



Education & its Influences on Class Mobility

The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

Overview:

Attending and completing college is an opportunity for improving one's class mobility, as college graduates tend to earn more over their lifetimes, have greater career and economic opportunities, and benefit from a number of positive post-graduate outcomes. For first generation and low-income students, in particular, grappling with these changes as one navigates differences between home and school can present challenges. Moreover, students of any background will interact with peers of different socioeconomic backgrounds, and this is especially true for students who engage in community service and work off campus. These interactions may also raise the need for more education, reflection, and discernment. With this context in mind, this workshop is focused on how socioeconomic status and class affect an individual's education experience - at the elementary, high school, and college levels - and how education is a significant factor that affects class mobility. Participants will engage in a reflective opening activity about their initial conceptions of class mobility, and then collaborate to review scholarship by American critical thinker and researcher in education, Dr. Jean Anyon and NY Times Correspondent David Leonhardt targeting the intersection of education and class mobility.

Category:

Diversity, Reflection, Critical Thinking, Analysis

Level:

Moderate to advanced. This workshop requires deep analysis of participants’ own class, as well as the role education plays in class mobility. Additionally, it requires some prior knowledge about basic terms including class, socioeconomic status, and class mobility. Finally, this workshop draws on literature and scholarship and involves reading, in an aim to strengthen upperclass students’ critical thinking skills.



3rd or 4th year

Recommended

Bonner Sequence:

This workshop is recommended for third or fourth year Bonners, as part of the Dialogue Across Diversity and Inclusion 4x4 model, Stage 4: Adaptation.

Dialogue Across Diversity and Inclusion 4x4 Student Developmental Model			
Stage 1: Exposure	Stage 2: Understanding	Stage 3: Application and Discussion	Stage 4: Adaptation

Learning Outcomes:

- Participants will have engaged in reflection around their own class and socioeconomic backgrounds, opportunities for social mobility, and initial thoughts on education and its influence on class mobility.
- Participants will gain insight from collaborative reading and analysis on scholarship focused on education and class mobility.
- Participants will apply their knowledge to better understand the implications of education and college on their own lives, as well as their civic engagement in the community.

Materials:

- Appropriate number of print-outs of each of the articles
- Each corner of the room labeled with one of the labels: **A** strongly agree, **B** agree, **C** disagree, **D** strongly disagree

How to Prepare:

As a facilitator, it is important for you to read through the trainer guide to get an understanding for the flow of the session. Additionally, it is important for you to read through both the articles that will be discussed in the second half of this session: Dr. Jean Anyon's *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*, and New York Times Correspondent, David Leonhardt's chapter in *Class Matters*, "The College Dropout Boom." Browse through the Class Matters website, the "How Class Works" graphic, in particular, because it may be a useful tool for participants to check out prior to this workshop. That assignment is up to your discretion.

Prepare the room for the session by labeling each corner of the room for the Four Corners exercise with one of the labels: **A** strongly agree, **B** agree, **C** disagree, **D** strongly disagree.

Brief Outline:

This session is designed to get participants to think about their initial perceptions of class mobility and the influence of education, both through K-12 education and college, on changes in socioeconomic status. After reflecting on their preconceptions, participants will get an opportunity to critically engage with scholarship around the intersection of education and class, and work collaboratively to infer what implications it has for themselves and their work in the community.

The outline has the following parts:

Total: 60 minutes

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Introduction | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2) Four Corners | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 3) Article Analysis | suggested time 25 minutes |
| 4) Debrief | suggested time 10 minutes |

Your Plan

Part 1) Introduction

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Introduce yourself. Allow time for each of your participants to introduce themselves, or if they already know each other, share something about themselves.

Sample prompts:

- Favorite book
- TV show you are currently watching
- Spirit Animal
- Hobby
- Favorite kitchen gadget

Today, participants will be engaging in activities and discussions around class mobility and how education can serve as an influential factor. This topic can bring out many differing opinions, and in order to establish a safe space for sharing, listening, understanding, and deliberative dialogue, ask participants to adhere to the following ground rules:

- Be respectful of every individual in the room and what their differing backgrounds may be.
- Agree to come into this with an open mind and the goal of understanding; do not attempt to persuade others.
- Be curious and open.
- If you want to be heard, be sure to listen.
- Realize and accept that we may leave this room without a resolution to problems that may arise.
- Ask questions and use "I" statements to draw from personal experiences. Do not try to represent larger groups.
- Consciously move beyond stereotypes and assumptions.
- Share speaking time.

Thank everyone in advance for their adherence to these guidelines. Now we are ready to begin our workshop.

Part 2) Four Corners

Suggested time: 20 minutes

In this activity, participants have the chance to reflect on and articulate their own viewpoints. It also provides a structure for participants to learn, through dialogue, about viewpoints that may differ from their own. This activity fosters communication, listening, and leadership skills. By using statements about class mobility and education that are designed to be intentionally ambiguous and effective at dividing the group by different perspectives, this activity helps participants to dialogue.

Introduce the structure of the activity to participants. Each corner of the room (point to the corners as you describe) corresponds to a response:

- A** strongly agree
- B** agree
- C** disagree
- D** strongly disagree.

You will read a statement, and after each statement, participants will choose one response in private, and then walk to the corner that matches their response to the statement. Once in that corner, they will engage in conversation with each other around the following questions:

- Why did you choose this response?
- How did you interpret and respond to the statement?

It should be noted that everyone should have an opportunity to speak during this breakout. Limit the small groupings to 5-6, which may mean responses with many participants need to be split into smaller groups for dialogue.

After discussing in each corner for five minutes, allow for each corner to share one insight from their discussion. After each corner has had time to report out, open the floor for questions or comments amongst responses.

Each statement will take at least ten minutes, so choose two from the list of statements below, or create your own. If you have more than an hour time frame for this workshop, feel free to increase the time for this segment and incorporate more statements.

Statements on the Intersection Between Class Mobility and Education:

- When I have collaborated with other peers, I have experienced times when others have made assumptions about my economic background.
- Experiences in community service often involve uncomfortable interactions that raise issues of income and class.
- Being in college has made me think negatively about my class and socio-economic status.

To close this session and transition into the next, read or modify the following script:
“This activity was meant to help us begin to understand our own experiences, reflections, and preconceptions about class mobility and the role that education can play. I hope you were able to engage in productive dialogue with both those who

agreed and those who disagreed with your perspectives. Now that we've established a bit more about our own thoughts on the intersection of class and education, we are now going to move onto some established scholarship on the matter."

Part 3) Article Analysis

Suggested time: 25 minutes

This segment of the workshop provides participants with an introduction to scholarship on college, education, and class mobility. The goal is for participants to interact with these texts and collaborate to learn more about the intersections of education and class. Each group will have a portion of an article to read and synthesize to present to the group. To help you as a facilitator, later in the guide you will find a few bullet points about each article to highlight to prompt deeper discussion.

Introduce the next segment: Article Analysis. Participants will be split into six groups. You can split them randomly, or ask them to get into groups. They will either read sections of Dr. Jean Anyon's *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*, or New York Times Correspondent, David Leonhardt's chapter in *Class Matters*, "The College Dropout Boom." Each group will have a 5-7 page reading.

Once they are assembled into their groups, pass out the appropriate reading to each group:

1. *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*: Working Class Schools (page 10-15)
2. *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*: Middle Class School (page 16-20)
3. *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*: Affluent Professional School (page 21-26)
4. *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*: Executive Elite School (page 27-33)
5. *The College Dropout Boom*: Part 1 (page 34-38)
6. *The College Dropout Boom*: Part 2 (page 39-44)

Note: The groups reading sections of *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum* all have the same first three pages, which provides context to the article. They then have their specific section listed afterwards. Group 4, assigned to the Executive Elite School section, has the concluding paragraphs included in their section.

Give the groups fifteen minutes to read their article (aloud, popcorn style, or independently - their choice) and discuss the key takeaways from their section. They should be ready to come back together after this time to share out insights and a key summary from their reading.

The following questions can be provided to help groups synthesize and share their insights:

1. What was the main argument of the reading?
2. What evidence was used to support those points?
3. What are your reactions to the article?

After each group shares out about their designated reading, allow time for questions or clarifications before moving into the final set of debrief questions.

Below you will find a short summary of each of the articles, so that you can add to any of the group's shared takeaways or prompt deeper discussion.

Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work by Dr. Jean Anyon

- The work, methodologies, and philosophies of education in schools are vastly different in the schools observed, based on the socioeconomic status of the communities in which they are located.
- In the schools studied, the work that students are tasked with, as well as reinforced behaviors by educators, promote an education that prepares students for the social class from which they already belong. Therefore, classroom practice aids in reproducing the current class system.

