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Dictatorship of Social Class on Education

In the United States, class oftentimes determines the type of education one receives, for example in the reading “Social Class and Hidden Curriculum of Work”, Jean Anyon Argues how social status often affects the learning environment of a child. The factors that impact a student’s environment consist of; the way students are taught, expectations from their teachers, and the lack of resources that are offered to them. The article “Two Students, Two Schools -- 20 Miles and a World Apart” by Mitchell Landsberg, also supports Anyon’s argument by giving a specific example of two students from opposite ends of the social spectrum and how their education differs based on their social status. In the United States social class dictates the outcome of one’s educational opportunities by restricting the lower classes to settle for mediocre education while higher classes are privileged to receive college preparation in order to ensure their success.

In the reading “Social Class and Hidden Curriculum of Work”, Anyon conducts observations in different schools that are located in working class, middle-class, affluent professional, and executive elite communities. As she observed each classroom setting amongst 5th grade classes she was able to see how the differences between each school was caused by economic and occupational social status. In the working class schools, for example, Anyon explains how students are geared towards gaining skills used in occupational jobs rather than skills used to prepare for college level education.

She says, “Most of the rules regarding work are designations of what children are to do; the rules are steps to follow. These steps are told to the children by the teachers and are often written on the board. . . . Work is often evaluated not according to whether it is right or wrong but according to whether the children followed the right steps” (Anyon 13). Rather than having students make connections and understand what they are learning, students are taught that following directions is much more important. Coming from a working class school, I have also experienced receiving teachers who used the same methods of teaching which eventually led to confusion amongst students when entering college.

In contrast, students from executive elite schools, are taught to think on their own rather than having to follow direction. “In executive elite schools, work is developing analytical intellectual powers. Children are continually asked to reason through a problem, to produce intellectual products that are both logically sound and of top academic quality” (Anyon 20). Rather than teaching students what to think, executive elite schools are teaching students how to think independently. This shows how students are given much more freedom to think as individuals which will allow them to gain the necessary qualities needed to receive high paying jobs.

Anyon also shows how teachers from working class schools have much lower expectations towards their students compared to schools at the top of the social spectrum. In working class schools teachers limit their students to learning only rules of punctuation in their English classes however in college writing, punctuation is determined on the context one uses in their writing therefore, these students were not being prepared for college level writing nor were they expected to. When Anyon

questioned one of the teachers about this she responded, "Simple punctuation is all they'll ever use," (Anyon 14). It was easy to see how this teacher did not expect her students to use a higher form of writing, which probably meant that she did not anticipate that her students would go on to pursue a higher education. On contrary, students from executive elite schools, are taught how to further develop their writing skills such as grammar, punctuation, conjunctions etc. Impressively, these students also incorporate writing into each of their subjects as a way to further expand on what they know(Anyon 22).

The Landsberg reading supports Anyon's argument on the distinction of educational opportunities based on the lack of resources when Landsberg compares two students from different economic backgrounds. On one hand, there is Henry who comes from an immigrant family who is part of the working class. His school is located in a neighborhood that is known for its gang violence and high poverty rates. Throughout Henry's high school experience he was deprived of certain privileges that had been provided to students like Kyle. To start off, Henry lacked a life of stability within his home and school. Because his parents were constantly moving due to work, Henry was challenged with having to maintain decent grades. He saw his future headed towards college however, he did not receive guidance or counseling from anyone to point him in the right direction. When it came time to take his practice SAT exam, he was unable to attend because his relatives came from out of town. In Henry's French 3 class, students were highly unprepared and unmotivated and did not meet the requirements of advanced french however, they were still placed in this class. When

Landsberg interviews a teacher from the french 3 class he says, "There's not a lot of willingness to study at home, not a lot of motivation" (Landsberg 9).

The barriers that Henry faced were highly uncommon in a community like Kyle's. Kyle grew up in La Canada High School where the majority of the student body go on to receive a college education. Unlike Henry, Kyle had the privilege of remaining in a stable environment throughout his youth. Because Kyle's education was of great importance to his parents, his father turned down a job offer that would have required him to move to Northern California in order to ensure that his son completed his education at the best schools in La Canada. His mother started a business teaching SAT prep classes which meant that Kyle had the luxury of receiving SAT classes in his home rather than having to take them elsewhere. Kyle also received extensive help from his guidance counselor on deciding which colleges to apply for as well as which one's would best suit him. Lastly, the majority of students in Kyle's German class were far more fluent in the german language compared to Henry's french 3 class. About half of the students in Kyle's German class had the privilege of traveling to Germany where they became familiar with the language.

Henry's parents lacked understanding of the importance of the SAT prep classes because they were not involved in his academics, lack of financial stability in Henry's, household caused his family to constantly move, low funding in Henry's school affected the access to college counselors and funding for trips to foreign countries. Unlike Henry Kyle's school and family were able to avoid these problems because of their financial status which ensured that he would be able to get into good colleges and eventually receive a well paying career. It is obvious that where a person stands on the social and

economical spectrum determines how their educational opportunities will turn out. Henry came from a working class school where he was forced to settle and become accustomed to the resources he was given, however Kyle, who came from a school that would be considered as affluent professional or executive elite, was easily given the resources he needed which guaranteed his success.

Works Cited

Anyon, Jean. "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work." *Chicago Public Schools University of Chicago Internet Project*. University of Chicago.
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Landsberg, Mitchell. "Two Students, Two Schools- 20 Miles and a World Apart." *Los Angeles Times*. 22 June 2009
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Definition: Class: n. a group of people considered as a unit according to economic, occupational, or social status; especially a social rank or caste; as the working class, the middle class (334) according to *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language, Unabridged*. 2nd. ed. New York: Prentice Hall, 1983. Print.

Essay topic: Analyze the social class system in the fictional representation of Melton, Iowa, in "Cora Unashamed" by Langston Hughes. Your analysis may focus on the values of the dominant and subordinate classes, and the rights and privileges that went along with certain levels of status. Look at the actions and words of Mrs. Art Studevart and Cora Jenkins, and the two families they represent, using specific details from the text to illustrate the class differences in this 1930s community. You may also bring in other characters. Analyze and comment on the class system.

To be successful with this essay, do not just describe the plot of the story, but use information from the story to make points about social class.

Requirements: Make a substantial use of text from the reading, through incorporation of quotations and paraphrases. Length should be at least four full typed, numbered pages using 12 point type, double-spaced. Follow Modern Language Association (MLA) style as you include in-text citations and a separate Works Cited page, not to be counted in the four page length.

After beginning your rough draft in class Feb. 9, visit the Writing Center to get help from a tutor by Feb. 20. This appointment is worth 5 points of the assignment. Have the Writing Center stamp the draft reviewed and attach it to the revision you turn in. **Bring two copies of the rough draft to class for a workshop Feb. 14.** Turning in a copy of this rough draft is worth 10 points of the assignment. If you wish instructor feedback on your rough draft, you must make an appointment during office hours. Bring your latest version of the essay to class Feb. 16 for a further workshop. **Turn in the revision, attached to the draft reviewed and stamped by the Writing Center, at the start of class Feb. 21.** Read it out loud to yourself and clarify your wording before printing the draft that you will turn in for grading. Check spelling, punctuation and verb tenses. **Late papers will be marked down.** Students who arrive late to class may forfeit a portion of the grade for this paper.