

CONTESTED AND CHALLENGING SCHOOL CONTEXTS: POVERTY, EQUITABLE MACROECONOMIC POLICIES,
AND URBAN EDUCATIONAL REFORM

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All told, 42 percent of children born to poor families will still be in poverty as adults—a higher percent than in any other advanced nation.

--Robert Reich "The Four Biggest Right-Wing Lies about Inequality"

Attempting to fix inner-city schools without fixing the city in which they are embedded is like trying to clean the air on one side of a screen door. --Jean Anyon, Ghetto Schooling

The headnotes capture the fundamental flaw in the United States school reform movement of the past three decades. This effort has focused almost exclusively on what takes place in schools, that is, on one side of the screen door, a discourse dominated by teacher accountability, punitive student high stakes tests, and charter schools. Unfortunately, the school reform conversation has virtually ignored what may well be of greater urgency, what happens on the other side of the screen door, namely, in the school's social, cultural, and political environment. As Carolyn Shields puts it, "what happens to students and their families outside of school," powerfully affects students' "ability to learn, their identity construction, their sense of belonging and being welcomed or valued within the learning context" (pp. 21-22).

Poverty in the United States

Perhaps, the single most consequential of these external social factors in American education is the unprecedented high level of childhood poverty. In initiating the "War on Poverty" in 1964, President Lyndon Johnson forcefully captured the crippling role of poverty, exclaiming, "Poverty must not be a bar to learning" (Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States, p. 704).

Currently, 20 million American children, or nearly one in four, lives in poverty, the most at any time in history. UNICEF reports that the childhood poverty rate in the United States is double that of the United Kingdom and Japan, nearly three times higher than Germany and France, and nearly four times higher than Norway and Finland. In fact, among all developed nations, the United States has the highest rate of childhood poverty, with the single exception of Romania. (Reich, 2014a, p. 10A.)

Poverty contains a glaring racial dimension to it, with proportionately three times as many students of color as whites as whites living in poverty. Specifically, 32% of Latino children, 35% of Native American children, and 38% of African American children live in poverty. All three groups are six to nine times more likely than whites to live in communities of concentrated poverty. In my city of Detroit, a staggering 58% of children living in poverty (Erb, 2013).

The horrific child poverty figures reflect a racial discrimination of wealth. According to the Census Bureau, the median household net worth for whites in the United States is \$110,000, compared to only \$7,424 for Latinos, and \$4,900 for African Americans. This translates to whites having 15 times more wealth than Latinos, and 22 times more wealth than African Americans.

The Achievement Gap: Socioeconomic Status and Academic Performance

Sociologist James Coleman's landmark 1966 study, Equal Educational Opportunity, has been described by Charles Finn as "probably the best known and most influential piece of educational research ever published" (Mirel, 1999, p.viii). Essentially, the Coleman Report found that student achievement overwhelmingly reflects family socioeconomic status, rather than what happens in schools (Coleman, 1966). Specifically, Coleman concluded that schools accounted for only five to 35 percent of the variability in student performance, though the figure for low-income students was at the higher end of the scale. Demographer David Rusk (1999, p. 91) found that a full 65% to 85% of school variation in standardized test scores can be explained by the percentage of low-income students in a school.

Today, in nearly all school districts in the United States, student scores on state-mandated tests highly correlate with parents' socioeconomic status. For example, on the 2000 New York State Education Department's fourth-grade math tests, an observer could have correctly predicted the test scores in all but one of the city's 32 school districts based solely on knowing the percentage of students in a given district who qualified for a free lunch (Traub, p. 52).

It is hardly surprising that over two-thirds of student achievement is the product of out-of-school factors, primarily family SES. As psychologist Abraham Maslow reminded us generations ago, in their hierarchy of needs, children living in poverty first have to deal with surviving before focusing on self-actualization.

Clearly, if the United States was serious about improving its education system, it would be having a different conversation than the present school reform movement that effectively demonizes teachers and undermines traditional public schools. As David Sirota (2013) puts it, "it would instead be focused on mounting a new war on poverty and thus directly addressing the biggest education problem of all" (p. 3).

