

FEATURED ARTICLES

Understanding Resource: Maldistribution and Acting on Inequality of Resources

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The United States is both morally and legally obligated to equally educate all of its students. As a nation, we have high expectations of our schools and invest in them to provide our children with the means to succeed in an increasingly uncertain world of work (Aronowitz, 2008). That would of course mean providing all students with equal access and equal resources. Historically and currently this goal has not been met. To truly provide all students with equal resources would require reformative action at many levels. Leveling the playing field is more than equally distributing monetary resources (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Jones, 2003).

In this article we examine seven maldistribution conditions that impact educational equity and resources to actualize equal educational access for Latino and low income communities. Maldistribution of resources cuts across every educational activity and human development domain (Brofenbrenner, 1979). Maldistribution is defined as faulty distribution or apportionment of resources over an area such as a school, school community or a particular group. In the case of schooling, not only is less money spent on “at risk” schools, but students in such schools get less of their teacher’s time, fewer of their teachers are able or willing to be legitimate authorities, students receive a lower level of encouragement because of deficit thinking, and more of the teachers are not prepared to work in Latino and/or low income school communities.

Misdistribution of resources questions why we fail to fairly invest in all of our schools or school communities. Maldistribution of resources is supported by critical race theory (Delgado, 1995) that examines the relationship between race and power and “interest-convergence” issues (educational, social, political, economic), in which one group profits or benefits over the other in society. Maldistribution of resources is also supported by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) in their analysis of social reproduction and schooling. They argue that schools reproduce class relations by accepting rather than reducing class based resource differentials in working class communities, producing poorly prepared students for academic work, which often leads to limited occupational choices. At the same time in middle and upper income communities students are prepared for a rich intellectual education and higher career opportunities.

In this article we examine seven maldistribution conditions that impact educational equity and resources to actualize equal educational access for Latino and low income communities, namely: (1) fiscal resource distribution between schools, (2) fiscal resource distribution and use within a school, (3) resource distribution reflected in teacher quality at the K-12 level, (4) resource distribution in time spent on teaching at the classroom level, (5) resource distribution as reflected by differences in teacher encouragement within a classroom, (6) resource distribution of classroom authority, and (7) resource distribution as a result of unengaging and mind numbing curriculum.

The first area of maldistribution is fiscal resource distribution between schools. Jonathan Kozol (1991, 2005) clearly delineates how brutally inequitable monetary resources are distributed. There are huge disparities by state and within states. Using U.S. Census Bureau (2008) data, school district spending per pupil was highest in New York (\$14,884), followed by New Jersey (\$14,630) and the District of Columbia (\$13,446). States where school districts spent the lowest amount per pupil were Utah (\$5,437), Idaho (\$6,440) and Arizona (\$6,472),

with California spending \$8,586 per pupil. In certain high Latino populous states, such as California and Texas, disparities are significant within a state. Kozol described in considerable detail the appalling conditions of schools and life in one of United States' poorest ghettos, East St. Louis, and contrasted it with school and life in wealthy suburbs. He documented that schools in affluent suburbs spent as much as five times more than schools in impoverished inner cities. In 28 states "high minority districts receive less state and local money for each child than low minority districts. . . . Across the country, \$908 less per student is spent on students in the districts educating the most students of color, as compared to the districts educating the fewest" (Education Trust, 2009). Inequities exist within schools districts.

. . . salaries are not the only problem: districts routinely assign a larger share of their unrestricted funds to lower poverty schools, as well. Although districts distribute earmarked funds such as Title I mostly to higher need schools, they undercut the purpose of those dollars to provide "extras" for low income students by sending a higher percentage of flexible state and local funding to lower poverty schools. (Education Trust, 2009).

