



The Teaching of English, Social Mobility, and the Ideology of Merit

Author(s): John Harwood

Source: *The English Journal*, Vol. 69, No. 4 (Apr., 1980), pp. 30-37

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/814766>

Accessed: 22-12-2019 16:56 UTC

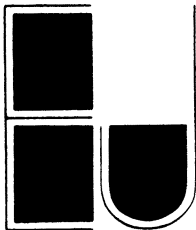
JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

National Council of Teachers of English is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *The English Journal*



Volume 69, Number 4

April 1980

The English Journal

Focus: English for Everyone
The Teaching of English,
Social Mobility, and the
Ideology of Merit
John Harwood

It is time that we had uncommon schools, that we did not leave off our education when we begin to be men and women.

Thoreau, *Walden*

The strongest man is never strong enough to be always master, unless he transforms his power into right and obedience into duty.

Rousseau

If it is true that every age is an age of transition, then it is also true that the now-more-than-ever rhetoric has been heard so often amid perpetual crisis that the speaker's sense of urgency

John Harwood teaches at Christopher Newport College, Newport News, Virginia. Much of the research for the paper was done at an NEH Seminar at the University of Texas. The author wishes to thank James Sledd and Alice Randall for their helpful criticism.

only annoys. English teachers who survived the calamitous sixties and suffered into the gray years of steady state enrollment, of headcounts and FTE's, have likely been undisturbed by the "literacy crisis" by which Edwin Newman, John Simon, Jean Stafford, and a host of academics have proclaimed their discovery that students do not write very well. This "discovery" (is there an antonym for "eureka"?) is less interesting than the range of responses and catalogue of causes that the discoverers do not shrink from providing. While it would no doubt be useful to analyze the political purposes that gave rise to the "discovery" and the insidious purposes to which the crisis has

been put, my reflections are considerably more modest: I propose to examine only one aspect of the circumstances in which English is now taught, an elusive set of assumptions about what is required for students to “get along” in our society. My remarks are variations on a theme so simple and obvious that I blush to state it so boldly: Education is politics. American education is American politics. Every educational act is a political act, reflecting and serving political values. Teachers of “standard” languages are inextricably enmeshed in social and political values and conflicts.

Despite our obsession with modernity and our sense of historical uniqueness, we must surely recognize the modernity of earlier views of American education. Writing in 1909, Ellwood P. Cubberley, a professor at Stanford, notes wistfully that the world of his childhood is no more.

The church has lost its influence over the young, frequently they give it only a nominal allegiance and many children grow up today without any religious training. The little homogeneous community with its limited outlook and its clannish outlook is fast being displaced by semi-urban conditions, a much more cosmopolitan population, and a much freer and an easier life. The apprentice system has practically gone. The amusements and temptations of life have been greatly multiplied. The attitude of the people toward the old problems has greatly changed. Parents everywhere are less strict than they used to be, and the attitude of many communities today, as expressed in their life, their newspapers, and their failure to enforce the law, is really opposed to righteousness and good behavior. The home altogether too often is unintelligent or neglectful in the handling of children, and not infrequently it has abdicated entirely and has turned over to the public school the whole matter of the training and education of the young.¹

Ages and ages hence we can read this with a sigh, for Cubberley’s scenario is ragtime *Future Shock*: Earlier he had spoken of the “knowledge explosion”; the old moral order, once supported by church and home, is being shaken by new ideas; the education of the young has been surrendered to the public schools; the ladder of success grows ever more slippery. Writing in the first issue of *The English Journal*, W. D. Lewis laments the sad state of literacy. His ears sting

from a chorus of complaints from the colleges and the businessmen to whom our students go at the end of the high-school course. We find, for instance, that Harvard University thinks it nec-

¹*Changing Conceptions of Education* (New York: Houghton-Mifflin, 1909), pp. 17-18.

essary to send out to the schools a pamphlet stating the most flagrant errors in English among its Freshmen. . . . The colleges cannot sufficiently condemn our product so far as its training in English is concerned. Businessmen tell us that our graduates cannot write a decent letter, that they are unable to spell and punctuate acceptably; in short, their anathemas are fully as vigorous as are those of the colleges.²

In the next issue of the *Journal*, another teacher of composition sees the whole society lurching into the Age of Dullness, with the only light still flickering in the shaky hands of English teachers.