In 2013, scholars Richard Rothstein and Martin Carnoy found an "achievement gap" based on social class in every nation. Students from the most affluent homes scored at the top of test scores, while students from the poorest homes scored at the bottom. What's more, the main reason why the scores of students in the United States are low is precisely because we have more poverty than other nations with which we compare ourselves. Rothstein and Carnoy state: "U.S. student scores are lower on average simply because of our relatively disadvantaged social class composition" (Ravitch, 2013).

An especially troubling development is that in the last few decades, differences in educational success between high- and lower-income students have grown substantially. Stanford University Professor Sean Reardon (p. 3) terms this phenomenon, the "income achievement gap." Indeed, the achievement gap between children from high- and low-income families is about 40% larger today than it was 30 years ago. To illustrate, Reardon considers two children, one from a family with an income of \$165,000 and one from a family with an income of only \$15,000, which respectively represent the 90th and 10th percentiles of the income distribution nationally. In the 1980s, on an 800-point SAT-type test scale, the average difference between these prototypical students would have been 90 points, but today it is 125 points (Reardon, 2013).

Reardon offers various explanations for the growing income achievement gap. First, family income stratification has grown considerably in the last 40 years. Second, with schools increasingly segregated by income, lower-income students are concentrated in schools with vastly fewer resources and less qualified teachers. Third, wealthy families are greatly expanding their investing of resources, namely their money, time, and knowledge, on their children's cognitive development, which leads to their

youngsters' educational success (Income inequality producing a new kind of achievement gap, 2012, p. 19).

Essentially, Reardon is speaking of parents' high cultural capital investments which include private music and dance lessons, individual tutors, literary activities, and sports camp. Data developed in 2013 by The After-School Corporation found that the gap in both time and money that wealthy as opposed to poor parents spend on their children's educational enrichment has widened dramatically in the past 40 years. The gap for a 12-year old is a staggering \$90,000 and 6,000 hours of enrichment activities, including being read to, attending pre-K school, as well as camp, museums, and other summer learning opportunities (Friedman, 2013).

In the last three decades, the spending of high-income families on their children's enrichment activities has increased at triple the expanded rate of low-income families, a bloated early childhood investment termed "the rug rat race." One manifestation are the exorbitant sums that affluent parents pay to enroll their youngsters in exclusive private preschools, known in New York City as "Baby Iviess." According to Jonathan Kozol (2005), "Competition for admission to these pre-K schools is so extreme that private counselors are frequently retained, at fees as high as \$300 an hour, to guide the parents through the applications process" (p. 46).

At the other end of the income spectrum, children of the very poor in the United States often are locked out of access to good preschool and day-care programs. Accordingly, vocabulary differences among children are truly staggering. To illustrate, an often cited study "reached the almost unfathomable conclusion that 3-year-olds in families with professional parents used more—extensive vocabularies in daily interactions than did mothers on welfare—not to mention the children of those mothers." (Traub, p. 57) And yet vocabulary is a vital part of a child's brain toolkit for learning, memory, and cognition. Reardon offers a dire warning about an emerging feedback mechanism that may vastly "decrease intergenerational mobility. As the children of the rich do better in school, and those who do better are more likely to become rich, we risk producing an even more unequal and economically polarized society" ("Income Inequality Producing a New Kind of Achievement Gap," 2012, p. 19).

Dimensions of the Impact of Poverty on Education

Simply put, many students living in poverty do very poorly in school. Widely published author Eric Jensen (2013) summarizes the linkage between poverty and dropping out of school: "Half of all poor students of color drop out of school. Seventy percent of all children who do not graduate from high school have spent at least a year living in poverty. In 2009, the dropout rate of students living in low-income families was about five times greater than the rate of students from high-income families" (p. 1.).

Arguably, the three most important of these poverty-related factors that impact student school performance are school resources, health conditions, and psychological disarray/stress level.

School Resources

Nearly 90% of the funding of public schools in the United States derives from state and local government. Decentralized funding means that a student living in a wealthy state like Connecticut receives about three times as much funding for their education as their counterparts living in an economically poor state like Mississippi.

Within states, with the exception of Michigan, local property taxes form the basis of all school funding. Schools are financed by taxes levied by local communities mainly on residents' real estate values. In the United States, very poor communities typically pay two or three times higher rates of property tax than do extremely affluent districts, but these residents still end up with far less money for each child. For example, in the Detroit metropolitan area today, schools in the affluent suburban districts of Bloomfield Hills and Birmingham, where over 90% of students are white, receive approximately \$12,500 per student, compared to about \$8,000 per student in the public schools of the city of Detroit, where only 4% of students are white.

