

Equality, Adequacy, and Education for Citizenship*

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I. INTRODUCTION

There are significant inequalities in the lives of America's children, including inequalities in the education that these children receive. These educational inequalities include not only disparities in funding per pupil but also in class size, teacher qualification, and resources such as books, labs, libraries, computers, and curriculum, as well as the physical condition of the school and the safety of students within it. While not all schools attended by poor children are bad schools, and not all schools attended by well-off children are good schools, there are clear patterns. Poor children are more likely to attend crowded and poorly equipped schools with less qualified teachers than the children of more affluent families.¹ They are less likely to have computers, books, and advanced placement academic courses. To give one example of the differences in school resources, the wealthiest districts in New York spent more than \$25,000 per pupil at the same

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1. See Jonathan Kozol, *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools* (New York: Harper Perennial, 1991), and *The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid in America* (New York: Crown, 2005) for documentation of these disparities.

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time that the poorest district in Texas spent only about \$1,200 per pupil.²

Poor children in high poverty schools are also less likely to complete high school than middle-class children in better funded middle-class schools; less likely if they do to attend a four-year college; and very unlikely to attend an elite, highly selective college. At elite colleges, those at the bottom 28 percent of the socioeconomic scale make up only 3 percent of the student population.³

The relationship between the disparities in educational resources and these unequal educational outcomes is complex, since differential outcomes are likely to be (at least partly) explained by factors outside of schools, including differences in individual endowments and family circumstances.⁴ Nevertheless, our system of schooling certainly does little to diminish these inequalities among children: disparities in scores on standardized tests typically increase with years of schooling.

In *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* (1973) the Supreme Court ruled that state-funding formulae for schools based on local taxes that generated large disparities in per pupil resources were permissible under the U.S. Constitution.⁵ In this ruling the Court effectively sanctioned the unequal distribution of educational resources for children, so long as the allocation was rationally related to a legitimate state interest, such as encouraging local control of schools. In *Rodriguez*, the Court did, however, acknowledge the importance of securing a basic and “adequate” education for all students, regardless of the locality in which they live.

Since *Rodriguez*, “adequacy” has emerged as a new way of assessing the distribution of school resources. State courts, along with state legislatures, have enacted finance systems designed to ensure that all stu-

2. See Molly McCusick, “The Law’s Role in the Distribution of Education: The Promises and Pitfalls of School Finance Legislation,” in *Law and School Reform*, ed. Jay Heubert (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999), 88–159, 94.

3. See William Bowen and Derek Bok, *The Shape of the River: Long-Term Consequences of Considering Race in College and University Admissions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 341.

4. See Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Melissa Osborne Groves, eds., *Unequal Chances: Family Background and Economic Success* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005) for a summary of the literature.

5. *Rodriguez* was initiated by parents whose children attended schools in the Edgewood Independent School District, part of the metropolitan San Antonio area; see *San Antonio Independent School District v. Rodriguez* 411 U.S. 1 (1973). At Edgewood, 90 percent of the students were Mexican American and 6 percent were African American. Property values were so low that even with a relatively high tax rate the district generated only \$356 per student. By contrast, neighboring Alamo Heights, a predominantly white district, had such high property wealth that it could tax itself at a rate 20 percent below its poorer neighbor and still have nearly \$600 per student.

dents achieve proficiency on state educational content standards. Although there has been a large literature on the legal and practical implications of the shift from equality of educational opportunity to adequacy, there has been far less written on the normative implications of this altered framework.

The difference between the adequacy and equity approaches to education is usually drawn in terms of a logical distinction: whereas the idea of equality is essentially comparative (it matters how much a given person has with respect to others), adequacy is seen as essentially non-comparative (it matters only that a given person has enough). Thus, on this standard way of drawing the distinction, an egalitarian objects to unequal educational opportunities because such inequalities are inherently unfair, while a defender of adequacy aims merely to ensure an educational floor—defined in terms of cognitive achievements and outcomes. Additionally, adequacy has often been identified with only a low threshold of achievement.

My main aim in this essay is to undermine the sharp contrast usually drawn between adequacy and equality as goals of educational reform and to offer reasons in support of an egalitarian conception of adequacy. On my view, a certain type of equality—civic equality—is actually internal to the idea of educational adequacy for a democratic society. An education system that completely separates the children of the poor and minorities from those of the wealthy and middle class cannot be adequate for such a society. Educational adequacy, on my view, is tied to the requirements of equal citizenship, in ways that I will spell out below.

My argument proceeds in four parts. In Section II, I review some problems with educational equality of opportunity as a framework for thinking about the distribution of educational resources. In Section III, I present a conception of educational adequacy that has comparative, egalitarian, and relational elements: in particular, my conception ties adequacy to citizenship.⁶ I also argue that educational adequacy entails that significant resources must flow to the least advantaged students in our society. Thus, on my view, those who endorse an adequacy framework because they are complacent about inequality or because they are unwilling to devote additional resources to improving the education of poor children are simply mistaken.

6. I am not the only theorist who has proposed a tie between the distribution of educational resources and citizenship. However, my view emphasizes the egalitarian dimensions of educational adequacy. See Amy Gutmann, *Democratic Education* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987); Elizabeth Anderson, "Rethinking Equality of Opportunity: Comment on Adam Swift's *How Not to Be a Hypocrite*," *Theory and Research in Education* 2 (2004): 99–110; and Goodwin Liu, "Education, Equality and National Citizenship," *Yale Law Journal* 116 (2006): 330–411. I am especially indebted to Anderson's discussion of these issues.

In Section IV, I show that my conception of adequacy in education has a number of advantages over competing frameworks. In particular, adequacy for citizenship is necessarily about more than the distribution of resources. A key strength of the adequacy perspective is its potential to bypass the usual focus on allocating money and other divisible resources and to focus directly on the institutional structures of education. In particular, because adequacy looks at the substance of educational outcomes and not only at funding and opportunity, it opens the door on arguments for the integration of schools by class and race. Not only is integration by class and race causally related to the project of improving the performance of poor students, but it is also a constitutive part of the idea of civic equality. Segregated schools, by sharply dividing the advantaged from the disadvantaged, tend to freeze a student's economic and social position at the level of his or her parents, prevent understanding across social groups, and undercut the democratic idea that we are all civic equals.

Educational adequacy claims, while attractive, are not immune from criticism. They still permit the children of wealthy parents to maintain an educational advantage through schooling. So long as college scholarships, places in elite colleges, and good jobs are finite, children living in school districts that can devote greater resources to education will retain an advantage in the competition with poor children. Furthermore, adequacy seems to make the state complicit in promoting such unequal advantages. In Section V, I examine what I believe to be the most compelling objections to my conception of educational adequacy.