Furthermore, Jimenez-Castellanos (2008) found that schools with a higher percentage of poor Latino immigrant students tend to be older, have less space per pupil, and have a higher percentage of portables. In comparison schools with more affluent White students tend to be newer, more spacious, and with a higher percentage of permanent classrooms. The remedy for unequal distribution of monetary resources should be obvious but also difficult to actualize. At a time when parents strive for competitive advantage for their children, the pressure is in the opposite direction from equality. Difficult or not, the struggle for equity must continue, and at the very least a minimum every school should receive what is necessary for a quality education for every child in the school. A beginning point are the demands under the California Williams case (2004), the landmark Superior Court case that calls for all students to receive equal access to instructional materials, safe schools, and quality teachers. To actualize the equity concerns under the Williams case, the use of the California School Accountability Report card (SARC) provides the school community with over ten dimensions to assess the quality of the use of resources between schools. The SARC, provides demographic school data, academic data, fiscal and expenditure data, as well as data on class size, teacher and staff assignment and specialization, curriculum and instruction, as well as safety, cleanliness, and adequacy of school facilities (<http://www3.cde.ca.gov/sarcupdate/clink.aspx>).

The second maldistributive condition is the resource distribution within a school – the amount of money and how it is spent within a school. While the dollar spent per student may be the same throughout a district, how that money is spent can be markedly different. Dollars spent in affluent and smaller schools go almost exclusively for academically rigorous curriculum, while many dollars in disadvantaged low income schools and schools with large numbers of students are deflected away from rigorous instruction and utilized for security and student control—the bigger the school the more security. Security is a major issue in high poverty schools with heavy concentration of students of low income students. Penton Media (2000) reports that it's easy to understand the steps that are being taken to ensure personal and facility security. Three important questions are raised: What is the ultimate cost to school systems' budgets and students' personal freedom? Does the cost outweigh the benefits? And how much of it is a reaction to the outcry generated by political opportunists and the media frenzy that is sure to follow any school tragedy?

In any large urban community, schools with heavy concentration of poor and underserved students tend to look more like prisons, with students required to pass through metal detectors and otherwise be subjected to invasions of privacy than students in affluent suburbs do not have to endure (Kozol, 2005; Orfield, 2001). The expenditure of resources on security devices changes the atmosphere and the social climate of the school and, in subtle and not so subtle ways, undermines instruction. The remedy here is to transform schools into an inclusive and supportive community. This requires that the schools and community establish a mutually respectful partnership with bicultural parents, develop student leadership and school ownership, introduce

peer counseling, nurture an effective student government, and recruit a culturally competent administration and faculty (Lindsey, Robins, & Terrell, 1999). In addition one needs to question the allocation of resources within the school (authentic assessment, personnel addressing the needs of students, culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum and programs, support personnel, and parent engagement) to assure that they are student centered and advocate for the development of students to access rich intellectual opportunities and careers.

The *third maldistribution* condition is resource distribution reflected in teacher quality. Jimenez-Castellanos (2008) affirms that school achievement seems to be positively related to fully credentialed teachers and with teachers with more experience. At the same time school achievement is negatively correlated to the percentage of emergency credential teachers. Regardless of how teacher quality is measured, poor and low income Latino children get fewer than their fair share of high quality experienced teachers (Peske & Haycock, 2010). Peske and Haycock also make a powerful case for the importance of quality teachers. Teacher quality turns out to matter a lot. In the highest poverty high schools that had high teacher quality indices (TQI), for example, one will find about twice as many students meeting state proficiency standards as compared to similarly poor high schools that had low TQIs. In elementary and middle schools, when the TQI increased, so too, did the percentage of students who met or exceeded state standards, even after controlling for students' background characteristics (Peske & Haycock, 2010).