Most low-income students of color in America attend schools that receive vastly inadequate funding (Carey, 2005), which translates into a litany of devastating deficiencies of school resources, including: crumbling infrastructure, overcrowded classrooms, lower teacher salaries, (Karloy, 2001), lack of technology, science equipment, instructional materials and even textbooks. For more than 40 years, the overwhelming majority of students in Detroit public schools have not had their own copy of textbooks to take home with which to do homework.

A comprehensive study released in March 2014 by the U.S. Department of Education sheds new light on educational inequality. Based on all 97,000 of the nation's public schools, compared to whites, disadvantaged students from prekindergarten through high school show persistent and widespread disparities on key education indicators. For example, compared to white students, African American students were four times more likely and Latino students were twice as likely as whites to attend schools where teachers had not met state certification requirements. Of schools serving the highest percentages of African American and Latino students, only 66% offer chemistry and only 74% offer Algebra II. While African American children comprise 18% of preschool enrollment, they make up almost half (48%) of preschool children suspended more than once. Secretary of Education Arnie Duncan reflected on the grim findings: "In all, it is clear that the United States has a great deal of distance to go to meet our goal of providing opportunities for every student to succeed" (McNeil and Blad).

Health Conditions

Health conditions related to children's physical and emotional well-being substantially impact their learning capabilities (Sapolsky, (2005), pp. 92-99). Students from low income families are much more likely to experience a vast host of health and nutrition conditions, such as: born premature, low in birth weight, or with disabilities; higher incidence of asthma, obesity, untreated ear infections, hearing-issues issues, dental problems, and exposure to lead poisoning.

These health-related risks negatively impact cognition and behavior, which in turn, results in poor student educational outcomes. Some of these linkages are obvious. As Jensen (p. 10) states, "Students with ear infections may have additional trouble with sound discrimination, making it tough for them to follow directions, engage in demanding auditory processing, or even understand the teacher."

Low birth weight and premature birth, which are highly correlated with parental poverty, impede learning for many children in a way that the current model of school reform cannot undue. African Americans experience double the rate of low birth weight than whites, which is commonly associated with learning disabilities, attention deficit disorders, asthma, and subsequent low school achievement. In his classic book, Savage Inequalities (1991), Jonathan Kozol points out that in the South Bronx, a very poor, largely African American section of New York City, a whopping 551 infants out of 1,000 require neonatal hospitalization, eight times greater than the 69 infants in 1,000 in nearby affluent and white

Riverside. Kozol terms this, “a remarkable statistic that portends high rates of retardation and brain damage” among the Bronx babies (p. 116).

The devastating educational consequences of “environmental racism” deserve special mention. Rudy and Konefal (2007) note that this vital term refers to the “disproportionate representation of oppressed people of color and the poor within the most heavily polluted toxic and illegally dumped in areas of the country” (pp. 495-496).

A key component of environmental racism is exposure to lead. Lead poisoning comes from two main sources: lead-based paint in dilapidated homes, and as a residue in the soil left from manufacturing in the factories surrounding central cities. It is primarily children in poor neighborhoods who are exposed to high levels of lead. Research has shown that lead negatively affects juveniles’ judgment, cognitive function, and the ability to regulate behavior; indeed, a high blood lead level at 7-years-old is among the strongest predictors that a child will have both learning difficulties and disciplinary problems in school.

Jensen explains that “exposure to lead correlates with poor working memory and a weaker ability to link cause and effect. That means that...students...won’t necessarily understand when and how...behavior rules apply” (pp. 9-10). Recent studies point to a direct relationship between the amount of lead in a child’s blood and the likelihood they would commit crimes, including violent crime, as an adult (Toppo, 2008).

A landmark 2010 study conducted jointly by the Detroit City Health Department and the Detroit Public Schools (DPS) points to very ominous consequences of exposure to lead. Overall, 58% of the 39,199 Detroit students tested had a history of lead poisoning; only 233 students had no lead in their bodies. An extraordinarily high correlation existed between the levels of lead in the bodies of Detroit students and their performance on the state-mandated Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP).