Working Class Schools:

Work follows established procedures and directions. Students are rewarded for not asking questions, memorization, and being able to blindly follow directions. There is little to no room for student decision-making or creativity.

Middle Class School:

The focus of student work is achieving the right answers, with small flexibility in the ways to find those answers. Creativity is not required for satisfactory grades. Education is a means to other good rewards, such as a good job or college.

Affluent Professional School:

Work in this school is encouraged to be creative, expressive, and demonstrative of individuality. There is an emphasis in peer-to-peer learning and application of knowledge. There is little focus on a “right” answer; the focus is instead on comprehension of concept and individual interpretation.

Executive Elite School:

Students are encouraged to use their own deductive reasoning and analytical skills to solve problems. There is little room for creative projects. The focus of student work is on concepts, logic, independence, leadership, and authority.

The College Dropout Boom by David Leonhardt

- Though there has been significant progress in increasing access to college, there has been less progress in support for low-income enrolled students.
- Non-graduates, otherwise known as college dropouts, comprises one of the largest and fastest growing groups of young adults in the U.S. Almost 1 in 3 of Americans in their 20s fall into this group.
- If students begin college and struggle, a significant factor in whether or not they stay in college is the community and social status from which they belong.
- One potential step toward addressing the college dropout crisis is making economic need a more significant factor in both admissions and retention.
- Admitting more low-income students could lower a college’s average SAT score and subsequent prestige or decrease the number of spots open for children of alumni, a large donor base. These are two reasons why colleges and universities find providing more economic opportunity disadvantageous.

Part 4) Debrief

Suggested time: 10 minutes

This final segment of the workshop is focused on encouraging participants to pull their thoughts together around class mobility and education. They will apply their knowledge to next steps regarding their college experience and engagement in the community.

Bring participants back together as a large group to discuss the following questions:

- What role does education and/or higher education play in class mobility?
- Does your class affect your college experience? If yes, how? If not, why?
- What ways have you seen class and education intersect in your service work?
- What class mobility is possible?
- Should increasing class mobility be a goal of our society?
- What other factors affect class mobility beyond education?

Thank everyone for their time and contribution to this session. For more information about class, encourage participants to check out *Class Matters*, a novel as well as interactive webpage, which can be found [here](#).

Credits:

This training was developed by Samantha Ha, Program Associate at the Bonner Foundation and 2016 Bonner alumna from Ursinus College.

Resources were drawn from:

- Dr. Jean Anyon's *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*
<http://www1.udel.edu/educ/whitson/897s05/files/hiddencurriculum.htm>
- New York Times Correspondent, David Leonhardt's chapter in *Class Matters*, "The College Dropout Boom."
<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/24/us/class/the-college-dropout-boom.html>
- How Class Works: An Interactive Graphic
http://www.nytimes.com/packages/html/national/20050515_CLASS_GRAPHIC/index_02.html
- Class Matters: Written by Correspondents of The New York Times
www.nytimes.com/pages/national/class/index.html

Followed by Handouts:

1. *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*: Working Class Schools (page 10-15)
2. *Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work*: Middle Class School (page 16-20)
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Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work:

Working Class Schools

It's no surprise that schools in wealthy communities are better than those in poor communities, or that they better prepare their students for desirable jobs. It may be shocking, however, to learn how vast the differences in schools are - not so much in resources as in teaching methods and philosophies of education. Jean Anyon observed five elementary schools over the course of a full school year and concluded that fifth-graders of different economic backgrounds are already being prepared to occupy particular rungs on the social ladder. In a sense, some whole schools are on the vocational education track, while others are geared to produce future doctors, lawyers, and business leaders. Anyon's main audience is professional educators, so you may find her style and vocabulary challenging, but, once you've read her descriptions of specific classroom activities, the more analytic parts of the essay should prove easier to understand. Anyon is chairperson of the Department of Education at Rutgers University, Newark; This essay first appeared in Journal of Education in 1980.

Scholars in political economy and the sociology of knowledge have recently argued that public schools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes. Bowles and Gintis¹ for example, have argued that students in different social-class backgrounds are rewarded for classroom behaviors that correspond to personality traits allegedly rewarded in the different occupational strata--the working classes for docility and obedience, the managerial classes for initiative and personal assertiveness. Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael W. Apple focusing on school knowledge, have argued that knowledge and skills leading to social power and regard (medical, legal, managerial) are made available to the advantaged social groups but are withheld from the working classes to whom a more "practical" curriculum is offered (manual skills, clerical knowledge). While there has been considerable argumentation of these points regarding education in England, France, and North America, there has been little or no attempt to investigate these ideas empirically in elementary or secondary schools and classrooms in this country.³

This article offers tentative empirical support (and qualification) of the above arguments by providing illustrative examples of differences in student *work* in classrooms in contrasting social class communities. The examples were gathered as part of an ethnographical⁴ study of curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices in five elementary schools. The article attempts a theoretical contribution as well and assesses student work in the light of a theoretical approach to social-class analysis.. . It will be suggested that there is a "hidden curriculum" in schoolwork that has profound implications for the theory - and consequence - of everyday activity in education....

The Sample of Schools

... The social-class designation of each of the five schools will be identified, and the income, occupation, and other relevant available social characteristics of the students and their parents will be described. The first three schools are in a medium-sized city district in northern New Jersey, and the other two are in a nearby New Jersey suburb.

The first two schools I will call *working class schools*. Most of the parents have blue-collar jobs. Less than a third of the fathers are skilled, while the majority are in unskilled or semiskilled jobs. During the period of the study (1978-1979), approximately 15 percent of the fathers were unemployed. The large majority (85 percent) of the families are white. The following occupations are typical: platform, storeroom, and stockroom workers; foundry-men, pipe welders, and boilermakers; semiskilled and unskilled assembly-line operatives; gas station attendants, auto mechanics, maintenance workers, and security guards. Less than 30 percent of the women work, some part-time and some full-time, on assembly lines, in storerooms and stockrooms, as waitresses, barmaids, or sales clerks. Of the fifth-grade parents, none of the wives of the skilled workers had jobs. Approximately 15 percent of the families in each school are at or below the federal "poverty" level;⁵ most of the rest of the family incomes are at or below \$12,000, except some of the skilled workers whose incomes are higher. The incomes of the majority of the families in these two schools (at or below \$12,000) are typical of 38.6 percent of the families in the United States.⁶

The third school is called the *middle-class school*, although because of 5 neighborhood residence patterns, the population is a mixture of several social classes. The parents' occupations can be divided into three groups: a small group of blue-collar "rich," who are skilled, well-paid workers such as printers, carpenters, plumbers, and construction workers. The second group is composed of parents in working-class and middle-class white-collar jobs: women in office jobs, technicians, supervisors in industry, and parents employed by the city (such as firemen, policemen, and several of the school's teachers). The third group is composed of occupations such as personnel directors in local firms, accountants, "middle management," and a few small capitalists (owners of shops in the area). The children of several local doctors attend this school. Most family incomes are between \$13,000 and \$25,000, with a few higher. This income range is typical of 38.9 percent of the families in the United States.⁷

The fourth school has a parent population that is at the upper income level of the upper middle class and is predominantly professional. This school will be called the *affluent professional school*. Typical jobs are: cardiologist, interior designer,

corporate lawyer or engineer, executive in advertising or television. There are some families who are not as affluent as the majority (the family of the superintendent of the district's schools, and the one or two families in which the fathers are skilled workers). In addition, a few of the families are more affluent than the majority and can be classified in the capitalist class (a partner in a prestigious Wall Street stock brokerage firm). Approximately 90 percent of the children in this school are white. Most family incomes are between \$40,000 and \$80,000. This income span represents approximately 7 percent of the families in the United States.⁸

In the fifth school the majority of the families belong to the capitalist class. This school will be called the *executive elite school* because most of the fathers are top executives (for example, presidents and vice-presidents) in major United States-based multinational corporations - for example, AT&T, RCA, Citibank, American Express, U.S. Steel. A sizable group of fathers are top executives in financial firms in Wall Street. There are also a number of fathers who list their occupations as "general counsel" to a particular corporation, and these corporations are also among the large multinationals. Many of the mothers do volunteer work in the Junior League, Junior Fortnightly, or other service groups; some are intricately involved in town politics; and some are themselves in well-paid occupations. There are no minority children in the school. Almost all the family incomes are over \$100,000 with some in the \$500,000 range. The incomes in this school represent less than 1 percent of the families in the United States.⁹

Since each of the five schools is only one instance of elementary education in a particular social class context, I will not generalize beyond the sample. However, the examples of schoolwork which follow will suggest characteristics of education in each social setting that appear to have theoretical and social significance and to be worth investigation in a larger number of schools.