Peske and Haycock generate a series of long and short term proposals for more equitable distribution of teacher resources. These include: finding ways to get more high quality teachers in low performing schools; connecting measures of student performance to individual teachers; paying teachers in low income schools more; reducing their work loads and provide time off for professional development (such as specialized training, peer coaching, sabbaticals to upgrade skills); rethinking tenure; attracting the best principals; “ramping up” teacher education programs in the supply of “teachers in shortage areas, like math, science, special education and bilingual education” (Peske, & Haycock, 2010). Of importance at the university level is to hold teacher preparation programs accountable for what they produce, and rethinking teacher compensation and pay for performance not years of experience (Peske, & Haycock, 2010). None of these are remarkable recommendations and none are new. All are based on student performance on standardized test scores not changes in life conditions. Yet, missing from those recommendations is cultural relevance, cultural competence, and markedly increasing underrepresented teachers. Of importance is that presently in California (2010) over 72% of its K-12, 6.25 million students are Latinos and non-white, while over 70% of teachers are white. Cultural competence is superficially or indirectly addressed through one or two courses in multicultural education or diversity in our teacher preparation programs—understanding the sociocultural complexity and backgrounds of our students matters (Kozol, 2005; Lindsey et al., 1999; Ochoa, 2009; Valencia, 1997).

The *fourth maldistributive* condition is associated with resource distribution of time spent on teaching. One significant factor that creates sociocultural dissonance is the demographic gap between teachers of color and students of color (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007) - at the national and state levels. In the major urban communities of our nation, over 70% of the teachers are Euro-American while 70% of the students are ethnically and linguistically diverse. Garcia, Arias, Murri, and Serna (2010) and Gay (2010) point to the sociocultural dissonance that creates student resistance or disciplinary attention based on misperceptions of respect and appropriate ways of acting out, which leads to inappropriate use of classroom instruction or time spent on teaching. One impact on time spent on teaching is time that is lost because students are removed from classrooms.

A large body of evidence shows that Black students are subject to disproportionate amount of discipline in school settings and a smaller and less consistent literature suggests disproportionate sanctioning of Latino and Native American students in some schools..... , in 2003 . . . , almost 1 in 5 Black students were (19.6%) were suspended, compared with fewer than 1 in 10 White students (8.8%). A nationally representative survey of 74,000 tenth graders found that about 50% of Black students reported that they had been suspended or expelled compared with about 20% of White

students. (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010, p.59)

In the case of Latino students, a large majority of students are placed in compensatory programs that are guided by a cognitively undemanding curriculum. Often less prepared teachers dedicate more instructional time to classroom discipline less to teaching, that equates to students receiving less time spent on learning. Jimenez-Castellanos (2008) reports that schools with more poor Latino immigrant students tend to receive a higher percentage of teachers on emergency credential with fewer years of experience while schools with more affluent White students tend to have more experienced teachers and fewer emergency credentialed teachers. What is needed in low income school communities is a significant presence of fully credential, dedicated and professional staff, who recognize and address the particular needs of Latino and low income students and who can be helpful mentors. To increase time spent on teaching, schools need teachers who provide opportunities for small group work, self directed learning, peer group activities and leadership opportunities. There is also a need for teachers who integrate the culture and cultural awareness into services and programs to help Latino students navigate cultural differences between their home, community, and school. To increase academic rigor, schools need personnel who can provide bicultural and bilingual services that include parents in educational development and school professionals and capable leaders who develop strong networks with other stakeholders – including schools and colleges, clinics, other community based organizations, practitioners, and professionals (Ochoa, 2009; Santiago & Brown, 2004).

The *fifth maldistribution condition* is resource distribution as reflected by differences in teacher encouragement within a classroom. Perhaps the greatest discrepancy in distribution of teaching encouragement as a resource comes in teacher perception of student capabilities. Throughout the 20th and 21st century there has been systematic race, ethnic and class bias that has resulted in differential encouragement of students. For much of this period the differences in ability had been “proven” by science. Beginning with Darwin’s cousin Sir Francis Galton who developed statistical measures that provided the “evidence” that mental capacity was inherited.

. . . man’s natural abilities are derived by inheritance, under exactly the same limitations as are the form and physical features of the organic whole. Consequently, it is easy, notwithstanding these limitations, to obtain by careful selection a permanently breed of dogs or horses gifted with peculiar powers of running, or of doing anything else so it would be quite practicable to produce a highly gifted race of men by judicious marriages during several consecutive generations (Galton, 1869, p. 1).