II. EQUALITY PARADIGMS

The idea of equality of opportunity has been a dominant thread in public discourse about education and functions, in many respects, as a fixed political ideal in American society. However, equal educational opportunity is subject to very different understandings. There is, for example, a good deal of disagreement about what it means for children (or adults) to have equality of opportunities for education and employment success, with proposals ranging from securing the absence of overt discrimination based on race and gender in schools to the far more ambitious goals of eliminating all race, gender, and class differences in educational outcome. Thus, people who all accept the ideal of equality of opportunity can differ on such issues as the legitimacy of unequal school funding, tracking students by skill, and the permissibility of private schools. Indeed, there are so many different interpretations of the meaning of educational equality of opportunity that at least one theorist has suggested that it might not mean anything at all.⁷

7. See Christopher Jencks, "Whom Must We Treat Equally for Educational Opportunity to Be Equal?" *Ethics* 98 (1988): 518–33.

I do not undertake a comprehensive survey of the many meanings of the idea of equality of opportunity here.⁸ Instead, I review three interpretations that have traditionally been associated with this idea in educational policy and theory—nondiscrimination, horizontal equity, and vertical equity. I am especially interested in examining the strengths and weaknesses of the vertical equity interpretation, which I take to be the strongest alternative to the view I defend here.

A. Formal Equality of Educational Opportunity: Nondiscrimination

The most minimally demanding equality of opportunity interpretation is a formal one. Formal equality of opportunity requires that social positions should be open to all applicants and that applicants be selected on the basis of their qualifications for the position. It is a principle of nondiscrimination. In employment, it means that applicants for a position should only be judged on the basis of their respective relevant qualifications and not their race, class, or gender. Rawls refers to this principle as “careers open to talents.”⁹

Formal educational equality of opportunity entails that no educable child can be excluded from an education. It precludes an educational system from distributing its positions on a discriminatory basis: it must be open to all who can learn.¹⁰ Formal equality of opportunity in education (and employment) clearly marks a great achievement. But it is also an inadequately narrow view of what equality of opportunity should mean. This principle could be satisfied by a society in which only a small elite had the opportunity to develop the necessary qualifications for a given educational benefit. Adapting an example from Bernard Williams, imagine an education system in which everyone has the chance to compete for grades and honors but where the schools attended by poor children are too ill-equipped—with unqualified teachers, outdated textbooks, and limited curricula—for these children to succeed in competitive examinations. Such children may have no effective possibility of becoming educated, let alone becoming competitive for college admissions or highly skilled, high-paying jobs.¹¹

There surely is something perverse in contending that equality of opportunity in college admissions is fulfilled if many children never had

8. See Andrew Mason, “Equality of Opportunity: Old and New,” *Ethics* 111 (2001): 760–81, for discussion of the various understandings of equality of opportunity.

9. John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971), 65.

10. See Gutmann, *Democratic Education*, 127.

11. See Bernard Williams, “The Idea of Equality,” in *Philosophy, Politics and Society*, ed. Peter Laslett and W. G. Runciman, 2nd ser. (London: Blackwell, 1962), 110–31. The Harvard Civil Rights Project documents the many parallels between Williams’s imaginary warrior society and our real educational system’s “savage inequalities.” (The quoted phrase is of course Jonathan Kozol’s.)

the chance to acquire the necessary qualifications to enter college. The appeal of equality of educational opportunity depends in some way on the idea that, at some prior stage, individuals really had the possibility of becoming qualified.

B. Horizontal Equity

Under this interpretation of equality of opportunity, all students are entitled to the same amount of money from the government for any government provided resource. The state is not permitted to be complicit in inequalities of financial resources (although inequalities in private resources are viewed differently by different theories). Plaintiffs advocating greater equity in terms of this framework will be successful when, for example, they succeed in replacing a state's funding system that is dependent on local property taxes with a system that generates the same amount for any pupil in the state.

Although this interpretation of educational equality of opportunity has had some limited legal and legislative successes, it is subject to three obvious objections which have rendered it both difficult for courts and legislatures to implement and conceptually unattractive. First, because it does not specify a threshold of funding, this conception is compatible with leveling educational resources downward for all. For example, in California, a successful school finance equity case has been coupled with a lower proportion of state revenue spent overall on education than before its enactment.¹²

Second, it has been increasingly realized that equal financial inputs may not yield equal resources: attracting good teachers to poorer schools may require paying those teachers higher salaries than they would need elsewhere. But even if resources are interpreted more broadly than simply as cash—as including, for example, teachers, infrastructure, and curriculum—an equal resources perspective ignores the fact that students have different needs. Poor students in particular carry a higher “load”—poor health, developmental disabilities, hunger, family disruption, and violence—which makes them more costly to educate. Third, equal funding may not translate into equal education, insofar as the school's organization and infrastructure ensure that the money is badly spent, with poor teachers and incompetent or corrupt leadership locked into place in the school or school district.

C. Vertical Equity

Neither formal equal treatment nor horizontal equity, as we have seen, gives us an attractive interpretation of equal educational opportunity, especially if we take into account the differences in students due to their

12. *Serrano v. Priest* (Cal. 1971) 5 C3d 584.

different genetic, family, and social circumstances. An alternative idea, with wide appeal, is the idea that what equal opportunity requires is a level playing field, in which all children have something like an equal opportunity to compete for success. In his famous dissent in *Rodriguez*, Justice Marshall invoked the idea of an “equal start in life” for all children. Nevertheless, given that children come into the world with different innate abilities, as well as with different parents and social circumstances, the idea of what it means to have an “equal start” in life or compete on a “level” playing field is not straightforward. It needs interpretation. Below, I discuss two interpretations of this idea that have tended to dominate the literature.

1. *Meritocratic equality of opportunity*.—An intuitive case for educational equality of opportunity is desert based. It's unfair if some children get more opportunities for educational achievement than others—and to the rewards that such achievement makes possible—for reasons that are arbitrary or irrelevant. The playing field is leveled—and the competition for society's occupations and rewards is fair—when only differences in children's talents, abilities, and motivations determine their educational (and via education, their employment) outcomes. When such differences determine outcomes, children (and the adults that they become) get what they deserve. I'll refer to this interpretation of the level playing field as meritocratic. In his recent book on schooling, Adam Swift articulates a version of the meritocratic view: “Someone's chances of getting into a good university, or getting into a university at all, shouldn't depend on whether her parents are able and willing to send her to private school. It should depend on how intelligent she is, and how much effort she's prepared to make when applying her intelligence. The kind of equality of opportunity we're talking about is meritocratic: people with the same level of merit—IQ plus effort—should have the same chance of success. Their social background shouldn't make any difference. If the lucky ones are jumping the queue, the unlucky ones are necessarily losing out.”¹³ Although the meritocratic conception of equality of opportunity has some intuitive appeal, it faces three serious (and I believe decisive) problems: it cannot guide us in allocating resources for K–12 education where “merit” is highly endogenous to schooling; it would not offer a sufficient education with respect to either children with little inborn talent or those who make poor choices; and it has no real application to the lives of young children.¹⁴

13. Adam Swift, *How Not to Be a Hypocrite: School Choice for the Morally Perplexed Parent* (London: Routledge, 2003), 24.