Specifically, on all tests administered, from reading to writing, to math and science--as the lead levels in students’ bodies increased, their rank in the state tests declined, in a step-by-step linear fashion, from advanced, to proficient, to partially proficient, to not proficient. The study is particularly instructive because the scores for DPS fourth and eighth grade students on the 2009 National Assessment of Educational Progress was the very lowest of any school district in the United States in the history of the exam (Lam and Tanner-White, 2010, p. 6A).

Psychological Disarray and Stress

Success in school requires that a child possesses a certain social-emotional repertoire of appropriate school behaviors, which low-income students are less likely to hold. A likely root cause of behavioral issues are the early home experiences of a child living in poverty, which are chaotic or insecure due to absent or stressed caregivers. Failure to learn appropriate emotional responses to everyday situations at home can result in poor emotional regulation, depression, and overall negative student engagement and achievement in school (Jensen, pp. 15-16).

Stress is a major factor that undercuts student engagement in school. Acute stress means exposure to trauma such as abuse or violence, while chronic stress refers to high stress sustained over time. Children in poverty often experience both acute and chronic stress.

In fact, some scholars have written about poverty, itself, as a form of trauma. This interpretation makes sense, since living in poverty significantly increases children’s exposure to daily trauma-like experiences, including homelessness, parental mental illness, substance abuse, family violence, and chronic illness.

One telling statistic is that one out of 10 children under the age of six living in a major American city reports witnessing a shooting or stabbing (Parris, 2013).

Homelessness is another form of poverty as trauma. More than 600,000 Americans are homeless on a given night, according to the latest government data. Nearly a quarter of these are children and a third were living in unsheltered places like parks, cars, or abandoned buildings. The impact of homelessness on student school outcomes is direct and ominous (Covert, 2013, p. 1.),

A major way in which poverty negatively impacts the academic performance of students is transience or school turnover. Children who are poor, immigrants, or migrants experience very high turnover rates in school. In 1996, I interviewed the principal of Roberto Clemente Elementary School elementary school in Hartford, Connecticut, where virtually all of the students were from Puerto Rico. This principal told me that over 80% of the students in his school who sat for state required standardized tests in May had not been in the school the previous September because they moved back and forth between Hartford and Puerto Rico. Lichter (1997) found that in a given year, more than half of all children living in poverty deal with evictions, utility disconnections, overcrowding, or lack of a stove or refrigerator (compared to only 13 percent of well-off children). Innumerable studies demonstrate that transient students typically fall grade levels behind more stable student populations.

Research suggests that growing up in poverty is associated with students developing attitudes of lowered expectations about future outcomes, and an increased sense of detachment and hopelessness, which in school involves passivity and disinterested, a giving-up process known as learned helplessness (Hiroto and Seligman, 1975). Some students in poverty come to believe that school is not relevant, and that a high school diploma from an inner-city school holds little value on the job market. Kozol (1991) well captures this dynamic: “Children, of course, don’t understand at first that they are being cheated. They come to school with a degree of faith and optimism, and they often seem to thrive during the first few years....By fifth or sixth grade, many children demonstrate their loss of faith by staying out of school....The route from truancy to full-fledged dropout status is direct and swift” (p. 57-58.).

Significantly, educational sociologists Kathleen deMarrais and Margaret LeCompte (1999) explain that low-income students do not so much drop out of school; rather, they are pushed out altogether by inflexible and unresponsive schools. These institutions have limited time, staff, or resources for students from poverty backgrounds “who present difficult problems, such as a need for child care or psychiatric care, or help for drug addiction or physical abuse” (p. 143).

Education Alone Cannot End Poverty

In 1848, in his 12th Annual Report as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education, Horace Mann, the great pioneer of the common school movement in the United States, made the eloquent case for education as “the great equalizer of the conditions of men, the balance-wheel of the social machinery....[I]t prevents being poor” (Mann, 1868, p. 669). Move the clock forward to 2002 at a Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday speech in Harlem, where New York City mayor Michael Bloomberg exclaimed that if schools improved, “a lot of what Dr. King wanted to accomplish in our society will take care of itself” (Rothstein, p. 7). Unfortunately, America’s unyielding faith in the omnipotent power of schools to cure poverty has proven to a false promise.

