putnam, 2000; Rank, 2004; Royce, 2009). Gene Glass (2008) argues that educational reform over the last hundred years has had two major aims with various hidden elements in each. The two aims have been to reduce the cost of public education and to create almost private schools for the middle class and upwardly mobile (Glass, 2008). This is a disturbing trend since different groups are coming to think that public education depends all too much on geography and the wealth of residents in those school communities (Reimers, 2000). These instances of inequality are just a few of the strong arguments and evidence for why schools cannot persist in being unequal in the future.

Each of the critical traditions analyzed in this study attempt to provide intellectual structures to prevent the preceding trends from continuing to expand. The following section discusses the common elements of these three traditions and then moves to establish a critique of them that links to the previous chapters.

This project arose out of an organic process of investigation that brought the diverse elements of these discourses together. The study is a product of a process of philosophical analysis of these traditions that came about because of dissatisfaction with

the existing discourses of critical educational thought that have often relied too exclusively upon appeals to class, autonomy, and identity. As hopefully comes through in Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the insights of these traditions represented by significant works from each of them are of substantial value and importance to educational theory and efforts at reform. However, they share some common characteristics that blunt their effectiveness in contributing to the changes in education and society that they passionately argue for in their writing. In fact, criticism of these traditions is only offered because the values underlying their work are so vital to improving the conditions of life for young people across the country. The problem, as mentioned previously, is the philosophical inconsistency and political framing of their thought towards reform and the improvement of social relations. There is little disagreement with most of the empirical claims that are the basis for each of the theories' starting points. The conditions of schooling at present are not defensible, but the steps they take—singly and together—to stake out remedies and solutions are not sufficient to confront and defeat the forces that promote inequality.

Some of the commonalities in these concepts and the critical traditions are the proposed solutions to the present social, economic, and political environments that require a conversion to their way of thinking by students, teachers, and other educational stakeholders. They want students and teachers to see that class, autonomy, or identity is a key to the educational and social predicament. What they are less interested in discussing is that if they truly wanted their perspectives to take hold, then they would need something much more substantial to overcome the resistance to it. The open and inclusive pedagogy they endorse to confront structures and institutions of power will not necessarily allow for the revolutions in thinking they hope to occur. It would seem that if

one were to take this view to its logical end, then the only way to convert the most resistant individuals to this perspective would be some type of *Clockwork Orange*-pedagogy that forces people to feel the suffering they cause in others in a physical way, which would consequently make them incapable of acting in accordance with their previous incorrect views. This suggestion, of course, would be an anathema to all three critical traditions. The hyperbole, here, is meant to showcase that the aims of these traditions and their methods are often at odds and can fail to see the difficulties in achieving their aims. None of them leaves open the possibility that anyone could have a belief system that conflicts with their own and still have it be considered a reasonable view. These critical traditions have all the answers; they act as if they have a vanguard status; and they assert, that if they were only implemented correctly, the projects' overall goals would be advanced with education and society benefiting tremendously.

Yet, each tradition is stifled when it comes to how schools work and how students live their lives. In contrast, this move to the everyday is an aspect that Barry systematically and repeatedly calls for in his work. There is something lacking in the direct and sustained attention in each tradition to the ways in which students get caught up in conspicuously consumptive behaviors that are at odds with the goals of each of these traditions. These status and position seeking moves vary among schools and communities, but they are constant problems for almost everyone in a school population in the country. There is very little discussion of how teachers are supposed to overcome students' interest in material goods and electronic distractions (like Twitter) and to get them focused on weighty underlying issues that make up their critical traditions such as class, autonomy, and identity. This is a substantial hole in the implementation of these

approaches as one often forgets that these are adult ideas laid upon the minds of young adults. Further, it must be remembered that students' priorities simply may be very different from adults of all philosophical commitments, and this generational aspect must not be forgotten.