14. There is also a “radical” conception of meritocratic educational opportunity, according to which talent and ability should not influence a child's chances for educational achievement, since talent and ability are not themselves deserved but are rather products of a genetic lottery. Instead, on this view, a meritocrat should focus only on effort and choice.

The creation of merit: A central problem with using merit as a basis for evaluating the distribution of school resources is that there is no preexisting merit that is relevant to the question of who deserves to get ahead, go to college, or get the best jobs. As Elizabeth Anderson notes in her critical review of Swift's book, the merit that matters in the case of employment and university access is developed talent and ability, not innate talent and ability.¹⁵ What matters, when selecting among applicants for a job, is the applicant's current qualifications for those positions. No one has any greater claim to an advantageous social position than others simply because of her inborn talents.

Moreover, as a number of critics of this view have pointed out, the creation of merit is highly endogenous to the distribution of educational resources that we choose.¹⁶ If we choose to devote fewer resources to courses in advanced mathematics, for example, we will thereby affect the level of math ability in our society and change the talents that will merit selection for jobs in university math departments. If a teacher devotes more time to her less able students and less time to her more able students, then she too can affect the meritorious abilities of her students and thus change the order of the queue. Merit, therefore, cannot tell us what the order of the queue should be, since different distributions of resources will produce different levels of merit, which in turn will determine who comes to stand first in line.

An aristocracy of talent? A second objection to the use of merit as a basis of rewarding students with educational opportunities is that it is not a demanding enough distributive principle for education in a democracy. This interpretation of the level playing field would offer very little in the way of resources to those children who have few inborn capacities or little educational potential. Consider the example of children with cognitive impairments who cannot learn without the presence of a teacher's aide. It is compatible with the merit-based view that the gap between these children's abilities and those of other children will substantially increase, and the so-called natural aristocracy of the talented would become a socially entitled aristocracy.¹⁷

Opportunity and children: A final problem with this interpretation of equality of opportunity is that the language of merit and, indeed, of "opportunity" seems misplaced in primary and at least part of secondary

15. See Anderson, "Rethinking Equality."

16. Ibid.; see also Jencks, "Whom Must We Treat Equally."

17. This objection might be met by an equality of opportunity theorist who acknowledges the need for other principles governing the content and distribution of education. Equality of opportunity need not be endorsed as the sole principle of education. I owe this point to Harry Brighouse.

school education.¹⁸ We expect children to go to school and master certain capabilities; it is not enough that they have the opportunities to do so. As Michael Walzer notes, “the goal of the reading teacher is not to produce equal chances, but to achieve equal results.”¹⁹ The reading teacher aims to teach all the children in his class to read, even the lazy child. Moreover, society has an interest in securing certain achievements in all children who are capable of attaining these levels of achievement.

A defender of merit-based equality of opportunity might grant children’s limited agency and responsibility. What he would claim he wants is not the equal opportunity for six-year-olds to read but rather that each child be ensured access to the capacities that will enable them at age eighteen to have an equal opportunity to compete for college. But what does equal opportunity mean in this case, if we abandon the link to an underlying and pregiven individual merit?

2. *Equal development of potentials.*—A different intuitive idea of the level playing field would require that differences in where children wind up at age eighteen should only reflect the differences in their underlying potentials and not differences in their economic or social background. Advocates of this view might seek to provide additional “weighted” resources to students who face social obstacles to the development of their potentials. There will, of course, be different ideas about which social factors merit additional resources.²⁰ In school finance litigation, some proponents of vertical equity have argued that children raised in high-poverty environments have a claim on the extra resources needed to enable them to develop their underlying potentials on a par with their wealthier peers. Vertical equity does not seek to track intrinsic merit but rather to provide social resources such that all potentials develop to the same degree (more or less).

This interpretation resonates with the democratic idea that all individuals are entitled to the same rights and freedoms regardless of their social background. It also bears a resemblance to the principle that Rawls calls “fair equality of opportunity”: it stipulates that individuals with similar potentials born into different social classes should have similar chances of occupying social positions.²¹ Nevertheless, the equal development of children’s potentials among different social groups is not plausible as a guiding principle for educational policy.

18. Stefan Gosepath pointed out the need to distinguish levels of education in my argument.

19. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice* (New York: Basic, 1983), 203.

20. See John Roemer, “Equality of Opportunity,” in *Meritocracy and Economic Inequality*, ed. Ken Arrow, Samuel Bowles, and Steven Durlauf (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) for one conception. See also the “weighted student funding” approach which has recently been developed by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (2006).

21. See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sec. 14.

Leveling down: It is certainly true that if educational resources were improved for poor children, then they could compete for higher education and jobs on fairer terms. But even so, no society has the resources to supply the same opportunities to poor families as are possible for those with more wealth who value the continued development of their children's talents. As one child's potentials expand more than another's, this principle will continually justify devoting more resources to bring the now disadvantaged child up to the levels of her wealthier peers. Yet no society can devote all of its resources to education, and so at some point a line must be drawn as to how much the state is willing to spend. Authorized democratic decision-making bodies will draw lines that reflect the relative value they assign to education as opposed to other social goods.

Assume that a level of funding based on a principle of vertical equity is in place. Now suppose that some child's parents propose to devote additional resources to the development of their own child's talents. If the additional development of the child's talents enhances overall productivity, then this should, given appropriate social institutions, redound to everyone's absolute advantage. Suppose you and I are equal in underlying potentials, but your parents invest in special lessons and that leads your potentials to surpass mine. Although it may now be true that my relative position with respect to a given opportunity is worse, my absolute position may be better, if your additional talent increases the size of the social surplus. It makes no sense to object to unequal talent development simply because one's own relative position is worsened.²² Efficiency considerations matter, even if they are not the only things that matter. Increasing the life prospects of those born with little possibility of acquiring talent also matters. Ensuring fairness in competitions between the super talented and the merely very talented seems less important than ensuring that the life prospects of the worst off are improved.²³ While we can debate how much less important such considerations are, many political and moral theories recognize reasons for focusing on the least advantaged.²⁴

There are other reasons to be wary of a principle that would level talent down. There are numerous ways a person can benefit from the cultivation of other people's talents beyond the levels provided for by public funds: these talents may make life more interesting and stimu-

22. See Anderson, "Rethinking Equality."

23. See Richard Arneson, "Against Rawlsian Equality of Opportunity," *Philosophical Studies* 93 (1999): 77–112.

24. John Rawls has expressed some reservations about his earlier argument in *A Theory of Justice*, according to the fair equality of opportunity principle strict lexical priority over the difference principle; see *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 163.

lating, may give us a new sense of what human beings can achieve, and may be valuable for their own sake. So, we had better have a clear argument for why the unequal development of potentials is unjust.