The Working Class Schools

In the two working-class schools, work is following the steps of a procedure. The procedure is usually mechanical, involving rote behavior and very little decision making or choice. The teachers rarely explain why the work is being assigned, how it might connect to other assignments, or what the idea is that lies behind the procedure or gives it coherence and perhaps meaning or significance. Available textbooks are not always used, and the teachers often prepare their own dittos or put work examples on the board. Most of the rules regarding work are designations of what the children are to do; the rules are steps to follow. These steps are told to the children by the teachers and are often written on the board. The children are usually

told to copy the steps as notes. These notes are to be studied. Work is often evaluated not according to whether it is right or wrong but according to whether the children followed the right steps.

The following examples illustrate these points. In math, when two-digit division was introduced, the teacher in one school gave a four-minute lecture on what the terms are called (which number is the divisor, dividend, quotient, and remainder). The children were told to copy these names in their notebooks. Then the teacher told them the steps to follow to do the problems, saying, "This is how you do them." The teacher listed the steps on the board, and they appeared several days later as a chart hung in the middle of the front wall: "Divide, Multiply, Subtract, Bring Down." The children often did examples of two-digit division. When the teacher went over the examples with them, he told them what the procedure was for each problem, rarely asking them to conceptualize or explain it themselves: "Three into twenty-two is seven; do your subtraction and one is left over." During the week that two-digit division was introduced (or at any other time), the investigator did not observe any discussion of the idea of grouping involved in division, any use of manipulables, or any attempt to relate two-digit division to any other mathematical process. Nor was there any attempt to relate the steps to an actual or possible thought process of the children. The observer did not hear the terms *dividend*, *quotient*, and so on, used again. The math teacher in the other working-class school followed similar procedures regarding two-digit division and at one point her class seemed confused. She said, "You're confusing yourselves. You're tensing up. Remember, when you do this, it's the same steps over and over again--and that's the way division always is." Several weeks later, after a test, a group of her children "still didn't get it," and she made no attempt to explain the concept of dividing things into groups or to give them manipulables for their own investigation. Rather, she went over the steps with them again and told them that they "needed more practice."

In other areas of math, work is also carrying out often unexplained fragmented procedures. For example, one of the teachers led the children through a series of steps to make a 1-inch grid on their paper *without* telling them that they were making a 1-inch grid or that it would be used to study scale. She said, "Take your ruler. Put it across the top. Make a mark at every number. Then move your ruler down to the bottom. No, put it across the bottom. Now make a mark on top of every number. Now draw a line from..." At this point a girl said that she had a faster way to do it and the teacher said, "No, you don't; you don't even know what I'm making yet. Do it this way or it's wrong." After they had made the lines up and down and across, the teacher told them she wanted them to make a figure by connecting some dots and to measure that, using the scale of 1 inch equals 1 mile. Then they were to cut it out. She said, "Don't cut it until I check it."

In both working-class schools, work in language arts is mechanics of punctuation (commas, periods, question marks, exclamation points), capitalization, and the four kinds of sentences. One teacher explained to me, "Simple punctuation is all they'll ever use." Regarding punctuation, either a teacher or a ditto stated the rules for where, for example, to put commas. The investigator heard no classroom discussion of the aural context of punctuation (which, of course, is what gives each mark its meaning). Nor did the investigator hear any statement or inference that placing a punctuation mark could be a decision-making process, depending, for example, on one's intended meaning. Rather, the children were told to follow the rules. Language arts did not involve creative writing. There were several writing assignments throughout the year but in each instance the children were given a ditto, and they wrote answers to questions on the sheet. For example, they wrote their "autobiography" by answering such questions as "Where were you born?" "What is your favorite animal?" on a sheet entitled "All About Me."

In one of the working-class schools, the class had a science period several times a week. On the three occasions observed, the children were not called upon to set up experiments or to give explanations for facts or concepts. Rather, on each occasion the teacher told them in his own words what the book said. The children copied the teacher's sentences from the board. Each day that preceded the day they were to do a science experiment, the teacher told them to copy the directions from the book for the procedure they would carry out the next day and to study the list at home that night. The day after each experiment, the teacher went over what they had "found" (they did the experiments as a class, and each was actually a class demonstration led by the teacher). Then the teacher wrote what they "found" on the board, and the children copied that in their notebooks. Once or twice a year there are science projects. The project is chosen and assigned by the teacher from a box of 3-by-5-inch cards. On the card the teacher has written the question to be answered, the books to use, and how much to write. Explaining the cards to the observer, the teacher said, "It tells them exactly what to do, or they couldn't do it."

Social studies in the working-class schools is also largely mechanical, rote work that was given little explanation or connection to larger contexts. In one school, for example, although there was a book available, social studies work was to copy the teacher's notes from the board. Several times a week for a period of several months the children copied these notes. The fifth grades in the district were to study United States history. The teacher used a booklet she had purchased called "The Fabulous Fifty States." Each day she put information from the booklet in outline form on the board and the children copied it. The type of information did not vary: the name of the state, its abbreviation, state capital, nickname of the state, its main products, main business, and a "Fabulous Fact" ("Idaho grew twenty-seven billion potatoes in one

year. That's enough potatoes for each man, woman, and...") As the children finished copying the sentences, the teacher erased them and wrote more. Children would occasionally go to the front to pull down the wall map in order to locate the states they were copying, and the teacher did not dissuade them. But the observer never saw her refer to the map; nor did the observer ever hear her make other than perfunctory remarks concerning the information the children were copying. Occasionally the children colored in a ditto and cut it out to make a stand-up figure (representing, for example, a man roping a cow in the Southwest). These were referred to by the teacher as their social studies "projects."

Rote behavior was often called for in classroom work. When going over 15 math and language art skills sheets, for example, as the teacher asked for the answer to each problem, he fired the questions rapidly, staccato, and the scene reminded the observer of a sergeant drilling recruits: above all, the questions demanded that you stay at attention: "The next one? What do I put here? . . . Here? Give us the next." Or "How many commas in this sentence? Where do I put them . . . The next one?"

The four fifth grade teachers observed in the working-class schools attempted to control classroom time and space by making decisions without consulting the children and without explaining the basis for their decisions. The teacher's control thus often seemed capricious. Teachers, for instance, very often ignored the bells to switch classes - deciding among themselves to keep the children after the period was officially over to continue with the work or for disciplinary reasons or so they (the teachers) could stand in the hall and talk. There were no clocks in the rooms in either school, and the children often asked, "What period is this?" "When do we go to gym?" The children had no access to materials. These were handed out by teachers and closely guarded. Things in the room "belonged" to the teacher: "Bob, bring me my garbage can." The teachers continually gave the children orders. Only three times did the investigator hear a teacher in either working-class school preface a directive with an unsarcastic "please," or "let's" or "would you." Instead, the teachers said, "Shut up," "Shut your mouth," "Open your books," "Throw your gum away-if you want to rot your teeth, do it on your own time." Teachers made every effort to control the movement of the children, and often shouted, "Why are you out of your seat??!!" If the children got permission to leave the room, they had to take a written pass with the date and time....

Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work: Middle Class School

It's no surprise that schools in wealthy communities are better than those in poor communities, or that they better prepare their students for desirable jobs. It may be shocking, however, to learn how vast the differences in schools are - not so much in resources as in teaching methods and philosophies of education. Jean Anyon observed five elementary schools over the course of a full school year and concluded that fifth-graders of different economic backgrounds are already being prepared to occupy particular rungs on the social ladder. In a sense, some whole schools are on the vocational education track, while others are geared to produce future doctors, lawyers, and business leaders. Anyon's main audience is professional educators, so you may find her style and vocabulary challenging, but, once you've read her descriptions of specific classroom activities, the more analytic parts of the essay should prove easier to understand. Anyon is chairperson of the Department of Education at Rutgers University, Newark; This essay first appeared in Journal of Education in 1980.

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Middle-Class School

In the middle-class school, work is getting the right answer. If one accumulates enough right answers, one gets a good grade. One must follow the directions in order to get the right answers, but the directions often call for some figuring, some choice, some decision making. For example, the children must often figure out by themselves what the directions ask them to do and how to get the answer: what do you do first, second, and perhaps third? Answers are usually found in books or by listening to the teacher. Answers are usually words, sentences, numbers, or facts and dates; one writes them on paper, and one should be neat. Answers must be given in the right order, and one cannot make them up.