Further, each tradition is substantially at risk of having their calls for reform or revolution reified by the educational discourse in ways that may do harm to their long-term goals. For example, the work of Ruby Payne (2003, 2006, 2009) has been at the center of a substantial controversy about how to teach poverty issues to teachers in professional development settings, which is an element that cuts across each of the critical traditions. The problems around Payne's work received more scholarly attention (Bomer, Dworin, May, & Semingson, 2008; Gorski, 2006; Ng & Rury, 2006; Valencia, 2009) as her popularity on the professional development circuit grew. When analyzed by education scholars, Payne's work shocked and disturbed these scholars, especially since it was influencing possibly millions of teachers (based on claimed book sales) with little more than lessons in cultural stereotypes presented as research on how children in poverty act. The problem for critical educational thought, here, is that instead of getting the nuanced views that the traditions hope for on issues of class, autonomy, and identity, teachers receive confirmation of stereotypes of how students from certain backgrounds and ethnicities will behave and why they act in those ways. This is certainly not the aim of the scholars of these traditions. The determinism Payne pushes and profits from is certainly not what McLaren (2005), Reich (2002), or Goodman (2001) may have wanted to contribute to, but, in the move from observation to theory to professional development program, this blunt (and offensive version) is an example of how the underlying values,

which are positive in these traditions, can come through to teachers and students in negative ways. The other glaring problem that is showcased in this example is that Payne's work is missing any expectation or call for substantial revolution or reform in education and society, which are critical components of each tradition discussed in this study. Hence, there is an essential element that can be lost in the translation of these critical traditions into policy and practice.

The last commonality, and the most important one, is that these critical traditions in educational thought are largely modernist constructions. The categories used and methods employed often have essentialist qualities and frame educational and political issues in ways that neglect the complexities and changes in the United States and the globe (see also Bauman, 2008, Davis & Monk, 2007; Levy, 2008; Jacoby, 2005; Zizek, 2007, 2008). The old means and territory for debate are fading or have faded completely from the world of politics or have been usurped by conservative forces. For example, one might argue that the "Tea Party protests," which were framed as spontaneous grassroots confrontations, were actually centrally planned propaganda promoted by prominent right-leaning corporations. With this argument, the right has taken over and incorporated one of the last remaining apparatuses towards social progress—the protest—and turned it into another part of their political machine. The point here is that all three traditions start at the same point and leave us at the same point—playing into the hands of forces that oppose the reduction of inequality.

Given these weaknesses of the established critical traditions in educational thought, it is important to return to Barry's work and what it suggests for the future of critical educational scholarship.

Barry and Critical Educational Thought

It is crucial at this point to specify what elements of Barry's (1995, 2005, 2008) work can be drawn from to confront educational inequality and how inequality can be reduced. A relevant place to start is a symposium in the journal *Ethics* in July of 2008 for Barry's *Why Social Justice Matters* (2005). Barry's responses to several papers in this issue merit attention for understanding possible paths that lead away from greater inequality and towards egalitarianism in education and public policy through sustained efforts of collaboration across differences and against common political challenges.

First, Barry thinks that the metaphor and discourse of choice in education, and more broadly in society, must be eliminated. The three concepts Barry dissects in his work—meritocracy, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity—all rely on this central symbol of choice being the determinant element in a young person's educational prospects and life outcomes. For Barry, it is not enough to simply assert that students have a choice to be successful or unsuccessful in schools, as Sowell suggested in Chapter Two. He sees the mitigating out-of-school factors mentioned by Berliner as providing challenges that society should work to overcome by providing similar resources to young people in their educational and community lives. Barry sees the use of choice as an extremely deleterious tool of political rhetoric that must be shown to the public for the fraud that it is. Barry (2008) explains that choice does not have the power that it is all too often given by politicians and mislead voters: "individual choice is incapable of playing the role that it has to be assigned if it is to be used to justify many of the outcomes in connection with which it is invoked by politicians and pundits in contemporary societies" (p. 688)."

Further, Barry notes that there is more going on in how one's life turns out that is beyond one's simple choices. He states:

What I hoped to do was to avoid falling back on the proposition that universal determinism is incompatible with individual responsibility while at the same time running the gamut of relevant academic disciplines to illustrate ways in which the web of causation either circumscribes the scope of choice or results in outcomes that cannot be explained in terms of choice at all but which arise directly from features of the social structure without the mediation of choice. (p. 688-689)

The point here that Barry emphasizes is that choices are connected to a network of choices made by other people that have effects on individuals' lives in school and for years after. That more attention is not given to what choices are available to young people and to the choices of others that curtail their prospects is substantially unjust for Barry. He thinks that this renders the notion of choice to be no more than a political smokescreen used to obscure the growth of inequality in education and derivative life outcomes.