The causes of inequality matter to our assessments: Is the unequal development of children's potentials necessarily unjust? There are many factors involved in the fostering or stunting of children's potentials. These include the educational levels of the parents, parental income and wealth, the transmission of personality traits, geographical location, parenting styles, religion, gender, ethnicity, attractiveness, and health status. It seems clear that the causes of differential starts in the "race" of life (and of the corresponding differential development of underlying potentials) are relevant to our assessment of the legitimacy of those differentials.

In fact, data show that unequal educational outcomes are more strongly influenced by exogenous factors than by school funding or by schools themselves. The advantage of being raised in a middle-class home is estimated at a half year's achievement for every year of a mother's educational achievement beyond high school.²⁵ Even with respect to differences in parents' financial resources on educational attainments, recent scholarship suggests that the direct effect is probably smaller than has been previously thought to the extent that parents are not in extreme poverty and children's basic material needs are met.²⁶ Indeed, given the weak correlation between school funding and educational outcomes, it is difficult to understand why an advocate of a vertical equity approach would focus on school funding issues.

Many factors outside schools affect children's development. While some of these factors are rightly subject to criticism (e.g., poor housing, environmental toxins leading to bad health outcomes, etc.) others are not objectionable. Consider parents who adopt religious conceptions that differentially stress hard work, other worldly pursuits, or materialistic consumerism. These different conceptions of life and value will have different effects on the development of children's talents. So will parents' decisions to raise their children in urban or rural settings.

Some equal opportunity theorists try to drive a wedge between legitimate parental partiality in shaping children's potentials and excessive and unfair partiality. Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift argue that only insofar as parents' advantaging child-development activities realize the "relationship goods" of the family can they legitimately engage in

25. Gordon Berlin and Andrew Sum, *Toward a More Perfect Union: Basic Skills, Poor Families, and Our Economic Future* (New York: Ford Foundation, 1988).

26. See Susan Mayer, *What Money Can't Buy: Family Income and Children's Life Chances* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

them.²⁷ On their view, it is acceptable to read your child bedtime stories but not to pay for your child to have a reading or mathematics tutor, even if these activities have the same net effect on promoting the development of your children's potentials.

I do not think we should accept their argument. Many parents want better education for their children—including private lessons—because they believe that education is intrinsically valuable, not because they want their children to be wealthier or more advantaged than their peers. Their commitment to education does not stem from the desire to help their children obtain competitive advantages in the job market but rather from their appreciation of the good of education for personal development. Or maybe they just don't want to see their children bored and unhappy in school. The Swift/Brighouse argument unacceptably constrains those families with conceptions of the good that favor promoting the education of their child—but lack the time to do the promoting themselves.²⁸ Dual-career families are likely to be especially constrained by their approach.

In fact, I believe that there is a deep tension within the ideal of equality of opportunity, understood in terms of ensuring equal potential development. Allowing equality of opportunity for talent development—where parents who have received the resources necessary for the equal development of their potentials must now bear the cost of their own choices—leads to inequality of opportunities in the development of the potentials of their children. Each of the choices that adults make in their lives has some effect on the choices that will be open to their children. What a parent values, where a parent lives, the career a parent pursues, all will inevitably have some effect on the development and shaping of her child's potentials. We cannot secure the equal development of children's potentials while permitting a world with diverse families, parents, parenting styles, geographical locations, and values.²⁹

27. Harry Brighouse and Adam Swift, "Legitimate Parental Partiality," unpublished manuscript on file with author.

28. Brighouse and Swift ("Legitimate Parental Partiality") argue that if a parent truly values education, they should value it for everyone's children, not just their own. Parents who thus invest in their own child's education really only value the education of their own child, not education per se. But this conclusion does not follow. In a democracy, representatives of citizens with diverse views about the priority of education over other social goods vote on budgets. Parents who invest extra dollars in their own child's education might simply disagree with the majority's decision about the appropriate size of the education budget.

29. Nor should we assume that the middle-class strategy of continually enhancing children's educational potentials are superior to other ways of bringing up children. See Annette Lareau, *Unequal Childhoods: Class, Race, and Family Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), for a discussion of the strengths and weaknesses of different ways of approaching children's potentials. As Lareau emphasizes, there is nothing intrinsically

III. ADEQUACY

The alternative to an equal opportunity view is an adequacy view. Adequacy approaches typically focus on ensuring some threshold level of education that must be achieved for all children. Many proponents and some opponents of adequacy endorse the idea that educational adequacy requires only a fixed and minimal threshold of achievement; adequacy is widely viewed as compatible with significant inequalities above this specified threshold of opportunity and proficiency. Critics charge that adequacy simply ignores inequalities among students. As two critics of adequacy in education put it, adequacy involves only “a specific quantitative level of educational resources . . . to achieve certain educational outcomes based on external and fixed standards. It is a measure that does not compare the educational resources or outcomes of students with each other, but rather, looks only to some minimally required level of resources for all students.”³⁰

By contrast, I believe that if we reflect on the civic purposes that we want a conception of educational adequacy to serve, we will endorse only conceptions that contain comparative and relational elements.³¹ On my view, the idea of educational adequacy should be understood with reference to the idea of equal citizenship. Education has long been recognized as a “foundation of good citizenship,” a necessary condition for full and equal membership in the political community. Education is essential to the effective exercise of political rights. As the Court reminded us in its *Brown* decision, education is required for the “performance of our most basic public responsibilities,” and its denial effectively shuts out individuals from participation in society as citizens.³²

preferable about maximizing potential: the issue is the extrinsic rewards that our society places on educational attainment, an issue that I will discuss below.

30. William S. Koski and Rob Reich, “When Adequate Isn’t: The Retreat from Equity in Educational Law and Policy and Why It Matters,” *Emory Law Review* 56 (2007): 545–617, 550.

31. The educational outcomes appealed to by courts and legislatures attempting to determine adequacy vary widely. Some stress civic capacities such as the ability to vote and to serve on a jury, others the capacity to compete in the labor market, and others the ability to succeed in higher education. But many courts explicitly include comparative criteria in defining adequacy. In one, the New York State adequacy rulings (2001), Justice Leland DeGrasse struck down the entire New York State school financing system, arguing that the idea of education for citizenship invoked by the New York constitution involves “more than just being qualified to vote or serve as a juror, but to do so capably and knowledgeably.” He also argued that minimal competency for any employment was not enough but must include skills for “sustained productive employment.” The Ohio Supreme Court declared in broad terms that children must be educated adequately so that they are able to participate fully in society and directed the legislature to create an entirely new school financing system with a significant infusion of resources to failing schools; see *Campaign for Fiscal Equity, Inc., et al. v. The State of New York* (100 N.Y. 2d 893).