Although continually challenged, and in some instances withdrawn, the insistence that there was an inherited difference in the capacity to learn continued to be promoted. Arthur Jensen (1969) and Richard Herrnstein and Charles Murray (1994) made similar arguments for race and class limitations on the capacity to learn. The drum beat for inherited intelligence has been muted, but deficit thinking –the legacy of justifications for slavery, colonization and decimation are very much alive, although in recent years it has taken on different forms – an unwholesome environment, and anti-intellectual culture. Deficit thinking, the insistence that students come to classrooms with limited ability to learn - “genetics, culture and class, and familial socialization have all been postulated as the sources of alleged deficits expressed by the individual student who experiences school failure” (Valencia, 1997, p.2) - is very widespread. As a result of it, a large number of students are shortchanged. Deficit thinking undermines any effort to close the achievement gap and deprives a sizeable number of students of the full value of the teacher resource. All of the above means a wide range of resource utilization within a classroom and more specifically where some students are encouraged to succeed while others are discouraged to achieve their potential (Orfield, 2001).

In a single classroom, the teacher teaches to some students more than to others, and some are virtually ignored. The students singled out for teacher attention are more likely to be advantaged by how they are perceived by the teacher or by how the student perceives the teacher. In either instance attention given to equalizing teaching in the classroom will provide far more benefits than trying to raise standardized test scores.

A possible solution is creating a pedagogy of equal encouragement that seeks to examine the “teacher student contradiction, by reconciling the poles of the contradiction so that both are simultaneously students and teachers” (Freire, 1970, p. 72). Yet, Freire points out that the educator and the student, though sharing democratic social relations of education, are not on an equal footing. The educator must be humble enough to be disposed to relearn that which he/she already thinks s/he knows, through interaction with the learner (Freire, 1970).

The *sixth maldistribution* condition is resource distribution of classroom authority. Often another resource loss at the classroom level is an unwillingness of students to accept classroom authority—the ability of the teacher to persuade and negotiate with her/his students the relevance and application of their learning. Gregory and Weinstein (2008) found African American and Latino students more defiant than White students. They suggest that defiance may not be an attribute of the student but the student’s perception of the teacher. Far more students in disadvantaged schools encounter illegitimate authority, that is an imposed authority without the consent of the governed than do students in advantaged schools. Here the resource is wasted on teachers who are unable, or unwilling, to develop positive relationships with a large percent of their students (Ochoa, 2009). Since teachers are not elected by those they will teach, how they are perceived is critical to their legitimacy as classroom authorities. Teachers have legitimate authority only when the student accepts that authority. Legitimacy is a function of persuasiveness and negotiation (Pearl & Knight, 1999). In classroom where the vast majority of students are students of color and the overwhelming majority of teachers is Euro-American, the legitimacy may be challenged on the basis of race or ethnicity. The defiance may well be the result of an unwillingness or inability of the teacher to persuade and negotiate with a student rather than a student’s propensity for defiance.

By far the largest complaint about teacher authority is “fairness.” If the teacher is perceived as unfair, teaching as resource is seriously compromised. The unfairness is perceived in classroom management, while race, class and ethnicity become factors that filter how the student is treated. In his thirteen years on the Santa Cruz School Board, Art Pearl heard numerous complaints by mostly Latino students of unfairness in disciplinary action. Valdez (1996) also documents teacher and school authority through the existing distances between culturally diverse families and schools with regard to lack of respect and belongingness. Fairness has also been documented as a significant factor in student perceptions of classroom humiliation and grading. (Cullingford, 2002; Freidel, Marachi & Midgley, 2002; Wendorf & Alexander, 2005). Once again, the authority, which the educator enjoys, must not be allowed to degenerate into authoritarianism; teachers must recognize that their fundamental objective is the recovery of the student’s stolen humanity and support their academic development (Freire, 1970). From the outset, her/his efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His/her efforts must be provided with a profound trust in abilities and their creative power. To achieve this, they must be partners of the students in their relations with them (Freire, 1970).