The following activities are illustrative. Math involves some choice: one may do two-digit division the long way or the short way, and there are some math problems that can be done "in your head." When the teacher explains how to do two-digit division, there is recognition that a cognitive process is involved; she gives you several ways and says, "I want to make sure you understand what you're doing-so you get it right"; and, when they go over the homework, she asks the *children* to tell how they did the problem and what answer they got.

In social studies the daily work is to read the assigned pages in the textbook and to answer the teacher's questions. The questions are almost always designed to check on whether the students have read the assignment and understood it: who did so-and-so; what happened after that; when did it happen, where, and sometimes, why did it happen? The answers are in the book and in one's understanding of the book; the teacher's hints when one doesn't know the answers are to "read it again" or to look at the picture or at the rest of the paragraph. One is to search for the answer in the "context," in what is given.

Language arts is "simple grammar, what they need for everyday life." The language arts teacher says, "They should learn to speak properly, to write business letters and thank-you letters, and to understand what nouns and verbs and simple subjects are." Here, as well, actual work is to choose the right answers, to understand what is given. The teacher often says, "Please read the next sentence and then I'll question you about it." One teacher said in some exasperation to a boy who was fooling around in class, "If you don't know the answers to the questions I ask, then you can't stay in this *class!* [pause] You *never* know the answers to the questions I ask, and it's not fair to me-and certainly not to you!"

Most lessons are based on the textbook. This does not involve a critical perspective on what is given there. For example, a critical perspective in social studies is perceived as dangerous by these teachers because it may lead to controversial topics; the parents might complain. The children, however, are often curious especially in social studies. Their questions are tolerated and usually answered perfunctorily. But after a few minutes the teacher will say, "All right, we're not going any farther. Please open your social studies workbook." While the teachers spend a lot of time explaining and expanding on what the textbooks say, there is little attempt to analyze how or why things happen, or to give thought to how pieces of a culture, or, say, a system of numbers or elements of a language fit together or can be analyzed. What has happened in the past and what exists now may not be equitable or fair, but (shrug) that is the way things are and one does not confront such matters in school. For example, in social studies after a child is called on to read a passage about the pilgrims, the teacher summarizes the paragraph and then says, "So you can

see how strict they were about everything." A child asks, "Why?" "Well, because they felt that if you weren't busy you'd get into trouble." Another child asks, "Is it true that they burned women at the stake?" The teacher says, "Yes, if a woman did anything strange, they hanged them. [sic] What would a woman do, do you think, to make them burn them? [sic] See if you can come up with better answers than my other [social studies] class." Several children offer suggestions, to which the teacher nods but does not comment. Then she says, "Okay, good," and calls on the next child to read.

Work tasks do not usually request creativity. Serious attention is rarely given in school work on *how* the children develop or express their own feelings and ideas, either linguistically or in graphic form. On the occasions when creativity or self-expression is requested, it is peripheral to the main activity or it is "enriched" or "for fun." During a lesson on what similes are, for example, the teacher explains what they are, puts several on the board, gives some other examples herself, and then asks the children if they can "make some up." She calls on three children who give similes, two of which are actually in the book they have open before them. The teacher does not comment on this and then asks several others to choose similes from the list of phrases in the book. Several do so correctly, and she says, "Oh good! You're picking them out! See how good we are?" Their homework is to pick out the rest of the similes from the list.

Creativity is not often requested in social studies and science projects, either. Social studies projects, for example, are given with directions to "find information on your topic" and write it up. The children are not supposed to copy but to "put it in your own words." Although a number of the projects subsequently went beyond the teacher's direction to find information and had quite expressive covers and inside illustrations, the teacher's evaluative comments had to do with the amount of information, whether they had "copied," and if their work was neat.

The style of control of the three fifth-grade teachers observed in this school varied from somewhat easygoing to strict, but in contrast to the working-class schools, the teachers' decisions were usually based on external rules and regulations--for example, on criteria that were known or available to the children. Thus, the teachers always honor the bells for changing classes, and they usually evaluate children's work by what is in the textbooks and answer booklets.

There is little excitement in schoolwork for the children, and the assignments are perceived as having little to do with their interests and feelings. As one child said, what you do is "store facts up in your head like cold storage - until you need it later for a test or your job." Thus, doing well is important because there are thought to be *other* likely rewards: a good job or college.¹⁰

Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work:

Affluent Professional School

It's no surprise that schools in wealthy communities are better than those in poor communities, or that they better prepare their students for desirable jobs. It may be shocking, however, to learn how vast the differences in schools are - not so much in resources as in teaching methods and philosophies of education. Jean Anyon observed five elementary schools over the course of a full school year and concluded that fifth-graders of different economic backgrounds are already being prepared to occupy particular rungs on the social ladder. In a sense, some whole schools are on the vocational education track, while others are geared to produce future doctors, lawyers, and business leaders. Anyon's main audience is professional educators, so you may find her style and vocabulary challenging, but, once you've read her descriptions of specific classroom activities, the more analytic parts of the essay should prove easier to understand. Anyon is chairperson of the Department of Education at Rutgers University, Newark; This essay first appeared in Journal of Education in 1980.

Scholars in political economy and the sociology of knowledge have recently argued that public schools in complex industrial societies like our own make available different types of educational experience and curriculum knowledge to students in different social classes. Bowles and Gintis¹ for example, have argued that students in different social-class backgrounds are rewarded for classroom behaviors that correspond to personality traits allegedly rewarded in the different occupational strata--the working classes for docility and obedience, the managerial classes for initiative and personal assertiveness. Basil Bernstein, Pierre Bourdieu, and Michael W. Apple focusing on school knowledge, have argued that knowledge and skills leading to social power and regard (medical, legal, managerial) are made available to the advantaged social groups but are withheld from the working classes to whom a more "practical" curriculum is offered (manual skills, clerical knowledge). While there has been considerable argumentation of these points regarding education in England, France, and North America, there has been little or no attempt to investigate these ideas empirically in elementary or secondary schools and classrooms in this country.³

This article offers tentative empirical support (and qualification) of the above arguments by providing illustrative examples of differences in student *work* in classrooms in contrasting social class communities. The examples were gathered as part of an ethnographical⁴ study of curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices in five elementary schools. The article attempts a theoretical contribution as well and assesses student work in the light of a theoretical approach to social-class analysis.. . It will be suggested that there is a "hidden curriculum" in schoolwork that has profound implications for the theory - and consequence - of everyday activity in education....

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Affluent Professional School

In the affluent professional school, work is creative activity carried out independently. The students are continually asked to express and apply ideas and concepts. Work involves individual thought and expressiveness, expansion and illustration of ideas, and choice of appropriate method and material. (The class is not considered an open classroom, and the principal explained that because of the large number of discipline problems in the fifth grade this year they did not departmentalize. The teacher who agreed to take part in the study said she is "more structured this year than she usually is.") The products of work in this class are often written stories, editorials and essays, or representations of ideas in mural, graph, or craft form. The products of work should not be like anybody else's and should show individuality. They should exhibit good

design, and (this is important) they must also fit empirical reality. The relatively few rules to be followed regarding work are usually criteria for, or limits on, individual activity. One's product is usually evaluated for the quality of its expression and for the appropriateness of its conception to the task. In many cases, one's own satisfaction with the product is an important criterion for its evaluation. When right answers are called for, as in commercial materials like SRA (Science Research Associates) and math, it is important that the children decide on an answer as a result of thinking about the idea involved in what they're being asked to do. Teacher's hints are to "think about it some more."

The following activities are illustrative. The class takes home a sheet requesting each child's parents to fill in the number of cars they have, the number of television sets, refrigerators, games, or rooms in the house, and so on. Each child is to figure the average number of a type of possession owned by the fifth grade. Each child must compile the "data" from all the sheets. A calculator is available in the classroom to do the mechanics of finding the average. Some children decide to send sheets to the fourth-grade families for comparison. Their work should be "verified" by a classmate before it is handed in.