32. *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka*, 347 U.S. 483, 493 (1954).

I define citizenship, following T. H. Marshall, in terms of the political, civic, and economic conditions that are needed to make one a full member of one's society.³³ Citizens are equal in terms of their status as full members, although they may be unequal along other dimensions such as income and wealth. As full members of society, citizens (1) have equal basic political rights and freedoms, including rights to speech and participation in the political process; (2) have equal rights and freedoms within civil society, including rights to own property and to justice; and (3) have equal rights to a threshold of economic welfare and to "share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society."³⁴ Marshall associated citizenship not only with political and civil rights—such as freedom of speech and political participation—but also with social and economic rights—such as access to employment, health care, education, housing, and a level of income essential to being, and being regarded as, a full member of one's society. Social and economic rights, in particular, work to substantially mitigate market inequality and serve to underwrite our basic constitutional freedoms. If citizens are equals, then no citizen should suffer a disadvantage in having access to these basic rights as a result of her social background.

We can derive, in general terms, the nature and content of educational adequacy from the requirements for full membership and inclusion in a democratic society of equal citizens. First, citizenship requires a threshold level of knowledge and competence for exercising its associated rights and freedoms—liberty of speech and expression, liberty of conscience, and the right to serve on a jury, vote, and participate in politics and in the economy.

Second, the empirical content of this threshold itself depends on the distribution of skills and knowledge in the population as a whole. For example, what it takes to serve competently on a jury depends, in part, on what other jury members know. Jurors need not only to comprehend and apply concepts like "reasonable doubt," "negligence," and "probability" and be able to analyze statistical tables and graphs but also to have the capability of responding to the arguments of other jurors during their deliberations. Similarly, if students applying to college are now expected to have knowledge of algebra, then those students who are

33. See T. H. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," in *Class, Citizenship, and Social Development: Essays by T. H. Marshall* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 71–134. Liu's "Education, Equality and National Citizenship" called to my attention the importance of Marshall's classic essay on citizenship.

34. Marshall, "Citizenship and Social Class," 78.

not taught algebra are effectively cut off from college and the educational and employment opportunities that depend on a college degree.³⁵

Third, an education adequate for equal citizenship includes but goes beyond the achievement of a narrow list of individual skills. A society of equals is more than a collection of independent individuals but includes the ways that people cooperate and relate to one another in employment, in politics, and in making social decisions in their neighborhoods and within public spaces. While some aspects of citizens' competence (e.g., numeracy, literacy, knowledge of history) can be achieved by individuals alone, other competencies (e.g., mutual understanding, mutual respect, tolerance) are group achievements, best accomplished through the presence of diverse individuals. Individuals who are radically cut off from one another, in class- and race-segregated schools and neighborhoods, will also lack the knowledge and perspectives needed in both politics and in the economy.³⁶ A society whose leaders come narrowly from one social group will generally do a poor job in representing the interests of the diverse members of that society, interests about which they may have no real information.³⁷ Likewise, a person who has no understanding of racial discrimination or poverty may do a poor job in deliberating in a trial in which these matters are relevant.

Fourth, although an adequacy standard does not insist on strictly equal opportunities for the development of children's potentials, large inequalities regarding who has a real opportunity for important goods above citizenship's threshold relegate some members of society to second-class citizenship, where they are denied effective access to positions of power and privilege in the society. Imagine a society in which all citizens were educated to participate in social decision making but only whites were educated enough to have access to the most fulfilling, well-paying jobs or to serve as political leaders. Care must be taken to ensure

35. Robert Moses argues that when poor minority children are not taught algebra, they are effectively cut off from the chance for a college education and access to key positions in the economy. Young students need a floor—an acceptable amount of math education in middle school that readies them for the college prep sequence in high school. Moses emphasizes the “moving target” nature of this floor: the college prep math curriculum differs from place to place, and it is changing; see his “Remarks on the Struggle for Citizenship and Math/Science Literacy,” *Journal of Mathematical Behavior* 13 (1994): 107–11.

36. Not all forms of de facto segregation threaten the ideal of relations among equal citizens. The social context of that segregation matters. Gender segregation in schooling on the basis of girls' purported impurity is a different matter than sending one's daughter to Wellesley.

37. There are as well indirect means by which we can learn about the lives of others, including literature, history, film, and imagination. But while such means are important components of education, they do not replace the need to integrate elites, a need that I discuss and justify below. Thanks to an anonymous editor of *Ethics* for stressing the various ways that we can learn about the lives of others.

that those with fewer opportunities are not at such a relative disadvantage as to offend their dignity or self-respect, relegate them to second-class citizenship, cut them off from any realistic prospect of upward social mobility, or deprive them of the ability to form social relationships with others on a footing of equality. Thus, an educational system that simply precluded the students of poorer families from competing in the same labor market and society as their wealthier peers cannot be adequate.

This ideal of equal citizenship does not require either equality of resources or equal development of children's potentials. Nevertheless, it has distributive implications—although these are harder to state precisely than a principle of horizontal equality.³⁸ While some inequality in spending across districts and schools can theoretically be justified, large differences in educational resources may effectively cut off the bottom segments of society from effective access to society's best opportunities and leading positions. On my view, then, adequacy is not only a function of the bottom of the distribution but also of the top of the distribution. Citizens are not equals when there is a closed intergenerational social elite with disproportionate access to society's positions of political and economic power. While my conception of adequacy does not require that everyone have the level of education necessary to gain entry into the top law schools, it does require that everyone with the potential have access to the skills needed for college. And, to the extent that even this criterion turns out to exclude pockets of society where tradition orients people to manual labor and away from education, then care must be taken to ensure that there are also multiple routes to leading positions and multiple avenues of reward.³⁹ In some societies, for example, trade union leaders are frequently elected to political office; in other societies, the social gradient is not so steep that those with few skills are effectively excluded from access to significant social benefits.

My conception of adequacy undercuts the sharp divide philosophers often draw between sufficiency and equality. Consider a parallel between my defense of an equality sensitive threshold (adequacy for equal citizenship) and Rawls's difference principle.⁴⁰ Recall that the difference principle stipulates that inequalities in resources are acceptable so long as they contribute to the resources of the least well-off person. Some theorists have interpreted this principle as establishing

38. As Harry Frankfurt once noted, "calculating the size of an equal share is plainly much easier than determining how much a person needs to have enough"; see "Equality as a Moral Ideal," *Ethics* 98 (1987): 23–24.

39. An anonymous editor at *Ethics* pointed out that the requirement that all students with the potential for college realize that potential may turn out to be unrealistic.

