

Examples of Global Educational Inequities and Reform

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GLOBAL EDUCATIONAL INEQUITIES AND REFORM

Introduction

As I scan global news on education, the topic of inequity in attainment of, access to and reform in education continue to stand out. I found an interesting article, “A Simple Equation: More Education = More Income” which charts the educational attainment of people within countries and whether or not these people received the same, greater or lower education than their parents. America, not surprisingly, is below the average mark, according to the chart. While countries like, Russia, Belgium and Finland stand atop the chart. (Porter, 2014) This article steered me in the direction of researching stories that could highlight and explain the factors that led to this ranking. Education equity and reform were at the forefront of my mind as they continued to arise throughout my research. It was evident that these two topics needed further investigation.

On the news and in political debates, we are constantly reminded of the United States’ lackluster performance in K-12 education and educational system inequities. However, the United States is not the only country facing the systematic problem of educational inequity. Inequity in education is a global problem faced by many countries. Education systems in cities, nations, and around the globe, vary in quality, students experience and academic output. Reform as it is seen in cities like New Orleans, Newark and Oakland are being realized in countries around the world. At the heart of education reform, is the aim to create a leveled playing field; that is, equity in education for all students to gain a valuable 21st century education.

Common Factors

Many factors lead to inequity in education and student academic achievement, domestically and globally. These factors can be topics of great political and social debate. These factors may be easily identifiable, while others present a mystery. However, three factors continue to be at the forefront of the education inequity conversation, regardless of geographic

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location. Belinda Williams, author of “Closing the Achievement Gap: A Vision for Changing Beliefs and Practices” identifies, economic, social and cultural disadvantages as factors that lead to low academic achievement in students and ultimately inequity in education. (Williams, 1996) The impact of inequity in education may differ based on geography. However, the understanding that inequity in education has a negative impact on societies, regardless of geographical location, is universal. The following stories, pulled from various countries, comprise a small sample of the world that highlights education inequities and the three commonly associated factors.

Examples of Educational Inequity

Economic Factors

The first story of education inequality comes from Latin America. In 2014, The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) evaluated education systems by testing 15-year olds, in various countries, in key subjects. The result of the tests was a ranking that placed all Latin America countries below the global average. Chile in particular, scoring ten percent lower than the average, was the highest-ranking country in Latin America. (Chafuen, 2014) Leaders of Latin America have identified economical factors as the leading cause of educational inequalities and lackluster overall academic performance by the region.

Herald Beyer, the current Director of the Center of Public Schools, shared researched data that point to income inequality as strongly correlated to levels of educational attainment. That is, the less income power one has, the less education that person is likely to attain. (Chafuen, 2014) Leaders of the region push for the government to help economically disadvantaged people by providing additional funding and merit based scholarships. By pushing the government to provide these economic resources, leaders look to afford people of low economic status the means to attain a quality education.

Social Factors

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The second example of inequity in school systems around the world comes from France. France was once a country that saw its best and most prestigious schools as state establishments. After years of low academic performance of state schools, many parents of the country have become disenchanted with the state's education system. A large percentage of French parents are moving to support the Socialist Party, to take their children out of the state education system. Currently, France is beginning to see a rise in new fee-paying schools that promise to bring a different approach to education, which French parents seem to favor. (Gumbel, 2015)

French parents want better educational options and alternatives for their children. The educational desire of French parents is a similar sentiment held by many parents across the globe. From a social perspective, parents want options that they feel best fit their beliefs and are aligned with their values in education. For instance, according to Gumbel in the article, "France is following where Eton and Harrow lead", Montessori and Bi-lingual schools are seeing a boom in enrollment. According to Grumbel, home schooling in France has jumped by nearly 70 percent as parents lose faith in the state's system. Other schooling options continue to grow, as the state schools see a downward spiral in academic performance and growing social inequality. (Gumbel, 2015)

Cultural Factors

The third story of inequality in education is one centered around culture and comes from Swat, Pakistan and Dubai, United Arab Emirates. In 2009 the Swat Valley, a North Western Frontier Province of Pakistan was taken over by extreme Taliban Militants. Led by Maulana Fazlullah, the Taliban banned all media outlets and girls' education. (Peer, 2012) During the height of the Taliban terror, more than 100 girls' schools were bombed, burned or prevented from operating. Sources say the reason for the ban on media and burning of girls' schools was

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due to infiltration of western ideas in Swat and Pakistan. Essentially, member of the Taliban believed that girls schooling was against their Islamic beliefs. (Islamabad, 2009)