We are no longer a Bible-reading people; the church and Sunday School are fast losing their hold; family life is less intimate and watchful; respect for law and order is decreasing while forces of evil are steadily multiplying in our midst. The moving pictures and the vaudevilles, cheap and commonplace if not immoral, the trashy magazine, the daily newspaper with its scandal and vulgar comic supplement are but a few of the agencies at work which have already helped to bring about a cheapening of ideals, a lowering of standards, and a blunting of fine sensibilities and distinctions, already ominously perceptible in our American people, both man and youth.³

All of the satanic forces, I hasten to add, were affecting high schools and society in an age when, according to a contemporary account, only 86 of one thousand students who began elementary school graduated from high school.⁴ So much for the good old days.

What is to be done in such evil times? Cubberley’s foresight is as keen as his hindsight, so he envisioned and as a school administrator and social planner worked for a society in which the public schools engineer a perilous harmony between social classes.

The school is essentially a time and labor saving device, created—with us—by democracy to serve democracy’s needs. . . . The school must grasp the significance of its social connections and relations, and must come to realize that its real worth and its hope of adequate reward lies in its social efficiency. . . . With the ever increasing subdivision and specialization of labor, the danger from class subdivision is constantly increasing, and the task is thrown more and more upon

²“The Aim of the English Course,” *English Journal* (January, 1912).

³Emma J. Breck, “A New Task for the English Teacher,” *English Journal* (February, 1912), 68.

⁴Edward L. Thorndike, *The Elimination of Pupils from School* (Washington: Bureau of Education, 1907), no. 4, p. 25.

the school of instilling into all a social and political consciousness that will lead to unity amid diversity, and to united action for the preservation and betterment of our democratic institutions. (pp. 54, 55)

Stripped of Independence Day rhetoric, the purpose of American education, he says, is to prevent class warfare. Schools accomplish this mission efficiently by inculcating a particular political and social consciousness. State-supported education supports the state. And lest this talk of political consciousness sound like the early wall posters of Mao's widow, I should emphasize that Cubberley is quite typical of his age (and ours): His views are consistent with the dominant values of his age, and from such views our own age has derived its understanding of its problems and purposes. Given Cubberley's confident assertion that a particular social and political consciousness would save the day, we might sensibly ask whose values would inform that consciousness, how those values would be legitimated, and what purposes would be served by such values.

The rise of corporate capitalism at the turn of the century has been adequately traced in the hagiography and folklore of American tycoons—Vanderbilt, Rockefeller, Carnegie—and the impact of their values on public education discloses their features as clearly as the busts in any board room.⁵ Industry needed workers who were obedient, punctual, and reliable, and the schools *efficiently* prepared young people to be employees. That employees were widely exploited is apparent from any survey of American history, and the bloody histories of the American labor movement dramatize only the most spectacular abuses. The existence of massive inequality of income and wealth could be explained, justified, and perpetuated by reference to the talismanic con-

⁵See Michael Katz, *Class, Bureaucracy, and Schools* (New York: Praeger, 1971); Michael Katz, *The Irony of Early School Reform* (New York: David McKay, 1972); Martin Carnoy, *Education As Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay, 1974); David Tyack, *The One Best System* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974); Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly, ed., *Education and Colonialism* (New York: Longman, 1978). For a repudiation of the assumptions shared by these authors and a critique of their methods, see Diane Ravitch, *The Revisionist Revisited: A Critique of the Radical Attack on the Schools* (New York: Basic Books, 1978). It is by no means incidental that Ravitch's own "upward mobility" is the subject of an article in *The Chronicle Review* (October 16, 1978), p. 15. For non-historical and non-statistical accounts of the class biases in education, see Richard Sennett and Jonathan Cobb, *The Hidden Injuries of Class* (New York: Vintage, 1972) and an extraordinary book written collectively by the schoolboys of Barbiana, *Letter to a Teacher*, trans. Nora Rossi and Tom Cole (New York: Vintage, 1971).

cepts of merit, competition, and social mobility, all of which could be mediated through schooling. This trinity embodies the primary articles of faith that underlay the extraordinary economic development—and rapacity—of modern corporations in the utilities, petroleum, and steel industries in particular. Indeed, the concept of social mobility is deeply implicated in Americans' desire to get and spend, a passion noted by de Tocqueville nearly two centuries ago. In America, he noted, "The first thing that strikes one . . . is the innumerable crowd of those striving to escape from their original social condition. . . . Every American is eaten up with longing to rise. . . . All are constantly bent on gaining property, reputation, and power."⁶ The wealthy achieved their cachet through their native abilities, hard work and persistence; at least this is the popular mythology.