Each child and his or her family has made a geoboard. The teacher asks the class to get their geoboards from the side cabinet, to take a handful of rubber bands, and then to listen to what she would like them to do. She says, "I would like you to design a figure and then find the perimeter and area. When you have it, check with your neighbor. After you've done that, please transfer it to graph paper and tomorrow I'll ask you to make up a question about it for someone. When you hand it in, please let me know whose it is and who verified it. Then I have something else for you to do that's really fun. [pause] Find the average number of chocolate chips in three cookies. I'll give you three cookies, and you'll have to eat your way through, I'm afraid!" Then she goes around the room and gives help, suggestions, praise, and admonitions that they are getting noisy. They work sitting, or standing up at their desks, at benches in the back, or on the floor. A child hands the teacher his paper and she comments, "I'm not accepting this paper. Do a better design." To another child she says, "That's fantastic! But you'll never find the area. Why don't you draw a figure inside [the big one] and subtract to get the area?"

The school district requires the fifth grade to study ancient civilization (in particular, Egypt, Athens, and Sumer). In this classroom, the emphasis is on illustrating and re-creating the culture of the people of ancient times. The following are typical activities: the children made an 8mm film on Egypt, which one of the parents edited. A girl in the class wrote the script, and the class acted it out. They put the sound on themselves. They read stories of those days. They wrote essays and stories depicting

the lives of the people and the societal and occupational divisions. They chose from a list of projects, all of which involved graphical presentations of ideas: for example. "Make a mural depicting the division of labor in Egyptian society."

Each wrote and exchanged a letter in hieroglyphics with a fifth grader in another class, and they also exchanged stories they wrote in cuneiform. They made a scroll and singed the edges so it looked authentic. They each chose an occupation and made an Egyptian plaque representing that occupation, simulating the appropriate Egyptian design. They carved their design on a cylinder of wax, pressed the wax into clay, and then baked the clay. Although one girl did not choose an occupation but carved instead a series of gods and slaves, the teacher said, "That's all right, Amber, it's beautiful." As they were working the teacher said, "Don't cut into your clay until you're satisfied with your design."

Social studies also involves almost daily presentation by the children of some event from the news. The teacher's questions ask the children to expand what they say, to give more details, and to be more specific. Occasionally she adds some remarks to help them see connections between events.

The emphasis on expressing and illustrating ideas in social studies is accompanied in language arts by an emphasis on creative writing. Each child wrote a rebus story for a first grader whom they had interviewed to see what kind of story the child liked best. They wrote editorials on pending decisions by the school board and radio plays, some of which were read over the school intercom from the office and one of which was performed in the auditorium. There is no language arts textbook because, the teacher said, "The principal wants us to be creative." There is not much grammar, but there is punctuation. One morning when the observer arrived, the class was doing a punctuation ditto. The teacher later apologized for using the ditto. "It's just for review," she said. "I don't teach punctuation that way. We use their language." The ditto had three unambiguous rules for where to put commas in a sentence. As the teacher was going around to help the children with the ditto, she repeated several times, "where you put commas depends on how you say the sentence; it depends on the situation and what you want to say. Several weeks later the observer saw another punctuation activity. The teacher had printed a five-paragraph story on an oak tag and then cut it into phrases. She read the whole story to the class from the book, then passed out the phrases. The group had to decide how the phrases could best be put together again. (They arranged the phrases on the floor.) The point was not to replicate the story, although that was not irrelevant, but to "decide what you think the best way is." Punctuation marks on cardboard pieces were then handed out, and the children discussed and then decided what mark was best at each place they thought one was needed. At the end of each paragraph the teacher asked, "Are you satisfied

with the way the paragraphs are now? Read it to yourself and see how it sounds." Then she read the original story again, and they compared the two.

Describing her goals in science to the investigator, the teacher said, "We use ESS (Elementary Science Study). It's very good because it gives a hands-on experience--so they can make sense out of it. It doesn't matter whether it [what they find] is right or wrong. I bring them together and there's value in discussing their ideas."

The products of work in this class are often highly valued by the children and the teacher. In fact, this was the only school in which the investigator was not allowed to take original pieces of the children's work for her files. If the work was small enough, however, and was on paper, the investigator could duplicate it on the copying machine in the office.

The teacher's attempt to control the class involves constant negotiation. She does not give direct orders unless she is angry because the children have been too noisy. Normally, she tries to get them to foresee the consequences of their actions and to decide accordingly. For example, lining them up to go see a play written by the sixth graders, she says, "I presume you're lined up by someone with whom you want to sit. I hope you're lined up by someone you won't get in trouble with."...

One of the few rules governing the children's movement is that no more than three children may be out of the room at once. There is a school rule that anyone can go to the library at any time to get a book. In the fifth grade I observed, they sign their name on the chalkboard and leave. There are no passes. Finally, the children have a fair amount of officially sanctioned say over what happens in the class. For example, they often negotiate what work is to be done. If the teacher wants to move on to the next subject, but the children say they are not ready, they want to work on their present projects some *more*, she very often lets them do it.

Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work: Executive Elite School

It's no surprise that schools in wealthy communities are better than those in poor communities, or that they better prepare their students for desirable jobs. It may be shocking, however, to learn how vast the differences in schools are - not so much in resources as in teaching methods and philosophies of education. Jean Anyon observed five elementary schools over the course of a full school year and concluded that fifth-graders of different economic backgrounds are already being prepared to occupy particular rungs on the social ladder. In a sense, some whole schools are on the vocational education track, while others are geared to produce future doctors, lawyers, and business leaders. Anyon's main audience is professional educators, so you may find her style and vocabulary challenging, but, once you've read her descriptions of specific classroom activities, the more analytic parts of the essay should prove easier to understand. Anyon is chairperson of the Department of Education at Rutgers University, Newark; This essay first appeared in Journal of Education in 1980.

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Executive Elite School

In the executive elite school, work is developing one's analytical intellectual powers. Children are continually asked to reason through a problem, to produce intellectual products that are both logically sound and of top academic quality. A primary goal of thought is to conceptualize rules by which elements may fit together in systems and then to apply these rules in solving a problem. Schoolwork helps one to achieve, to excel, to prepare for life.

The following are illustrative. The math teacher teaches area and perimeter by having the children derive formulas for each. First she helps them, through discussion at the board, to arrive at $A = W \times L$ as a formula (not *the* formula) for area. After discussing

several, she says, "Can anyone make up a formula for perimeter? Can you figure that out yourselves? [pause] Knowing what we know, can we think of a formula?" She works out three children's suggestions at the board, saying to two, "Yes, that's a good one," and then asks the class if they can think of any more. No one volunteers. To prod them, she says, "If you use rules and good reasoning, you get many ways. Chris, can you think up a formula?"

She discusses two-digit division with the children as a decision-making process. Presenting a new type of problem to them, she asks, "What's the *first* decision you'd make if presented with this kind of example? What is the first thing you'd *think*? Craig?" Craig says, "To find my first partial quotient." She responds, "Yes, that would be your first decision. How would you do that?" Craig explains, and then the teacher says, "OK, we'll see how that works for you." The class tries his way. Subsequently, she comments on the merits and shortcomings of several other children's decisions. Later, she tells the investigator that her goals in math are to develop their reasoning and mathematical thinking and that, unfortunately, "there's no time for manipulables."

While right answers are important in math, they are not "given" by the book or by the teacher but may be challenged by the children. Going over some problems in late September the teacher says, "Raise your hand if you do not agree." A child says, "I don't agree with sixty-four." The teacher responds, "OK, there's a question about sixty-four. [to class] Please check it. Owen, they're disagreeing with you. Kristen, they're checking yours." The teacher emphasized this repeatedly during September and October with statements like "Don't be afraid to say you disagree. In the last [math] class, somebody disagreed, and they were right. Before you disagree, check yours, and if you still think we're wrong, then we'll check it out." By Thanksgiving, the children did not often speak in terms of right and wrong math problems but of whether they agreed with the answer that had been given.

There are complicated math mimeos with many word problems. Whenever they go over the examples, they discuss how each child has set up the problem. The children must explain it precisely. On one occasion the teacher said, "I'm more--just as interested in *how* you set up the problem as in what answer you find. If you set up a problem in a good way, the answer is *easy* to find.

Social studies work is most often reading and discussion of concepts and independent research. There are only occasional artistic, expressive, or illustrative projects. Ancient Athens and Sumer are, rather, societies to analyze. The following questions are typical of those that guide the children's independent research. "What mistakes did Pericles make after the war?" "What mistakes did the citizens of Athens

make?" "What are the elements of a civilization?" "How did Greece build an economic empire?" "Compare the way Athens chose its leaders with the way we choose ours." Occasionally the children are asked to make up sample questions for their social studies tests. On an occasion when the investigator was present, the social studies teacher rejected a child's question by saying, "That's just fact. If I asked you that question on a test, you'd complain it was just memory! Good questions ask for concepts."