In 2009, a brave girl name Malala, began documenting her experiences as a girl fiercely seeking equality in the Swat education system. Over time, Malala became a key figure in the stand against the Taliban's ban on girls' education. Her voice and presence were felt across the country and the world, which made her a target for the extreme Taliban group. On Tuesday, October 9, 2012, Malala was shot by members of the Taliban in her school bus in Swat, Pakistan. (Peer, 2012) Fortunately, Malala survived the brutal attack and continues to be a global beacon of hope for education and gender equality. (Malik, 2012) In 2014, Malala was awarded a share of Nobel Peace Prize, with Kailash Satyarth, for her efforts in education advocacy. Kailash Satyarth, like Malala, fights for child right in his country of Dubai. (Times, 2015) Satyarth's main goal is to eradicate the impact of war on child, decrease child abuse, reduce child labour and increase the number of children that gain a quality education in India.

Milalala's survival and story continues to motivate thousand of girl's across Pakistan to register for school and millions of people to take action to seeking education equality around the world. (Siraj, 2014) While Satyarth's story is being heard by millions of people and key global dignitaries. Malala and Satyarth's stories are unique because of the attention they have gained around the world. However, their stories of facing inequality in education because of gender, age and cultural beliefs are common in regions like Swat, Dubai and others around the world.

Multiple Factors

The diversity in the quality of education around the world is evident. All children are born with the potential to learn, regardless of their mental or physical capacity. However, the potential for educational attainment, as seen in the examples above, is dependent on a child's social, economical and cultural environment. More and more our students are aware of the

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educational environment in which they are forced to accept. In the article “Pupils Speak Out: Rich and Poor Schools”, you find another story of inequity in educational resources and experiences through a dialogue between two South African teenage students.

In this story, one South African teenager is in a school with many social and academic resources. This teenager’s school has small class sizes and what she calls, advance technologies. The second teenager’s school is plagued with a culture of violence inside and outside of the school, large numbers of students in one class and limited resources, including technology. In their dialogue, teenagers discuss their experiences with one another and share their thoughts. Both students feel that it is easier and more beneficial to learn in an environment that has a safe culture, sufficient academic tools and adequate social resources. The two students ended their dialogue by agreeing that it is extremely difficult to overcome adversities and distractions created by a school’s environment. (John, 2015) These challenges could be caused by factors of social issues, such as gangs; economic issues, such as limited resources.

Examples of Reform

While countries like South African, France, Pakistan, United Arab Emirate, Chile and others struggle to move up the educational output ladder, countries like Finland continue to invest in education and reform to maintain it’s leadership position. For years, Finland has been known for its successful education system and top position on the global chart for literacy and mathematics. Rivalled only by Singapore and China, Finland is undergoing an exciting education reform to better its education systems and prepare its students for a modern future. Writers say, “this reform is the most radical reform every undertaken by a nation state.” (Gardner, 2015)

Finland is currently scrapping is traditional “teach by subject” approach to “teach by topic”. At the forefront of the reform is the city of Helsinki and Liisa Pohjolainen. The goal of the change is to 1) prepare students to for new industries and modern society 2) promote

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character, resilience and communication and 3) develop a sustainable system across all Finnish schools by 2020. In the new education system, teachers are trained to adopt new teaching concepts and are rewarded financially. (Gardner, 2015) Most importantly, students are the core focus of the reform. Early data shows that students are benefiting from the new teach to topic method.

Reform and Borrowing Practice

Reform is necessary to facilitate academic progress, improve educational systems and erase inequities we find in education around the world. With Finland finding success in their educational system, why do we not see more countries adopting the Finnish model and finding success? The answer to this question is a complicated one. In the article “Why borrowing from the ‘best’ school systems sounds good — but isn’t”, Valerie Strauss, points that borrowing practices of high performing countries do not always lead to success. The author points to educational leadership, contextual and cultural factors as matters that significantly impact education systems and performance. (Strauss, 2015) All of which, borrowed practices do not often address. As seen in the stories presented, social, economical and cultural factors commonly affect education systems. Reform and adoption of educational practices are necessary to level the educational playing field for all children. However, the stories and information presented throughout this environmental scan show that inequity in education is a root cause of a multitude of factors, both specific and non-specific to the region. Therefore education practices that work in one region, may not work in another.

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Appendix I: Link to Environmental Scan Map

<https://drive.google.com/open?id=1uQXPkB2zCqJxWSRAFYVVSA8A51Q&usp=sharing>