Barry believes that the discourse of choice must be superseded by a reclamation and promotion of the discourse of equality in its place. This renewed sense of equality via populism has the potential to appeal to an existing strain of American politics. There is no guarantee here that this will have any more salience in connecting with the detached and misinformed masses that have been misled through media outlets. Yet, for Barry some new political effort must push back against the discourse of choice if greater egalitarianism in education and society is to be achieved.

A second point is that there must be greater solidarity across the educational establishment in terms of teachers, administrators, university faculty, policymakers, and parents. This solidarity focused towards the goals of equality must move beyond the discourse of rights to a discussion of resources and opportunities in education. This is of

crucial importance as state school finance litigation has often shown that students have a right to some version of a basic education, but this is a remarkably low standard that does not provide an adequate leveling of the playing field between those students who attend St. Paul's and those who attend Harbor City High. For Barry (2008), this connection to solidarity is a crucial point that illustrates the complications of modern governance, its institutions, and his conception of social justice:

liberal justice, which I take to be the primary sphere of rights, whereas I add to it social justice, which is more the sphere of opportunities and resources....I insist that social justice is not in conflict with liberal justice but rather complements and completes it. (p. 692)

It is a universal positive that schools now no longer bar certain students from attending based exclusively on race, gender, or disability, but the resources allocated and opportunities afforded to students is by no means equal across and within public school districts or even within a single school. In Barry's opinion, this lack of focus on the amelioration of inequality in schools demonstrates that much progress remains to be achieved.

Barry's view of social justice as an extension of liberal justice provides a first order conception of the good that demands that government's purpose should be an attempt to give the DiAngelos and Richards of the population every chance possible to succeed and to improve their life outcomes relative to any other individuals, no matter where they went to school or how wealthy their parents were. Another example from Barry (2008) further expands this point on where the discussion of opportunities for life outcomes begins:

Suppose that you lack the qualifications for becoming a surgeon, say. This is your responsibility if you can choose not to take a path that would have led to your becoming surgeon. But suppose that at no times in your life did you have a set of

realistic options open that included the possibility of making choices leading to a surgery as a career. I then wish to say that you lacked the opportunity....Judging by test scores and dropout rates, there are many schools both in Britain and the United States in which achieving minimal literacy is an achievement. Being a surgeon is so far off the map that it is hard to know what to make of a hypothetical question about choosing to become one if one could. If a student at one of these schools had instead been in a position to become a surgeon by making available choices, who knows whether he or she would have choices to make the effort or not? (p. 696-697)

This is a vital point to understanding that social justice exceeds the bounds of liberal justice. Access to education is not enough if life outcomes are so tied to how well one does in school and what one is able to study. Further, the example of what decisions could realistically be made and achieved are important to recall in light of the discussion in the third chapter concerning the expansion of interest in students attending college. Unfortunately, this aspiration has not been supported through policies that would increase levels of college graduation.

The third element of Barry's work that must be reiterated is his direct attack on the growth and expansion of wealth inequality and its effect on education. Barry (2008) makes clear that he sees wealth inequality as the most significant form of inequality, and it has the most corrosive aspects on political agency and, derivatively, on educational funding: "At the top end of the scale, extremes of wealth fray the social fabric by enabling the rich to detach themselves from the common lot, opting out of the public system of education" (p. 698). In Barry's view, this separation of groups based on relativities of wealth reduces the possibility of sustained public investments that benefit broad coalitions of the population of a state or nation. This distortion in incomes and the distribution of wealth in the country increasingly leads to more exiting from the public systems of education for private schools, neighborhood schools, and new suburbs.

Further, as students exit public schools, the base of support for them and for progressive efforts to reduce inequality become more difficult since the more powerful interests no longer are invested in the public schools.