40. The analogy was suggested to me by Josh Cohen.

only a floor of provision but providing few or no restraints on inequalities above that floor. I believe that this interpretation is profoundly mistaken. Rawls repeatedly stresses that “the social bases of self-respect” are the most important resource to be secured by the difference principle, more important even than income and wealth.⁴¹ The social bases of self-respect form a central component of the difference principle’s threshold—income and wealth are merely simplifying proxies when ranking social positions. But the social bases of self-respect necessarily involve relational elements: for example, what it takes to “appear in public without shame” is dependent on what others have. Moreover, if a child from a poor family knows that the state is willing to inject vastly greater amounts of public monies into the development of wealthier children’s abilities than hers—for no other reason than that they are wealthier—she suffers from a dignitary injury that is unlikely to be compensated for by income. Indeed, Rawls notes that the development of our talents is a special kind of good, connected to the conditions that support our sense of self-respect in a way that other goods such as income are not.⁴²

My point here is that Rawls’s difference principle is itself embedded in a conception of justice that is meant to express a democratic idea of society, a society of equal citizens. Rawls’s principle for ranking social positions does not operate independently of the other parts of Rawlsian theory—especially what Rawls calls the fair value of political liberty and his fair equality of opportunity principle. What is sufficient to serve as a social minimum is inevitably conditioned by the resources that others have and what they can do with those resources. When some people have a lot more, this may effect what others need to take part in community life. If this is so, then sufficiency is not logically distinct from equality in Rawlsian theory.

IV. BENEFITS OF ADEQUACY FOR CITIZENSHIP OVER EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY APPROACHES

Adequacy for citizenship has egalitarian dimensions. It requires that education be distributed in ways that are consistent with equal civic status, including fair (but not equal) access to opportunities above citizenship’s threshold. Many of its practical implications are likely to be similar to those endorsed by some equality of opportunity theorists. Nevertheless, I believe that a focus on educational adequacy for citizenship has some theoretical and policy advantages over the traditional focus on educational equality of opportunity.

First, because adequacy for citizenship sets a minimum threshold

41. See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, sec. 67.

42. *Ibid.*, sec. 65.

of attainment, it theoretically prevents states from spending down to an equality of resources that leaves all schools without resources for meeting adequacy's educational standards.⁴³ Although courts, legislatures, and educators will inevitably disagree about the content of an adequate education, adequacy in principle gives us standards and instruments by which to hold public schools, and state policy makers, accountable for delivering a level of education to all.

Second, because adequacy looks at the democratic purposes of education, as opposed to only focusing on providing equal opportunities among individuals, adequacy is more congenial to the argument for greater integration by class and race. The prevalence of separate schools for rich and poor undercuts the primary lesson of democracy—that we are all social equals. Indeed, as the Supreme Court noted in its sweeping conclusion in the 2003 University of Michigan case on affirmative action, there is compelling evidence that diversity is centrally important to preparing students to function in a heterogeneous society.⁴⁴

From the vantage point of the conception of educational adequacy for equal citizenship, the neglect of the democratic purposes of education is a key weakness of equality of opportunity approaches.⁴⁵ If our K–12 educational goals are, at least in large part, based on the requirements of equal citizenship, then schools have an important role to play in encouraging intergroup knowledge, social integration, accommodation, and understanding. These goals are not merely instrumental to achieving more equal opportunities for poor children: they are also constitutive parts of education in a democratic society of equals.⁴⁶

Third, adequacy for citizenship can explain why some inequalities require greater remedial attention than others, namely, those inequal-

43. While many states have reasonable education systems pocketed with some high poverty, low achieving schools, some rural and poorer states have global problems in educating their state's children. In these states the problem is not so much funding inequality between districts, but the low levels of funding for all schools. The Kentucky finance litigation case *Rose v. Council for Better Education, Inc.* (790 S.W. 2d 186 [1989]) provides a model. The problem in Kentucky was not so much unequal educational resources but a lack of resources overall. An equity perspective does not address such problems. Instead, we need an adequacy perspective to show that the state is failing to deliver an adequate education to its children given existing levels of resources and so must increase school funding, usually by raising taxes.

44. *Grutter v. Bollinger* 539 U.S. 306 (2003).

45. Thanks to Elizabeth Anderson for helping me to see this difference between equality of opportunity approaches and those approaches which stress democratic citizenship.

46. Integration has also been shown to boost the academic achievement of poor children, beyond what is achieved by giving additional resources to poor schools. Equality of opportunity theorists sometimes endorse integration as an instrumental value. I am arguing, by contrast, that it is a constitutive feature of a democratic society.

ities that affect the prospects of the least well-off. On my view, many of the inequalities above citizenship's threshold are not especially troubling—consider inequalities in school funding between Beverly Hills and Scarsdale; by contrast, inequalities that involve some people falling below the requirements of full social membership are always of concern. Equality of opportunity principles tend to view all inequalities as on par.

Fourth, on a practical level, adequacy for citizenship is a more realistic standard for a diverse society. This principle recognizes that individuals will disagree about the relative priority of education over other social goods. As long as nonfederal decision-making bodies are vested with the authority to finance education, there will be different decisions about the levels of funding schools. At the same time, this principle directs our attention to the education of the least advantaged and to the education needed for full inclusion in society. Thomas Pogge gives one example of how we might (partly) operationalize the adequacy idea in education: we could examine how far below the median in educational attainment children from poor backgrounds fall and adjust educational spending to bring their outcomes closer to the median level.⁴⁷ This preserves the adequacy idea—focusing our attention on those with the worst opportunities—but couples it with a focus on the implications of wide educational attainment disparities for democratic citizenship.

V. RESIDUAL CONCERNS

I now turn to address remaining concerns about an adequacy approach, contrasted with an equality of opportunity approach. These concerns are the positional nature of education, the role of the state in legitimating inequalities, and the potentially negative consequences of an adequacy approach.

A. *Education as a Positional Good*

Defenders of equality of opportunity will press objections to the residual inequalities that even an egalitarian conception of adequacy seems to leave intact. Rob Reich and William Koski argue that by allowing inequalities in educational opportunities to remain, adequacy actually harms the worst-off members of society because education is a positional good.⁴⁸ Positional goods are goods whose value depends on relative

47. See Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989), 172ff. Pogge is not concerned with adequacy here but rather with what he considers the unrealistic standard set by Rawls's fair equality of opportunity principle.

48. Koski and Reich, "When Adequate Isn't."

advantage.⁴⁹ If everyone drove a Porsche, then the positional aspect of having one would be erased (although the absolute quality standard of everyone's car would be improved).

So, one important argument against adequacy stresses the positional nature of education and the private returns that education confers. When rich parents can send their children to private schools, or better-endowed public schools, or supplement their children's education with private tutoring, this actually disadvantages other children whose parents can afford less. Access to labor market and university positions is essentially competitive, so that the greater worth of some parties' opportunities has a direct negative effect on the worth of the opportunity for others. If we allow some parents to spend more on their children than the society collectively undertakes to provide, then those parents unfairly decrease the worth of the opportunities of the others. Moreover, in our society, education is not only a necessary qualification for high-paying forms of employment but also translates into health insurance, greater vacation and leisure time, home ownership, and increased mobility. Given the high stakes that are attached to high-paying, skilled employment in our society, perhaps we should be worried about the inequalities in educational resources that adequacy leaves in place.