In the social Darwinism of the era, the wealthy were "the fittest," and even if most children could more reasonably expect to become president than a member of the Rockefeller family, it was still prudent for their parents and teachers to teach them that the most industrious and most capable, like Gatsby, could achieve wealth.

A powerful fiction is thus created, and this fiction takes on explanatory power. It explains that because schooling was ostensibly open to all and because school offered to all the opportunity to acquire an education that led to success, one's position in society "could be portrayed as the result not of birth, but of one's own efforts and talents."⁷ Rich and poor, strong and weak, blue-blood and immigrant—all were to be subject to this natural law. The notions of merit and competition could be used to explain widespread failure and thus rationally consign the vast majority of children, especially minority, immigrant, and lower-class children, to jobs with limited futures and meager wages. The challenge was to convince most students to lower their aspirations rather than to question the basis on which privilege was denied or bestowed. Thus, "if a person is convinced that he is *not able to do well*, he is less likely to rise up against the social system than if he believes that the system is unfair and based on class."⁸ What could be fairer than an assessment of ability, one that yields a two-or-

⁶Cited in Murray Milner, Jr., *The Illusion of Equality* (San Francisco: Jossey-Boss, 1972), p. 8.

⁷Samuel Bowles, "Unequal Education and the Reproduction of the Social Division of Labor" in *Power and Ideology in Education*, ed. Jerome Karabel and A. H. Halsey (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 139.

⁸Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay, 1974), p. 253.



three-digit number, by which students are rank ordered? The hat-trick is to convince people not only that the principles of merit are uniformly applied (that is, there is equal opportunity for all) but that the principles themselves validly assess the “suitability” of particular persons for particular activities.

One of the most powerful methods for stratifying students is the standardized test. Indeed, the notion of “standard” is itself richly ambiguous, suggesting both a norm from which deviations are measured and a measuring rod that itself merits respect. The rise of standardized testing, supported heavily by major American philanthropic foundations, has a long history of “explaining” economic differences between race and social class by anatomizing physiological differences.⁹ In the nineteenth century, an American scientist, Samuel George Morton, sought to explain human differences by comparing the cranial capacities of different ethnic groups. Among nineteenth-century anthropologists, a favorite sport was the ranking of cultures and races by one criterion or another, so the craniometrists (not to be

⁹For the role of philanthropic foundations in the rise of standardized testing, see Caroline Hodges Persell, *Education and Inequality* (New York: Free Press, 1977), pp. 57-58 and Martin Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism*, p. 245.

confused with their vulgar kinsmen, the phrenologists) measured the heads of millions of Americans, establishing elaborate classifications of race in order of perceived merit. It may not be entirely coincidental that the scientist’s own ethnic group inevitably came out on top and that enslaved or defeated groups were on the bottom. The craniometrists compared the length and width of the cranium and calculated the degree to which jaws jutted but found certitude of measurement only in brain weight, few scientists doubting that brain size correlated with intelligence. Professor Morton, dean of American craniometrists, found that he could rank not only races but nationalities of the same race, “discovering” that Caucasians had greatest cranial capacity and that among Caucasians the English were highest, followed by Germans and Americans. Native American, Mexican, and Negro skulls had substantially less cranial capacity than Caucasian skulls, explaining quite clearly why so few of their races had succeeded in American life. Morton’s finagling of his evidence suggests not only that preposterous ideas can be quite convincing if presented with proper “scientific” panache (Emerson, after all, believed in the Cardiff giant) but that the “history of scientific views on race is a mirror of social beliefs

among the privileged.”¹⁰

Without belaboring the interconnections between “scientific” thinking about race, social Darwinism, and schooling, I should note briefly that the twentieth century, while lacking the good-humored lunacy of the craniometrists, has supplied numerous researchers who confuse science and politics, commingling their hopes and their evidence. Sir Francis Galton, a British researcher who made significant contributions to several branches of science, unabashedly championed racism in his works on eugenics. In America, Lewis Terman, one of the leading forces in the institutionalization of intelligence testing in American schools, concluded in 1916 that the intellectual dullness he observed in Chicanos, Indians, and Blacks