In his 1972 work, Inequality, Christopher Jencks showed that it is false to contend that school improvement can produce great progress in income inequality, as well as improve the health care and housing of the poor. Jencks stated: “There is no evidence that school reform can substantially reduce

the extent of cognitive inequality....Neither school resources nor segregation has an appreciable effect on either test scores or educational attainment” (p. 8.)

In 2000, education writer James Traub insightfully explained the American preoccupation with using schools, by themselves, to solve poverty. According to Traub: “School reform involves relatively little money and no large-scale initiatives, asks practically nothing of the nonpoor and is accompanied by the ennobling sensation that comes from expressing faith in the capacity of the poor to overcome disadvantage by themselves. Conversely, the idea that schools by themselves can’t cure poverty not only sounds like an un-American vote of no confidence in our capacity for self-transformation but also seems to flirt with racist theories....”(p. 54).

Nevertheless, the empirical evidence overwhelmingly demonstrates that efforts to solve poverty by education alone are insufficient. School is not the great equalizer. In fact, the negative economic, health, and cultural impacts of poverty—out-of school influences--usually override the positive in-school influences associated with the draconian agenda of the present school reform movement.

An good illustration of how poverty can trump schooling is the phenomenon of summer learning loss (SLL). SLL refers to the decline in academic skills and knowledge over the course of the summer vacation when school is not in session. The amount of academic growth or decline that a student experiences during the summer months is very highly correlated with their family socioeconomic status. Repeated studies over decades have shown that, in general, low-income students lose around three months of grade-level equivalency in reading scores during the summer months, while middle-class students, because they engage in summer enrichment programs, show an insignificant gain in reading scores.

Doris Entwisle and Associates (2000) found the cumulative effects of the learning loss that occurs during the summer months of the primary school years account for a stunning two-thirds of the academic achievement gap in reading and language found between middle-income versus low-income high school students. In other words, poor children come close to being able to keep up with their middle-class peers when school is in session. However, virtually the entire achievement gap reflects the inability of low-SES families, because of their lack of money, to offer their children summer enrichment experiences when school is not in session.

Conventional wisdom says that a more educated American population will automatically produce a higher standard of living. Unfortunately, the experience of the past 40 years demonstrates that the exact opposite has been the case.

Both high school graduations rates (about 80%) and college graduation rates (about 30%), represent all-time highs for Americans. Yet, the economic condition for most Americans has declined considerably for the past 40 years. Specifically, real hourly wages, when adjusted for inflation, are more than 10% lower today than in 1973. What matters most for our analysis of education and economic standing is the predominant income group in America, the shrinking middle class, which is working longer hours for lower wages and benefits.

In 2013, the median male worker made \$283 less than he did 44 years ago, while the typical female worker earned \$1,700 less than she did in 2007 (Sanders, 2014.). Significantly, these income declines are happening while workers are putting in much longer hours of work in order to make ends meet. “Today, the average American employee works, by far, the longest hours of any worker in the industrialized world” (Sanders, 2003, p. 13A.).

In short, while many young people today are much more educated than their parents, they represent the growing cohort of overeducated, but downwardly mobile, Americans. Indeed, many young adults with college degrees hold low-paying jobs, but still are saddled with an immense student debt load for attending college. This debt exceeds \$1.2 trillion, more than the collective credit card debt of all Americans.

David Leonhardt and Kevin Quealy (2014) show that the reality is that most Americans are not keeping pace with their counterparts around the world. Specifically, the lower- and middle-income tiers of citizens of other advanced countries have received considerably larger raises in their standard of living over the past three decades than have Americans. For example, after-tax middle-class incomes in Canada, which were substantially behind those in the United States in 2000, now are higher. Macroeconomic policies in the United States have taken their toll, in the form of declining real minimum wages, weaker labor unions, and companies that share a much smaller part of their bounty with the middle class.