How positional is education? The extent to which education is positional is contested, since many of the benefits of educational attainment appear to be absolute: more education is arguably better than less, no matter what others have. Nonetheless, education surely has some positional elements, especially at the top end. There are many more applicants for admission to elite colleges and universities than can be accepted. Acceptance at an elite institution translates into not only public goods for society but also private goods for the individual. Admission to elite private universities also serves as a signal to employers about a candidate's skills, or at least about their ability to acquire skills.⁵⁰

I think that this objection is the most compelling objection to an adequacy view. However, this objection may be overstated, or it can be countered without requiring equal opportunity. To see how it might be overstated, consider that access to the higher education that translates into jobs is only in some respects competitive; in others, it is not. In fact, admission to most colleges in the United States is not competitive: almost any high school graduate who applies will be admitted. Only a small percentage of colleges and universities have competitive admissions: according to *U.S. News and World Report's* college issue, no more than 100 colleges in the United States accept fewer than half of their

49. The term comes from Fred Hirsch, *Social Limits to Growth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1976).

50. Thanks to Jim Joyce for pointing out the signaling function of elite college education.

applicants. In fact, higher education is more academically accessible in the United States than in countries with more equal spending on schools. American colleges admit more students with poor secondary school records, offer to individuals many second chances to reenter education, and offer a wider range of nonacademic instruction than most of the other rich democracies. The main issue facing most American school children is not admission to college but preparation for college, which adequacy addresses.⁵¹

Of course, if everyone had an education that was adequate for college, college admissions might become more competitive across a broader spectrum of schools. Thus, as Gerry Cohen once pointed out about the freedom of the proletariat⁵²—just because any single person can escape from a life dependent on earning wages, it doesn't follow that everyone can escape—perhaps achieving adequacy in education would only make the conditions for equity in education more relevant, since now access to the elite colleges would be even more competitive. Would the achievement of adequacy now fuel an arms race between the more privileged parents and a further widening of the gap between an adequate threshold and the top end of precollege education? Would parents from Scarsdale and Beverly Hills resort to even more precollege tutoring and funding if inner-city school children in New York and Los Angeles now received a decent education? Perhaps, but I am unsure of precisely what the causal mechanism here would be.

At any rate, adequacy, as I understand it, must be concerned with ensuring that children from all walks of life are represented in society's leading institutions, including elite postsecondary universities and attractive careers. A society of equals requires leadership positions be filled by people from all parts of society, not only the most privileged. In a democratic society, there are no fixed and frozen ranks, where "each person is believed to have his allotted station in the natural order of things."⁵³ If the inequalities in opportunities that adequacy permits fail to integrate such privileged positions in universities and employment across class and racial lines, then adequacy is not adequate to its purpose. This is why adequacy views must look to not only the bottom of the distribution but also to the top of the distribution. Children of all walks of life must have a fair chance of obtaining the most privileged social positions, including a fair chance at access to elite universities and the

51. Even if greater numbers of students from poor families were prepared for college, there is a serious matter of the decreasing affordability of college for the poor. The maximum federal aid for poor university students in 1996 had only 43 percent of the buying power that the grant had in 1980.

52. Gerald Cohen, "The Structure of Proletarian Unfreedom," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 12 (1983): 3–33.

53. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 479.

career opportunities that depend on such access.⁵⁴ The more that education is positional, the more that adequacy will converge with vertical equality of opportunity views.

At the same time, because adequacy approaches tend to look at school reform more holistically than those approaches focused on equality of divisible resources, adequacy may actually have more leverage to narrow the gap between rich and poor. Adequacy for citizenship aims at a high level of achievements, it has the potential to embrace proposals aimed at breaking down class and race segregation, and it seeks to forge relationships among diverse social groups. Students of all races who are exposed to integrated educational settings feel much more comfortable about their ability to live and work in a diverse society. When children from poor families form relationships with children from middle-class backgrounds, their own horizons and opportunities inevitably widen.⁵⁵

The argument from the positional nature of education can also be countered through social design. Indeed, it is worth stressing that education need not have the gatekeeping role that it currently serves for many of our society's highest positions. There can be, and often are, diverse routes to success in life. In Sweden, for example, being a college graduate is not a prerequisite for having a flourishing political career; it is also possible to rise to high political positions because of one's experiences in the labor union movement.⁵⁶ Even in the United States, many of the most visible chief executive officers have not graduated from selective colleges and universities.

Consider also that, according to the citizenship tradition represented by Marshall that I am endorsing, full membership in society requires that individuals have access to certain goods as a right and not as a reward for placing in the competition for elite education. Marshall argued that there are strong reasons to provide a level of health care, income, and security to all as a guaranteed right; they are

54. How much income differential is explained by having a degree from an elite university rather than a noncompetitive one is contested. Stacy Berg Dale and Alan B. Krueger ("Estimating the Payoff of Attending a More Selective College: An Application of Selection on Observables and Unobservables," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 107 [2002]: 1491–1527) found that a school's selectivity, as measured by matriculants' average SAT scores, does not correlate with students' later income, once the abilities of the students upon entering college are taken into account. This finding challenges previous studies positively linking earnings to a college's prestige.

55. See Richard Kahlenberg, *All Together Now: Creating Middle-Class Schools through Public School Choice* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001) for discussion of the benefits of integrated education for all students but especially poor students. I was the first member of my own family to attend college, and forming relationships with middle-class students gave me a broader sense of possibility and freedom than I otherwise would have had.

56. Thanks to Eleni Manis for raising this point in her discussion of my essay.

the entrance tickets for inclusion in society as an equal citizen. To the extent that in providing such rights we decrease the steepness of the social hierarchy associated with education, we thereby decrease education's positionality.

B. State Complicity

It might still be objected that even if neither adequacy nor equality can fully redress the competitive advantages that rich children have in education and employment, adequacy makes the state complicit in the perpetuation of such advantages.⁵⁷ By allowing richer districts to supplement their finances through local parcel taxes or to unequally fund schools in the first place, the state is now setting its stamp of approval on inequality. It is bad enough for private individual factors to influence children's life prospects, but it is a far worse injustice if the state itself is a party to the unfairness.

I agree that the state's role matters: unequal outcomes that might be acceptable when they are the result of private decisions can become morally objectionable when sanctioned or codified by the state. There is a strong *prima facie* case for the equal public provision of education; as *Brown* put it, education must be provided by the state "on equal terms." Besides which, there is a shameful history in which the American state made invidious distinctions between its citizens about the nature of the education they were entitled to receive. Nevertheless, "on equal terms" is a complex idea—or so I have argued. I have endorsed an understanding of this phrase that links it to the equal status of citizenship. And I have argued that such equal status can be compatible with unequal funding, at least to some degree.