The *seventh maldistribution* condition is resource distribution as the result of unengaging and mind numbing curriculum. For nearly three decades, since *A Nation at Risk*, a report issued by President Reagan’s Commission on Excellence (National Commission, 1983), public education has been hammered for its inability to produce workers capable of competing in the global economy. As a result over the years, first at the state level and with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 at the national level, public education has come under corporate control and contorted and reduced to preparing docile workers for alleged competition with workers in other countries for preeminence in the global economy - a claim made by President Obama in every speech he makes about education (Obama, 2008). In reality, more and more high tech jobs are being outsourced, not because foreign workers are better educated but because they work for less money. What such changes do is undermine teaching as a resource. No Child Left Behind has not focused on the kind of higher order thinking and performance skills needed in the 21st century. These include the abilities required by social and democratic life to apply knowledge to complex and novel problems, to communicate and collaborate effectively, and to find, manage, and analyze information. Instead, federal policy under NCLB has encouraged schools to focus on a narrow band of knowledge, exhibited in ways that are not applied to important tasks in the real world

(Darling-Hammond & Wood, 2008).

Perhaps an even more devastating criticism of current approaches to what is called school reform comes from one time advocate and Assistant Secretary of Education, Diane Ravitch, who has done a complete turnabout about her views of NCLB. She states

On our present course, we are disrupting communities, dumbing down our schools, giving students false reports of their progress, and creating a private sector that will undermine public education without improving it. Most significantly, we are not producing a generation of students who are more knowledgeable, and better prepared for the responsibilities of citizenship. That is why I changed my mind about the current direction of school reform (Ravitch, 2010a, p. 1).

Public education would be better served if the federal role was severely restricted and teachers liberated to work with local communities (Ravitch, 2010b; Meir & Wood, 2004). What is needed is culturally responsive teacher education programs that can increase the pool from which teachers are recruited (Amram Flax, Hamermesh, & Marty, 1988). Also needed is a culturally relevant curriculum that is negotiated at a local level and that is not distorted by a mythical global competition. While math and science, now overemphasized at the expense of the arts and citizenship preparation will remain important, they need to be organized for meeting citizenship and other real life challenges.

In conclusion, equalizing education resources is difficult and complex and will not be solved with simple minded approaches - i.e., equalizing dollar distribution (which is probably the most difficult and yet, perhaps not the most important). The seven resource maldistribution conditions impacting negatively against the principle of equal access and equalization need to be addressed at every level (local, regional, state, national) and equalization manifested. What is clear is that progress made at any level will facilitate progress at other levels. When our national and state commitment becomes a priority to provide fiscal and people resources for developing the minds of children and youth—such actions will influence the local or micro levels of education. Conversely, when local school districts engage with their school community to campaign for quality education and democratic schooling for all, fiscal reallocation of resources should become a priority. Of interest is the fact that when our nation invests in the protection of other countries or engages in warfare—the nation seems to find billions of dollars to support such efforts. Our priority should be in supporting the development of children and youth for civic engagement and democratic participation!

Other remedies for changing how resources are used within a school include changing the climate and culture of the school. At the heart of the remedy is a culturally responsive teacher – a teacher who understands the students they teach. That teacher has to be of the community, not an outsider. Also necessary is the serious consideration that should be given to student voices and grievances (Mintra, 2004). Accusations of unfairness should not be summarily dismissed, nor are charges of unequal access and practices of racism. These concerns should be used to construct changes in school policies and practices that create equal encouragement and access. The more the school is a community center, the more parents are welcomed, the more an effort is made to recruit and prepare students and families to be members of a mutually supportive community. Enabling students to have equal availability to the teaching and instructional resources creates access to opportunities. Special attention should also be given to deficit thinking. A teacher who believes a student cannot learn for whatever reason will not be much of a teacher. Special effort has to be made in teacher preparation institutions and in teacher evaluations to help teachers guard against believing that some students cannot learn and as necessary to intervene when such sentiments become apparent. A beginning intervention in each school community is by monitoring teacher preparation programs, school conditions, and the support climate and culture of our schools—with a focus on investing in the support and development of all children and youth.

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