The last element that must be asserted is that this discussion of inequality cannot in the end of the analysis be restricted to just the national boundaries of the United States. There is far too much at stake to limit this call for social justice to countries that can actually afford it. This is especially true in considering how reluctant even the wealthiest countries are in meeting the demands of social justice. In the international realm, the advancement of social justice goes from thoroughly difficult to infinitely more complicated. It remains to be seen how gross levels of inequality in well-off countries can be reconciled and tackled, as well how relations among states of varying wealth are to interact. For Barry (2008), social justice cannot be bound to just one country, and one must look deeply into the face of inequality across the globe to fight for its reduction:

In general, though, I think it has to be said that social justice conceived of globally must involve international comparisons. If we say that infant mortality is very high by international standards in some poor country, we might be simply focusing on the country itself and pointing out the shortfall in relation to “best practice” in rich countries. But it seems to me much more plausible to regard the inequality as itself representing an injustice. (p. 706)

Barry continues pointing out that the simple solutions are the ones that rarely get the attention they deserve, even when they would have a negligible impact on the richest countries (see also Miller, 2007; Sachs, 2008, Singer, 2002, 2009). He suggests following the United Nations “Millennium Development Goals....if these goals are adequate for justice, and if these funds will be sufficient to meet them, factoring in global justice will have only a peripheral effect on the analysis of domestic justice” (p. 707). This is a crucial point and one that seem to have lost focus since the beginning of the economic

crisis of 2008. In Barry's view social justice demands sustained efforts at providing assistance before crises arise.

All these ideas require the political center of the country getting to a political mindset in which inequality is something to be warded off and not a taken-for-granted element of everyday life. It is acknowledged that this would require a sea change in the political atmosphere of the nation and elite interests that presently make it difficult to change the present political predicament. Barry (1995) is acutely aware of this limitation of his theorizing and provides insight into how the impulse to attack inequality often gets pushed off by political agendas. He contends, "those who gain from inequality are also well placed to propagate beliefs tending to legitimize their advantages via control of society's cultural, religious, and educational institutions and its media of mass communication" (p. 198). Yet, Barry sees that it is not just the top end of the scale that determines how and why inequality persists. He thinks those individuals in marginalized positions can have difficulty in thinking of a path to a more equal future and, even if they can visualize it, they are unable to make any choices that would result in it coming to fruition. He writes, "If they [marginalized individuals] regard collective action to improve their lot as unlikely to succeed, they can gain psychic ease by taking on board the belief that 'there is no alternative' to the inequalities from which they suffer" (p. 198). This element of reticence towards taking action is the influence of the media's efforts to convince people that the world exists as it does and change is really not possible any more.

It is also clear that the worldview at play in democracies is often, if not always, at odds with those who benefit the least from government intervention and support. Again,

the theme of the justification of position based on merit, personal responsibility, and equal opportunity comes through and shows why they are present barriers to the reduction of inequality in education in Barry's work. He states: "The superficial appearance of a consensus...provides support for the socioeconomic *status quo* by suggesting that successful individuals got where they are by their merits in a fair completion and that large economic rewards reflect large contributions to the economy" (p. 199). This view works for those who benefit from the system and further blames those who do not succeed as not having made the correct choices, thereby reinforcing the existing levels of inequality and opening up new spaces for its growth.

Barry (1995) further clarifies the complications of not having a legitimate alternative choice among the political parties and the depressing result, which is the degraded form of politics that is essentially non-political. This assertion defines the present historical age. Barry thinks he knows why there is not an "articulation of counter-ideology corresponding to the experience of those who do poorly out of the system" (p. 199). He suggests that "the answer is that trying to create an electoral base by changing beliefs is a long-term strategy which makes sense only if party leaders have a time horizon extending well beyond the next election" (p. 199). This long-term strategy becomes ever harder to achieve as news cycles increase to near non-stop campaign coverage. With these assertions and recommendations made, it is useful to now speculate on the future trajectory of critical educational scholarship.

One possible future trend that is in need of development is that new words, language, and discourse must be asserted to restart the critical discourse around education and society. At present, there seems to be an impasse between the existing critical

traditions in educational scholarship and the continuing centrist business-minded trends in educational reform. The means and methods of critique in the past no longer have the saliency and the potency that it was hoped they would have in achieving their goals. The optimism found in political and educational theory that reason would lead to a more just world in terms of rights and opportunities has failed to live up to its claim. As such, this study has provided a critique of these three traditions through the work of Brian Barry—who is also subject to some of these modernist conventions. Yet, this internal critique of the discourse is only the first step of the much larger task of developing and evaluating the new critical discourse in education that learns from its past mistakes, is willing to abandon politically dead terms while staying true to underlying values, and is forceful in its demands on students, parents, teachers, university faculty, and policymakers.

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