Consider the efficiency considerations noted above. If, by allowing richer districts to supplement the levels that the state provides, there is a greater social surplus produced which can improve the lives of the least advantaged, then the state may be justified in facilitating such unequal development of talent through unequal public funds. If authority over schooling is to be decentralized, then this may entail giving to local bodies input over funding decisions. The state's subsidy of such unequal funding through taxation must, however, be related to the democratic state's rational purposes: it cannot rest on the idea that the children of wealthy individuals deserve more as such. I have also argued—in agreement with traditional equality of opportunity theorists—that these considerations of efficiency and local power need to be bounded: all children with the potential for college should be given the education that will enable them to attend college—or if this is unrealistic, then there must be multiple routes to leadership positions—and

57. Thanks to Rob Reich for pressing this point in discussion.

inequalities in educational opportunities must not be so great as to undermine the social respect of the least advantaged.

As a practical matter, given that school funding in the United States occurs within individual states (who differ in their capacities and/or willingness to fund education) and not through a federal body, the national state is already complicit in inequality of educational opportunities. To the extent that we vest democratic decision-making power about the relative priority of education in local communities—whether at the state or district level—we will inevitably have differences in school funding across those communities. Adequacy, however, ensures that vigorous steps will be taken to prevent anyone with the potential from failing to have the opportunities for college and that the disparities in funding between states not undermine the ability of students from these different states to compete on the national job market.

C. Practical Negative Consequences of Employing Adequacy and Not Equity

Equality of opportunity has been an important rallying cry in our nation's educational history. It may be risky to give up that cry: talk of "adequacy" may embolden those who are indifferent to the fate of our nation's poor children. While I have defended adequacy not only on theoretical grounds but also on practical grounds, there is some reason to be skeptical of its practical implications. Adequacy gives to wealthy parents the ability to opt out of the effects of the public education system's levels of funding by buying up better education for their own schools. This, in turn, may actually encourage less than adequate funding for the education of poor students and thus increase the gap between the expectations of students attending different schools. If the wealthy can decouple the fates of their own children so radically from that of everyone else's children, then in cases where a single central decision needs to be undertaken in a state legislature to determine funding for schools, the funding may actually be far lower than if rich and poor saw themselves as standing in the same proverbial boat. Allowing richer parents to opt out of the state-provided school system, or insulate their children from its effects, may leave poor children more vulnerable to less than adequate levels of educational resources.⁵⁸ I do not here assess the merits of this objection, but I think that, in weighing the advantages of adequacy over equity approaches,

58. However, a system with no local supplementation may be politically difficult to sustain as well, as it forces many voters away from their preferred spending levels.

the practical policy consequences of each ultimately have to be considered.⁵⁹

VI. CONCLUSION

I believe that an adequacy theorist can, to a significant degree, incorporate the aspirations of the level playing field interpretations of equality of opportunity through an inclusion of relational and comparative considerations. When the children of the poor do not have a fair access to the educational and employment opportunities afforded to the rich, they are effectively excluded from key parts of society. If adequacy means adequate for democratic citizenship and for relations of civic equality, then adequacy cannot focus only on the bottom of the distribution but must also look to the top of the distribution.

Educational adequacy for citizenship directs us to distribute primary and secondary schooling in terms of five criteria:

1. Secure an educational minimum, whose empirical content is defined dynamically by the changing requirements for full membership in society. These requirements must not be understood narrowly as political capabilities but must also include capabilities for sustained productive employment and solid prospects of living a decent life.
2. Secure fair opportunities for educational and employment positions above the minimum. No social group should be relegated to a second-class position, with access only to inferior and unrewarding schools and jobs. While fair opportunities need not be equal, the extent of acceptable inequality of opportunity for access to positions in society has bounds.
3. Secure the distribution of leadership skills among diverse social groups.⁶⁰
4. Develop the capabilities needed for cooperative interactions in a diverse society. These include trust, tolerance, mutual understanding, and mutual respect.⁶¹ To achieve these capabilities, we need

59. A full discussion of practical consequences of equality of opportunity and adequacy views would also have to consider the possibility of middle-class withdrawal from public schools into private schools. So long as society grants wealthier parents the ability of opting out of the institutions of public education, then wealthy families will have some leverage over the nature of school funding. It is highly unlikely that our society will ever abolish private schooling. For a discussion of different models of school finance reform—with and without local supplementation of funding—see Susanna Loeb, “Estimating the Effects of School Finance Reform: A Framework for a Federalist System,” *Journal of Public Economics* 80 (2001): 225–47.

60. See Elizabeth Anderson, “Fair Opportunity in Education: A Democratic Equality Perspective,” in this issue.

61. Anderson (“Fair Opportunity in Education”) stresses this point.

to move beyond an exclusive focus on resources and focus on integrating schools and neighborhoods across race and class divisions.

5. Avoid leveling down the development of talent and ability through education, except insofar as this is necessary to get all children with the requisite potential above citizenship's high threshold.

While ensuring substantively equal opportunities in employment and higher education is not required by this view of adequacy, there must be enough access to the full range of society's most favored positions to make possible the conditions for people to have egalitarian social relationships. Thus, on my conception of it, adequacy is an egalitarian view.

Moreover, if it turns out that allowing wealthier districts to supplement their educational resources through property and parcel taxes, or through setting up tax-exempt private foundations attached to schools, has the effect of creating less social support for adequate levels of state funding, then adequacy itself condemns such funding inequalities. It may be that aiming at more equal funding of education actually promotes adequacy for citizenship.

The compatibility of the ideal of equal citizenship with significantly differential resources pouring into the lives of children is an open question. But it is clear to me that no egalitarian project for educational reform can succeed without challenging the segregation of schools by race and class. One way to undercut such de facto segregation of schools would be to give students the right to attend the public school of their choice, regardless of the neighborhood in which they reside. Another way would be to challenge zoning laws that have the effect of excluding the poor from middle-class communities. Still another would be simply to close high-poverty schools and redistribute the children of these schools into surrounding middle-class schools.⁶² To advance adequacy for citizenship, we might also consider using policy instruments including affirmative action, college outreach programs, adult learning programs, and top 10 percent admissions plans.⁶³ Any view of education that does not directly take aim at the structure of schooling in America, where about a quarter of our children are isolated and segregated in high-poverty, low-achieving, badly funded schools, cannot be adequate.

62. See Kahlenberg, *All Together Now*, for suggestions.

63. It is in fact unclear as to why a defender of equality of educational opportunity would endorse adult education programs. But such programs are clearly important from a citizenship perspective. I owe this point to Harry Brighouse.