seems to be racial, or at least inherent in the family stocks from which they come. The fact that one meets this type with such extraordinary frequency among Indians, Mexicans, and Negroes suggests quite forcibly that the whole question of racial differences in mental traits will have to be taken up anew and by experimental methods. The writer predicts that when this is done, there will be discovered enormously significant racial differences in general intelligence, differences which cannot be wiped out by any scheme or mental culture. Children of this group should be segregated in special classes and be given instruction which is concrete and practical. They cannot master abstractions, but they can often be made efficient workers, able to look out for themselves. There is no possibility at present of convincing society that they should not be allowed to reproduce, although from a eugenic point of view they constitute a grave problem because of their unusually prolific breeding.¹¹

Sir Cyril Burt’s famous studies of twins, which provided Arthur Jensen with theoretical support in his study of the heritability of intelligence, are now regarded with dire suspicion since he appears not only to have falsified data but to have cloned fictional “associates” (Margaret Howard and J. Conway) whose independent “research” supported his work.¹² From standardized testing

¹⁰Stephen Jay Gould, “The Finagle Factor,” *Human Nature* (July, 1978), 87. See also Charles H. Lyons, “The Colonial Mentality: Assessment of the Intelligence of Blacks and of Women in Nineteenth Century America” in *Education and Colonialism*, ed. Philip G. Altbach and Gail P. Kelly (New York: Longman, 1978), pp. 181-206.

¹¹Lewis Terman, *The Measurement of Intelligence* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1916), pp. 92-93.

¹²Persell, p. 73. See also Nicholas Wade, “IQ and Heredity: Suspicion of Fraud Beclouds Classic Experiment,” *Science* (November 26, 1976), 906-19 and D. D. Dorfman’s discussion in *Science* (April 20, 1979), 242ff.

to craniometry to eugenics to fraud is a tortuous path through science and politics, statistical legerdemain and statistical nonsense. But the founders of standardized testing had at least one virtue: Their motives were quite clear. They wanted to promote “efficiency” by stratifying students in a superficially “objective” manner.

The class and racial bias prominent in standardized tests, particularly of I.Q., has been well known from the beginning. Nearly sixty years ago, George Counts clearly described and explained the massive failure of students to persist in public education as a function of race, nationality, and class.¹³ In 1908, Thorndike, who provided much of the direction in educational psychology, noted that blacks and other minorities were disproportionately “eliminated” from the schools. That this result was anything but the inevitable outcome of a meritocratic system was not questioned by the government (Thorndike noted, however, that “a system in which laziness and stupidity eliminate pupils is better than one in which they are eliminated by poverty,” p. 7). The schools mirrored divisions and stratification in society, forming a pyramid very narrow at the top and very broad at the base. As economist Samuel Bowles concludes, “the close relationship between educational attainments and later occupational success thus provides a meritocratic appearance to mask the mechanisms which reproduce the class system from generation to generation.”¹⁴

Since schooling is required by law, children will necessarily be ranked, sorted, and prepared for delivery to the “real world,” a world in which we find extraordinarily real differences in status and power. Such preparation for “real” life through tracking, ability grouping, and so on

¹³George C. Counts, *The Selective Character of American Education* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1922). In Leonard P. Ayres, *Laggards in Our Schools* (New York: Survey Associates, 1913), the author studies the attrition of students from schools, using the factory metaphor as the basis of his analysis: “A factory is most efficient when it is being worked to its full capacity. As rises or falls the relation of finished produce to raw materials, so rise and fall profits and dividends. These principles of manufacturing economics are the impelling forces that explain the vigilant care with which managers and owners watch these variable features and the painstaking exactness with which they state them in the annual reports of mercantile corporations. In vivid contrast to this condition is the lack of definite information available in the field of educational administration with respect to the degree of efficiency in the use of our educational plants” (p. 49). Ayres observed striking differences in the persistence of different ethnic groups but ascribed the differences in factory “output” to the quality of the “raw material.” Such fetching metaphors are common in the professional literature of this period.