The economic gains derived from a more productive work force have gone mainly to a tiny strata of very wealthy Americans. In 2012, the top 10% of earners in the U.S. received more than half of the country's total income, the highest level recorded since the government began collecting the data over 100 years ago (Lowery, 2013). More revealing than annual income data are the figures for the distribution of wealth in the U.S., with the top one percent owning more than the bottom 95% combined. According to U.S. Senator Bernie Sanders (2014), "the walton family, the owners of wal-mart, who are now worth as a family \$148 billion" which is "more wealth than the bottom 40% of American society,"

Combatting Poverty through Equitable Macroeconomic Policies

In her brilliant 2005 book, *Radical Possibilities*, Jean Anyon contends that in order to reduce poverty, the United States should broaden the concept of education policy to include equitable macroeconomic policies that directly address the needs of the poor. Anyon demonstrates that low-achieving urban schools in the United States are not a product of failed education policy; rather, they are "a logical consequences of U.S. macroeconomy—and the federal and regional policies and practices that support it" (p. 2). Therefore, just as the policies of the United States government produced the urban poverty which spawned underachieving students, now it is incumbent on the government to reverse its repressive policies in order to ameliorate poverty.

The way macroeconomic policies create and perpetuate inner-city poverty are complex. They involve unequal distributions of public and private investment in metropolitan areas which short-change poor residents of color in the core city. Macroeconomic policies from the 1930s to the 1960s contributed mightily to the migration of businesses and the white-middle-class from the inner-city to the suburbs, which effectively eroded the property tax base of urban schools, leaving them racially segregated and underfunded. Anyon (2005) observes that these policies included "federal guidelines that forbade bank loans for housing rehabilitation or purchase in city neighborhoods....and land grants to developers and municipalities to build highways, sewer and electrical lines, homes and office buildings in the suburbs but not in the city" (p. 62).

In recent decades, macroeconomic policies have contributed to the maintenance of low-paying jobs, which can compromise, if not negate, the assumption that increased education of the workforce will alleviate poverty. These new jobs, including janitor, nurse's aide, airport security guard, and fast food worker, overwhelmingly are unskilled, part-time, temporary, dead-end jobs, without good benefits (Tyack and Cuban, 1995, pp. 38-39). In short, millions of middle-class workers are downwardly mobile

because in 2014, “9 out of 10 of the fastest-growing occupations are considered low-wage, generally not requiring a college degree” (Buchheit,).

Anyon (2005) documents the crucial role of housing policies in undermining urban school reform by concentrating “low-income students into central cities and urbanized suburban neighborhoods” (p. 93). Specifically, most entry-level jobs for which low-income adults are qualified are located in outlying suburbs. However, in a city like Detroit with no mass transit system, poor people who overwhelmingly do not own a reliably operating automobile, lack access to commute to these available jobs. Compounding the problem are local zoning ordinances based on income, supplemented by housing discrimination, that prevent the poor from accessing affordable housing in the suburbs where these entry-level jobs exist. The net impact is that the cycle of poverty continues into another generation for the urban poor, who are both denied access to jobs, and confined to live in inner-cities where they attend underfunded, segregated public schools.

Unaffordable college tuition is yet another crucial example of how macroeconomic policy undercuts the assumption that educational attainment is the route out of poverty. The key role of the federal government’s policies are reflected in the fact that the maximum federal Pell Grant that low-income students receive now covers less than half as much as it did a decade ago of the average fixed cost of attending a public four-year college. And yet the lack of financial assistance often is decisive reason why many low-income students do not finish college (Gladieux, 2004).

State government policy contributes negatively to equal educational opportunity through the steep drop in state government funding for public universities, which consequently have felt forced to charge skyrocketing tuition to students. In most states, public funding now covers only about 30% of student tuition, compared to about 70% two decades ago. Much of the missing 40% is now dedicated to the prison system in states which, in Michigan, accounts for 72% more of state funds more funds than allocated by the state to all of its 15 public colleges and universities combined.

Indeed, whereas attending college once represented a ladder to the middle-class in the days of the G.I. Bill, today, access to higher education in the United States is incredibly stratified by class and race. In terms of class, in 2011, 75% of the students at the 200 most highly rated colleges came from families with income in the top-quartile, with only 5% coming from families in the bottom income quartile. By race, since 1994, 80% of white students attending college have gone to a school ranked in the top 500 by Barron’s. On the other hand, 75% of African and American students who entered college in this period attended either a two-year or an open-admission college outside of the top 500 (Bruni, 2014).