In social studies--but also in reading, science, and health--the teachers initiate classroom discussions of current social issues and problems. These discussions occurred on every one of the investigator's visits, and a teacher told me, "These children's opinions are important - it's important that they learn to reason things through." The classroom discussions always struck the observer as quite realistic and analytical, dealing with concrete social issues like the following: "Why do workers strike?" "Is that right or wrong?" "Why do we have inflation, and what can be done to stop it?" "Why do companies put chemicals in food when the natural ingredients are available?" and so on. Usually the children did not have to be prodded to give their opinions. In fact, their statements and the interchanges between them struck the observer as quite sophisticated conceptually and verbally, and well-informed. Occasionally the teachers would prod with statements such as, "Even if you don't know [the answers], if you think logically about it, you can figure it out." And "I'm asking you [these] questions to help you think this through."

Language arts emphasizes language as a complex system, one that should be mastered. The children are asked to diagram sentences of complex grammatical construction, to memorize irregular verb conjugations (he lay, he has lain, and so on ...), and to use the proper participles, conjunctions, and interjections in their speech. The teacher (the same one who teaches social studies) told them, "It is not enough to get these right on tests; you must use what you learn [in grammar classes] in your written and oral work. I will grade you on that."

Most writing assignments are either research reports and essays for social studies or experiment analyses and write-ups for science. There is only an occasional story or other "creative writing" assignment. On the occasion observed by the investigator (the writing of a Halloween story), the points the teacher stressed in preparing the children to write involved the structural aspects of a story rather than the expression of feelings or other ideas. The teacher showed them a filmstrip, "The Seven Parts of a Story," and lectured them on plot development, mood setting, character development, consistency, and the use of a logical or appropriate ending. The stories they subsequently wrote were, in fact, well-structured, but many were also personal and expressive. The teacher's evaluative comments, however, did not refer to the

expressiveness or artistry but were all directed toward whether they had "developed" the story well.

Language arts work also involved a large amount of practice in presentation of the self and in managing situations where the child was expected to be in charge. For example, there was a series of assignments in which each child had to be a "student teacher." The child had to plan a lesson in grammar, outlining, punctuation, or other language arts topic and explain the concept to the class. Each child was to prepare a worksheet or game and a homework assignment as well. After each presentation, the teacher and other children gave a critical appraisal of the "student teacher's" performance. Their criteria were: whether the student spoke clearly, whether the lesson was interesting, whether the student made any mistakes, and whether he or she kept control of the class. On an occasion when a child did not maintain control, the teacher said, "When you're up there, you have authority and you have to use it. I'll back you up."

The executive elite school is the only school where bells do not demarcate the periods of time. The two fifth-grade teachers were very strict about changing classes on schedule, however, as specific plans for each session had been made. The teachers attempted to keep tight control over the children during lessons, and the children were sometimes flippant, boisterous, and occasionally rude. However, the children may be brought into line by reminding them that "It is up to you." "You must control yourself," "you are responsible for your work," you must "set your own priorities." One teacher told a child, "You are the only driver of your car-and only you can regulate your speed." A new teacher complained to the observer that she had thought "these children" would have more control.

While strict attention to the lesson at hand is required, the teachers make relatively little attempt to regulate the movement of the children at other times. For example, except for the kindergartners the children in this school do not have to wait for the bell to ring in the morning; they may go to their classroom when they arrive at school. Fifth graders often came early to read, to finish work, or to catch up. After the first two months of school, the fifth-grade teachers did not line the children up to change classes or to go to gym, and so on, but, when the children were ready and quiet, they were told they could go--sometimes without the teachers.

In the classroom, the children could get materials when they needed them and took what they needed from closets and from the teacher's desk. They were in charge of the office at lunchtime. During class they did not have to sign out or ask permission to leave the room; they just got up and left. Because of the pressure to get work done, however, they did not leave the room very often. The teachers were very polite to the

children, and the investigator heard no sarcasm, no nasty remarks, and few direct orders. The teachers never called the children "honey" or "dear" but always called them by name. The teachers were expected to be available before school, after school, and for part of their lunchtime to provide extra help if needed.

The foregoing analysis of differences in schoolwork in contrasting social class contexts suggests the following conclusion: the "hidden curriculum" of schoolwork is tacit preparation for relating to the process of production in a particular way. Differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills in each social setting and thus contribute to the development in the children of certain potential relationships to physical and symbolic capital,¹¹ to authority, and to the process of work. School experience, in the sample of schools discussed here, differed qualitatively by social class. These differences may not only contribute to the development in the children in each social class of certain types of economically significant relationships and not others but would thereby help to reproduce this system of relations in society. In the contribution to the reproduction of unequal social relations lies a theoretical meaning and social consequence of classroom practice.

The identification of different emphases in classrooms in a sample of contrasting social class contexts implies that further research should be conducted in a large number of schools to investigate the types of work tasks and interactions in each to see if they differ in the ways discussed here and to see if similar potential relationships are uncovered. Such research could have as a product the further elucidation of complex but not readily apparent connections between everyday activity in schools and classrooms and the unequal structure of economic relationships in which we work and live.

The College Dropout Boom:

Part 1

CHILHOWIE, Va. - One of the biggest decisions Andy Blevins has ever made, and one of the few he now regrets, never seemed like much of a decision at all. It just felt like the natural thing to do.

In the summer of 1995, he was moving boxes of soup cans, paper towels and dog food across the floor of a supermarket warehouse, one of the biggest buildings here in southwest Virginia. The heat was brutal. The job had sounded impossible when he arrived fresh off his first year of college, looking to make some summer money, still a skinny teenager with sandy blond hair and a narrow, freckled face.

But hard work done well was something he understood, even if he was the first college boy in his family. Soon he was making bonuses on top of his \$6.75 an hour, more money than either of his parents made. His girlfriend was around, and so were his hometown buddies. Andy acted more outgoing with them, more relaxed. People in Chilhowie noticed that.

It was just about the perfect summer. So the thought crossed his mind: maybe it did not have to end. Maybe he would take a break from college and keep working. He had been getting C's and D's, and college never felt like home, anyway.

"I enjoyed working hard, getting the job done, getting a paycheck," Mr. Blevins recalled. "I just knew I didn't want to quit."

So he quit college instead, and with that, Andy Blevins joined one of the largest and fastest-growing groups of young adults in America. He became a college dropout, though nongraduate may be the more precise term.

Many people like him plan to return to get their degrees, even if few actually do. Almost one in three Americans in their mid-20's now fall into this group, up from one in five in the late 1960's, when the Census Bureau began keeping such data. Most come from poor and working-class families.

The phenomenon has been largely overlooked in the glare of positive news about the country's gains in education. Going to college has become the norm throughout most of the United States, even in many places where college was once considered an exotic destination -- places like Chilhowie (pronounced chill-HOW-ee), an Appalachian hamlet with a simple brick downtown. At elite universities, classrooms are filled with women, blacks, Jews and Latinos, groups largely excluded two generations ago. The American system of higher learning seems to have become a great equalizer.

In fact, though, colleges have come to reinforce many of the advantages of birth. On campuses that enroll poorer students, graduation rates are often low. And at institutions where nearly everyone graduates -- small colleges like Colgate, major state institutions like the University of Colorado and elite private universities like Stanford -- more students today come from the top of the nation's income ladder than they did two decades ago.

Only 41 percent of low-income students entering a four-year college managed to graduate within five years, the Department of Education found in a study last year, but 66 percent of high-income students did. That gap had grown over recent years. "We need to recognize that the most serious domestic problem in the United States today is the widening gap between the children of the rich and the children of the poor," Lawrence H. Summers, the president of Harvard, said last year when announcing that Harvard would give full scholarships to all its lowest-income students. "And education is the most powerful weapon we have to address that problem."

There is certainly much to celebrate about higher education today. Many more students from all classes are getting four-year degrees and reaping their benefits. But those broad gains mask the fact that poor and working-class students have nevertheless been falling behind; for them, not having a degree remains the norm.

That loss of ground is all the more significant because a college education matters much more now than it once did. A bachelor's degree, not a year or two of courses, tends to determine a person's place in today's globalized, computerized economy. College graduates have received steady pay increases over the past two decades, while the pay of everyone else has risen little more than the rate of inflation.

As a result, despite one of the great education explosions in modern history, economic mobility -- moving from one income group to another over the course of a lifetime -- has stopped rising, researchers say. Some recent studies suggest that it has declined over the last generation.