¹⁴Bowles, p. 147.



becomes more “efficient” if “objective” tests stratify the students. Students are told that social mobility is the reward for successful competition and that success in school leads to success in the world. But the connection is not nearly so simple or direct as this, one economist even concluding that “the function of education is not to confer skill and therefore increased productivity and higher wages on the worker; it is rather to certify his ‘trainability’ and to confer upon him a certain status by virtue of this certification. Jobs and higher incomes are then distributed on the basis of this certified status.”¹⁵ In fact, most job skills are obtained after the student has obtained the position: jobs are *not* the result of learning particular skills in school. Of college graduates, for example, only 12% listed formal training or specialized courses as sources of skills they use in their work.¹⁶

If schools certify trainability, thereby reducing training costs for employers who would otherwise have to use criteria besides the evidence of “merit” provided by schools, then they become an inexpensive, defensible and “objective” screen-

ing device for employers, even if the relation of education and wealth (remember that through work comes social mobility) is not causal. Ivar Berg observes that today “employers frequently require educational credentials that have little to do with actual job requirements”¹⁷ while other employers have raised educational requirements for jobs whose duties have not changed. Likewise, some jobs “were being performed in 1960 by people with less schooling than those who held the same jobs in 1940, and others by people with more.”¹⁸ While it is true that children today are more likely than their parents to have white-collar jobs, there are both absolutely and relatively more such jobs.¹⁹

In light of these data, what happens to the “upward mobility” carrot dangled before children (and their parents) as the reward of success-

¹⁷Ivar E. Berg, *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery* (New York: Praeger, 1970), p. 120.

¹⁸Persell, p. 159.

¹⁹Milner, p. 115. For Christopher Jencks, the relationship is more complex: “Economic success seems to depend on varieties of luck and on-the-job competence that are only moderately related to family background, schooling, or scores on standardized tests. The definition of competence varies greatly from one job to another, but it seems in most cases to depend more on personality than on technical skills” [*Inequality: A Reassessment of the Effect of Family and Schooling in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1972), p. 8].

ful educational experience and substantial modification (for some) of language, values, and mores.²⁰ The carrot jumps unpredictably as the job/school relationships change and the schools maintain distance between the goal and its pursuer. Many more students now complete high school than ever before and begin college, but the tracking or stratifying of students, a prominent feature of public school education since the 1920s, has now become institutionalized in higher education as well.²¹ With the creation of the community college system in most states, a new track ostensibly offers students either a chance to acquire vocational skills that lead to employment or to follow another tributary into the "mainstream." Though generally regarded as the expression of an open and egalitarian system of higher education, the community college, according to several critics, is not egalitarian at all. It is instead "a prime contemporary expression of the dual historical patterns of class-based tracking and of education inflation. . . . The community college is itself the bottom track of the system of higher education in both class origins and occupational destinations of its students."²²

²⁰The question of upward mobility is a major problem in contemporary sociology. Humanists who venture into the fray without knowing statistical assumptions and techniques will likely encounter severe frustration. A standard work is Peter Blau, *The American Occupational Structure* (New York: Wiley, 1967). Jencks and Riesman note in *The Academic Revolution* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1969) that "the best available evidence suggests that a man's chances of altering his father's position in the educational hierarchy were about the same in the 1950's as in the 1920's" (p. 84). This year the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights published a monograph of real importance: in *Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing House, 1978) the Commission reviews data that measure the degree of improvement or decline in the level of well-being of women and minorities. Briefly, they find that "the minority male and female rates of high school completion were about 65 to 85 percent of the rates for majority males in 1976. The completion rates . . . show a far far greater degree of disparity between majority males, majority females, and minority males and females. Except for the Asian American groups and majority females, the groups' rates do not even approach half the college completion rates of majority males" (p. 16). Some groups, including Native Americans and black females, were even less likely in 1976 to have completed college than in 1970. Unemployment of minorities and women worsened in absolute and relative terms between 1960 and 1976 (p. 29), and minorities who changed occupations between 1965 and 1970 were less upwardly mobile than majority males (p. 45). As economic uncertainty persists or increases, one can expect privileged groups to cultivate more stringent devices for preserving privilege for themselves.

²¹For an excellent review of the research on tracking, see Pursell, pp. 85-99.

²²Jerome Karabel, "Community Colleges and Social Stratification: Submerged Class Conflict in American Higher Education," in *Power and Ideology in Education* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 235.