The graduation rates for American colleges are brutally stratified by class. In 2014, Paul Tough explained in an article appropriately entitled, “Who Gets to Graduate?” that “whether a student graduates or not seems to depend today almost entirely on just one factor—how much money his or parents make....About a quarter of college freshmen born into the bottom of the income distribution will manage to collect a bachelor’s degree by age 24, while almost 90 percent of freshmen born into families in the top quartile will go on to finish their degree”.

What is extremely troubling for the principle of equal educational opportunity is that graduating college today is overwhelmingly based on a student’s economic standing, not their ability. Specifically, comparing college students from different family backgrounds shows that educational outcomes reflect parents’ income, not students’ test scores. Tough points out that for students who do moderately well on standardized tests, those from families in the top-income quartile have a four times greater chance

of graduating with a four-year degree (at 67%), than do students from families in the bottom quartile (at 16%).

Inner-city children often come to school hungry, suffering from serious and untreated health conditions, and facing stress or even trauma, while living in transient, dilapidated, and lead infested housing. A meaningful analysis of macroeconomic policies to ameliorate poverty is an entire paper all to itself. Some items on such an agenda might include: a living minimum wage, job creation, universal health care, free universal pre-school, affordable public higher education, protecting union organizing; and ending laws and practices that support racial discrimination in housing, employment, and transportation. These programs would need to be financed by progressive taxing policies that require corporations and the wealthy to pay their fair share (Anyon, 2005).

The good news is that there is both indirect and direct empirical evidence that macroeconomic policies to increase familial resources can actually produce improved students' educational achievement. Take the following example of indirect evidence. For eight years, researchers studied a population sample of low-income children ages 9 to 13 in rural North Carolina, one-quarter who were from a Cherokee reservation. Halfway through the study, a local casino gave annual payments to each member of the tribal families over age 18.

When the study began, psychological tests had indicated that, on average, the poorer children exhibited more vandalism, stealing, bullying, stubbornness, and outbursts of anger than those who were not poor. However, these same tests conducted for the years that the funds were distributed showed that the negative behavior of the families who were no longer poor had dropped a full 40%, reaching the same levels found among children of families who had never been poor. Researchers identified the psychological benefits of not being poor. Specifically, youngsters felt less stress and exhibited fewer behavioral problems, while parents had more time to spend with their children (O'Connor, 2003).

There also is extensive direct empirical evidence that income supports to families improve educational achievement of children. A multitude of studies show improved student outcomes by providing families with wage supplements and subsidized child care. In 2001, the Manpower Development Research Corporation (MDRC) published a synthesis of research about how welfare and work policies affect the children of single mothers. The review found that even relatively small income supplements of \$4,000 a year to working parents improved their children's elementary school achievement by about 10-15% of the average variations of the control groups (Morris and Associates, 2001, p. 20).

Research also has found that moving families from inner-city neighborhoods to more affluent and/or less segregated metropolitan areas produces improved student achievement. Busing students to other school districts also can make a difference. To illustrate, in 1996, a random group of kindergarten-through-fifth grade low-income students in Hartford, Connecticut, nearly all African American, were offered the opportunity to attend schools in a dozen virtually all white suburbs. A longitudinal study 16 years later found that males in the test group were significantly more likely than those in the control group to have completed two years or more of college and less likely to have dropped out of high school (Kunen, 1996, p. 44).

It is hardly surprising that school achievement improves as family resources expand. In effect, we are giving the poor some of the advantages of time and money, reduced stress, and better health to nurture and rear their children with some of the kind of "concerned cultivation," to use sociologist Annette Lareau's term (2003), that the wealthy have always been accorded. Instead of waiting for schools to

develop in youngsters the cognitive skills they require for good jobs, why not short circuit the process by giving their parents the resources they require to prepare their children for school success?

I conclude with a caveat. Macroeconomic policies and genuine school reform are not mutually exclusive. Equitable macroeconomic policies are absolutely necessary to combat poverty; however, I am not sanguine that there is the will in today's conservative political climate to enact such laws. In the meanwhile, we must rely on the critical role of transformative leadership in education. As Carolyn Shields (2013) puts it, "The issue is that transformative educators cannot wait until society's ills and disparities are resolved before we take responsibility for educating all children" (p. 39).

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