Put another way, children seem to be following the paths of their parents more than they once did. Grades and test scores, rather than privilege, determine success today, but that success is largely being passed down from one generation to the next. A nation that believes that everyone should have a fair shake finds itself with a kind of inherited meritocracy.

In this system, the students at the best colleges may be diverse -- male and female and of various colors, religions and hometowns -- but they tend to share an upper-middle-class upbringing. An old joke that Harvard's idea of diversity is putting a rich kid from California in the same room as a rich kid from New York is truer today than

ever; Harvard has more students from California than it did in years past and just as big a share of upper-income students.

Students like these remain in college because they can hardly imagine doing otherwise. Their parents, understanding the importance of a bachelor's degree, spent hours reading to them, researching school districts and making it clear to them that they simply must graduate from college.

Andy Blevins says that he too knows the importance of a degree, but that he did not while growing up, and not even in his year at Radford University, 66 miles up the Interstate from Chilhowie. Ten years after trading college for the warehouse, Mr. Blevins, 29, spends his days at the same supermarket company. He has worked his way up to produce buyer, earning \$35,000 a year with health benefits and a 401(k) plan. He is on a path typical for someone who attended college without getting a four-year degree. Men in their early 40's in this category made an average of \$42,000 in 2000. Those with a four-year degree made \$65,000.

Still boyish-looking but no longer rail thin, Mr. Blevins says he has many reasons to be happy. He lives with his wife, Karla, and their year-old son, Lucas, in a small blue-and-yellow house at the end of a cul-de-sac in the middle of a stunningly picturesque Appalachian valley. He plays golf with some of the same friends who made him want to stay around Chilhowie.

But he does think about what might have been, about what he could be doing if he had the degree. As it is, he always feels as if he is on thin ice. Were he to lose his job, he says, everything could slip away with it. What kind of job could a guy without a college degree get? One night, while talking to his wife about his life, he used the word "trapped."

"Looking back, I wish I had gotten that degree," Mr. Blevins said in his soft-spoken lilt. "Four years seemed like a thousand years then. But I wish I would have just put in my four years."

The Barriers

Why so many low-income students fall from the college ranks is a question without a simple answer. Many high schools do a poor job of preparing teenagers for college. Many of the colleges where lower-income students tend to enroll have limited resources and offer a narrow range of majors, leaving some students disenchanted and unwilling to continue.

Then there is the cost. Tuition bills scare some students from even applying and leave others with years of debt. To Mr. Blevins, like many other students of limited means,

every week of going to classes seemed like another week of losing money -- money that might have been made at a job.

"The system makes a false promise to students," said John T. Casteen III, the president of the University of Virginia, himself the son of a Virginia shipyard worker.

Colleges, Mr. Casteen said, present themselves as meritocracies in which academic ability and hard work are always rewarded. In fact, he said, many working-class students face obstacles they cannot overcome on their own.

For much of his 15 years as Virginia's president, Mr. Casteen has focused on raising money and expanding the university, the most prestigious in the state. In the meantime, students with backgrounds like his have become ever scarcer on campus. The university's genteel nickname, the Cavaliers, and its aristocratic sword-crossed coat of arms seem appropriate today. No flagship state university has a smaller proportion of low-income students than Virginia. Just 8 percent of undergraduates last year came from families in the bottom half of the income distribution, down from 11 percent a decade ago.

That change sneaked up on him, Mr. Casteen said, and he has spent a good part of the last year trying to prevent it from becoming part of his legacy. Starting with next fall's freshman class, the university will charge no tuition and require no loans for students whose parents make less than twice the poverty level, or about \$37,700 a year for a family of four. The university has also increased financial aid to middle-income students.

To Mr. Casteen, these are steps to remove what he describes as "artificial barriers" to a college education placed in the way of otherwise deserving students. Doing so "is a fundamental obligation of a free culture," he said.

But the deterrents to a degree can also be homegrown. Many low-income teenagers know few people who have made it through college. A majority of the nongraduates are young men, and some come from towns where the factory work ethic, to get working as soon as possible, remains strong, even if the factories themselves are vanishing. Whatever the reasons, college just does not feel normal.

"You get there and you start to struggle," said Leanna Blevins, Andy's older sister, who did get a bachelor's degree and then went on to earn a Ph.D at Virginia studying the college experiences of poor students. "And at home your parents are trying to be supportive and say, 'Well, if you're not happy, if it's not right for you, come back home. It's O.K.' And they think they're doing the right thing. But they don't know that maybe what the student needs is to hear them say, 'Stick it out just one semester. You can do it. Just stay there. Come home on the weekend, but stick it out.'"

Today, Ms. Blevins, petite and high-energy, is helping to start a new college a few hours' drive from Chilhowie for low-income students. Her brother said he had daydreamed about attending it and had talked to her about how he might return to college.

For her part, Ms. Blevins says, she has daydreamed about having a life that would seem as natural as her brother's, a life in which she would not feel like an outsider in her hometown. Once, when a high-school teacher asked students to list their goals for the next decade, Ms. Blevins wrote, "having a college degree" and "not being married."

"I think my family probably thinks I'm liberal," Ms. Blevins, who is now married, said with a laugh, "that I've just been educated too much and I'm gettin' above my raisin'."

Her brother said that he just wanted more control over his life, not a new one. At a time when many people complain of scattered lives, Mr. Blevins can stand in one spot -- his church parking lot, next to a graveyard -- and take in much of his world. "That's my parents' house," he said one day, pointing to a sliver of roof visible over a hill. "That's my uncle's trailer. My grandfather is buried here. I'll probably be buried here."

The College Dropout Boom:

Part 2

Taking Class Into Account

Opening up colleges to new kinds of students has generally meant one thing over the last generation: affirmative action. Intended to right the wrongs of years of exclusion, the programs have swelled the number of women, blacks and Latinos on campuses. But affirmative action was never supposed to address broad economic inequities, just the ones that stem from specific kinds of discrimination.

That is now beginning to change. Like Virginia, a handful of other colleges are not only increasing financial aid but also promising to give weight to economic class in granting admissions. They say they want to make an effort to admit more low-income students, just as they now do for minorities and children of alumni.

"The great colleges and universities were designed to provide for mobility, to seek out talent," said Anthony W. Marx, president of Amherst College. "If we are blind to the educational disadvantages associated with need, we will simply replicate these disadvantages while appearing to make decisions based on merit."

With several populous states having already banned race-based preferences and the United States Supreme Court suggesting that it may outlaw such programs in a couple of decades, the future of affirmative action may well revolve around economics. Polls consistently show that programs based on class backgrounds have wider support than those based on race.

The explosion in the number of nongraduates has also begun to get the attention of policy makers. This year, New York became one of a small group of states to tie college financing more closely to graduation rates, rewarding colleges more for moving students along than for simply admitting them. Nowhere is the stratification of education more vivid than here in Virginia, where Thomas Jefferson once tried, and failed, to set up the nation's first public high schools. At a modest high school in the Tidewater city of Portsmouth, not far from Mr. Casteen's boyhood home, a guidance office wall filled with college pennants does not include one from rarefied Virginia. The colleges whose pennants are up -- Old Dominion University and others that seem in the realm of the possible -- have far lower graduation rates.

Across the country, the upper middle class so dominates elite universities that high-income students, on average, actually get slightly more financial aid from colleges than low-income students do. These elite colleges are so expensive that even many high-income students receive large grants. In the early 1990's, by contrast, poorer students got 50 percent more aid on average than the wealthier ones, according to the College Board, the organization that runs the SAT entrance exams.

At the other end of the spectrum are community colleges, the two-year institutions that are intended to be feeders for four-year colleges. In nearly every one are tales of academic success against tremendous odds: a battered wife or a combat veteran or a laid-off worker on the way to a better life. But over all, community colleges tend to be places where dreams are put on hold.

Most people who enroll say they plan to get a four-year degree eventually; few actually do. Full-time jobs, commutes and children or parents who need care often get in the way. One recent national survey found that about 75 percent of students enrolling in community colleges said they hoped to transfer to a four-year institution. But only 17 percent of those who had entered in the mid-1990's made the switch within five years, according to a separate study. The rest were out working or still studying toward the two-year degree.

"We here in Virginia do a good job of getting them in," said Glenn Dubois, chancellor of the Virginia Community College System and himself a community college graduate. "We have to get better in getting them out."

'I Wear a Tie Every Day'

College degree or not, Mr. Blevins has the kind of life that many Americans say they aspire to. He fills it with family, friends, church and a five-handicap golf game. He does not sit in traffic commuting to an office park. He does not talk wistfully of a relocated brother or best friend he sees only twice a year. He does not worry about who will care for his son while he works and his wife attends community college to become a physical therapist. His grandparents down the street watch Lucas, just as they took care of Andy and his two sisters when they were children. When Mr. Blevins comes home from work, it is his turn to play with Lucas, tossing him into the air and rolling around on the floor with him and a stuffed elephant.

Mr. Blevins also sings in a quartet called the Gospel Gentlemen. One member is his brother-in-law; another lives on Mr. Blevins's street. In the long white van the group owns, they wend their way along mountain roads on their way to singing dates at local church functions, sometimes harmonizing, sometimes ribbing one another or talking about where to buy golf equipment.

Inside the churches, the other singers often talk to the audience between songs, about God or a grandmother or what a song means to them. Mr. Blevins rarely does, but his shyness fades once he is back in the van with his friends.

At the warehouse, he is usually the first to arrive, around 6:30 in the morning. The grandson of a coal miner, he takes pride, he says, in having moved up to become a supermarket buyer. He decides which bananas, grapes, onions and potatoes the

company will sell and makes sure that there are always enough. Most people with his job have graduated from college.

"I'm pretty fortunate to not have a degree but have a job where I wear a tie every day," he said.

He worries about how long it will last, though, mindful of what happened to his father, Dwight, a decade ago. A high school graduate, Dwight Blevins was laid off from his own warehouse job and ended up with another one that paid less and offered a smaller pension.

"A lot of places, they're not looking that you're trained in something," Andy Blevins said one evening, sitting on his back porch. "They just want you to have a degree."

Figuring out how to get one is the core quandary facing the nation's college nongraduates. Many seem to want one. In a New York Times poll, 43 percent of them called it essential to success, while 42 percent of college graduates and 32 percent of high-school dropouts did. This in itself is a change from the days when "college boy" was an insult in many working-class neighborhoods. But once students take a break -- the phrase that many use instead of drop out -- the ideal can quickly give way to reality. Family and work can make a return to school seem even harder than finishing it in the first place.

After dropping out of Radford, Andy Blevins enrolled part-time in a community college, trying to juggle work and studies. He lasted a year. From time to time in the decade since, he has thought about giving it another try. But then he has wondered if that would be crazy. He works every third Saturday, and his phone rings on Sundays when there is a problem with the supply of potatoes or apples. "It never ends," he said. "There's a never a lull."

To spend more time with Lucas, Mr. Blevins has already cut back on his singing. If he took night classes, he said, when would he ever see his little boy? Anyway, he said, it would take years to get a degree part-time. To him, it is a tug of war between living in the present and sacrificing for the future.

Few Breaks for the Needy

The college admissions system often seems ruthlessly meritocratic. Yes, children of alumni still have an advantage. But many other pillars of the old system -- the polite rejections of women or blacks, the spots reserved for graduates of Choate and Exeter -- have crumbled.

This was the meritocracy Mr. Casteen described when he greeted the parents of freshman in a University of Virginia lecture hall late last summer. Hailing from all 50 states and 52 foreign countries, the students were more intelligent and better prepared than he and his classmates had been, he told the parents in his quiet, deep voice. The class included 17 students with a perfect SAT score.

If anything, children of privilege think that the system has moved so far from its old-boy history that they are now at a disadvantage when they apply, because colleges are trying to diversify their student rolls. To get into a good college, the sons and daughters of the upper middle class often talk of needing a higher SAT score than, say, an applicant who grew up on a farm, in a ghetto or in a factory town. Some state legislators from Northern Virginia's affluent suburbs have argued that this is a form of geographic discrimination and have quixotically proposed bills to outlaw it.

But the conventional wisdom is not quite right. The elite colleges have not been giving much of a break to the low-income students who apply. When William G. Bowen, a former president of Princeton, looked at admissions records recently, he found that if test scores were equal a low-income student had no better chance than a high-income one of getting into a group of 19 colleges, including Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Williams and Virginia. Athletes, legacy applicants and minority students all got in with lower scores on average. Poorer students did not.

The findings befuddled many administrators, who insist that admissions officers have tried to give poorer applicants a leg up. To emphasize the point, Virginia announced this spring that it was changing its admissions policy from "need blind" -- a term long used to assure applicants that they would not be punished for seeking financial aid -- to "need conscious." Administrators at Amherst and Harvard have also recently said that they would redouble their efforts to take into account the obstacles students have overcome.

"The same score reflects more ability when you come from a less fortunate background," Mr. Summers, the president of Harvard, said. "You haven't had a chance to take the test-prep course. You went to a school that didn't do as good a job coaching you for the test. You came from a home without the same opportunities for learning."

But it is probably not a coincidence that elite colleges have not yet turned this sentiment into action. Admitting large numbers of low-income students could bring clear complications. Too many in a freshman class would probably lower the college's average SAT score, thereby damaging its ranking by U.S. News & World Report, a leading arbiter of academic prestige. Some colleges, like Emory University in Atlanta, have climbed fast in the rankings over precisely the same period in which their

percentage of low-income students has tumbled. The math is simple: when a college goes looking for applicants with high SAT scores, it is far more likely to find them among well-off teenagers.

More spots for low-income applicants might also mean fewer for the children of alumni, who make up the fund-raising base for universities. More generous financial aid policies will probably lead to higher tuition for those students who can afford the list price. Higher tuition, lower ranking, tougher admission requirements: they do not make for an easy marketing pitch to alumni clubs around the country. But Mr. Casteen and his colleagues are going ahead, saying the pendulum has swung too far in one direction.

That was the mission of John Blackburn, Virginia's easy-going admissions dean, when he rented a car and took to the road recently. Mr. Blackburn thought of the trip as a reprise of the drives Mr. Casteen took 25 years earlier, when he was the admissions dean, traveling to churches and community centers to persuade black parents that the university was finally interested in their children.

One Monday night, Mr. Blackburn came to Big Stone Gap, in a mostly poor corner of the state not far from Andy Blevins's town. A community college there was holding a college fair, and Mr. Blackburn set up a table in a hallway, draping it with the University of Virginia's blue and orange flag.

As students came by, Mr. Blackburn would explain Virginia's new admissions and financial aid policies. But he soon realized that the Virginia name might have been scaring off the very people his pitch was intended for. Most of the students who did approach the table showed little interest in the financial aid and expressed little need for it. One man walked up to Mr. Blackburn and introduced his son as an aspiring doctor. The father was an ophthalmologist. Other doctors came by, too. So did some lawyers.

"You can't just raise the UVa flag," Mr. Blackburn said, packing up his materials at the end of the night, "and expect a lot of low-income kids to come out."

When the applications started arriving in his office this spring, there seemed to be no increase in those from low-income students. So Mr. Blackburn extended the deadline two weeks for everybody, and his colleagues also helped some applicants with the maze of financial aid forms. Of 3,100 incoming freshmen, it now seems that about 180 will qualify for the new financial aid program, up from 130 who would have done so last year. It is not a huge number, but Virginia administrators call it a start.

A Big Decision

On a still-dark February morning, with the winter's heaviest snowfall on the ground, Andy Blevins scraped off his Jeep and began his daily drive to the supermarket warehouse. As he passed the home of Mike Nash, his neighbor and fellow gospel singer, he noticed that the car was still in the driveway. For Mr. Nash, a school counselor and the only college graduate in the singing group, this was a snow day.

Mr. Blevins later sat down with his calendar and counted to 280: the number of days he had worked last year. Two hundred and eighty days -- six days a week most of the time -- without ever really knowing what the future would hold.

"I just realized I'm going to have to do something about this," he said, "because it's never going to end."

In the weeks afterward, his daydreaming about college and his conversations about it with his sister Leanna turned into serious research. He requested his transcripts from Radford and from Virginia Highlands Community College and figured out that he had about a year's worth of credits. He also talked to Leanna about how he could become an elementary school teacher. He always felt that he could relate to children, he said. The job would take up 180 days, not 280. Teachers do not usually get laid off or lose their pensions or have to take a big pay cut to find new work.

So the decision was made. On May 31, Andy Blevins says, he will return to Virginia Highlands, taking classes at night; the Gospel Gentlemen are no longer booking performances. After a year, he plans to take classes by video and on the Web that are offered at the community college but run by Old Dominion, a Norfolk, Va., university with a big group of working-class students.

"I don't like classes, but I've gotten so motivated to go back to school," Mr. Blevins said. "I don't want to, but, then again, I do."

He thinks he can get his bachelor's degree in three years. If he gets it at all, he will have defied the odds.