Other critics call the community college an intricately engineered mechanism for structuring and concealing the mass failure of the academically non-gifted student. What one calls "structured failure" another terms "cooling out," the process of convincing a student (through entrance tests, remedial courses, "vocational" counseling, systems of probation and suspension and so on) that continuance toward a degree is inappropriate without seeming to deny the student educational opportunity.²³

But the community college is not the only "track" on which this race is run. The performance of students in many introductory courses at large universities supports the claim that the function of such courses is not to teach but to stratify, to "weed out," to cull the "college material" from the rest. In the collision between students and the faculty, the conflict may stem not so much from the students' "low standards" and the professors' "high standards" but from the aspirations of students who seek upward mobility in a pyramidal system that is purposely narrow at the top. "Academic standards," writes Jerome Karabel, "are located in the midst of this conflict and serve as a 'covert' mechanism, which . . . enables the university to 'do the dirty work for the rest of society.'" ²⁴"Cooling out" or "structuring failure" is a successful strategy for stratifying students because it legitimates as it sorts, the system of sorting appearing so fair that students blame themselves rather than the system. The attrition in community colleges and large state universities during the first three semesters is very high, leaving students convinced that they had had their "chance" but had failed.²⁵ *Merit vincit omnia.*

Contemporary views of how school and marketplace work together to "remedy" inequality can be seen in the many forums that debate economic and social policy, but a particularly telling example of "received wisdom" on the

²³Karabel, pp. 238ff. See also note 25.

²⁴Karabel, p. 174.

²⁵See also Burton R. Clark, "The Cooling Out Function in Higher Education," *American Journal of Sociology*, 65 (May, 1960), 569-76. Jencks and Riesman argue that "given current tendency to siphon first-generation collegians into colleges with high attrition and second-generation collegians into colleges with low attrition, the overall attainment gap between children from different cultural backgrounds may well continue to widen for some time to come" (p. 97). For more sanguine notions, see K. Patricia Cross, *Accent on Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1976) and *Beyond the Open Door* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1971); John Roueche, *A Modest Proposal* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1973); and Mina Shaughnessy, *Errors and Expectations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

matter can be seen in popular college textbooks. One should notice, for example, how an economic text now in its sixth edition summarizes the moral foundations of the marketplace:

The price system is an impersonal mechanism, and the distribution of income to which it gives rise may entail more inequality than society desires. The market system yields very large incomes to those whose labor, by virtue of inherent ability and acquired education and skills, commands high wages. Similarly, those who possess—by virtue of hard work or easy inheritance—valuable capital and land receive large property incomes. But others in our society have less ability and receive modest amounts of education and training, and these same people typically have accumulated or inherited no property resources. Hence, their incomes are very low. . . . There is considerable debate about whether the government has sufficiently reduced income inequality and provided a minimum standard of living for all its citizens.²⁶

Several aspects of this fiction merit comment, since this view is typical of explanations offered by many contemporary economists and politicians. First, the price system is said to be “impersonal,” ignoring the widespread success of

²⁶Campbell R. McConnell, *Economics: Principles, Problems, and Policies*. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1975), 6th Edition, pp. 103-104.

individuals and corporations in manipulating prices in a way that quite *personally* benefits them and injures others. This “impersonal” quality supports the fiction of “objectivity” and “merit” as determinants of success in “real-world competition.” Second, McConnell asserts that inequality of income may be more extreme than society “desires.” Putting aside the abstraction of “society,” we might ask “Who desires inequality, and how much inequality do they desire?” Do their desires have limits? Third, McConnell links ability to education and education to income (and thus to social mobility), ignoring that the actual relationship is nowhere that simple. Fourth, the severe inequality of wealth and income seems to be the result of competition in the marketplace, an expression of raw social Darwinism.²⁷ As we sow, so shall we reap. Finally, the delicious litotes of McConnell’s final sentence needs no further analysis: the understatement makes quite clear the relationship among principles, policies, and problems.

In summary, then, it seems reasonable to argue that the system of education in this country mirrors, creates, and legitimates inequalities of the larger society that supports it. In light of such a system—and it is in such a system that English is taught—classroom instruction in English has a small but significant role. E

²⁷The Commission on Civil Rights confirms these trends in *Social Indicators of Equality for Minorities and Women*, (1978).

	<i>College Completion</i>			<i>Social Indicator Values</i> (Ratios of raw measures to the majority male population)		
	<i>Raw Measure^a</i>					
	1960	1970	1976	1960	1970	1976
Males						
Amer. Ind./Alask. Nat.	03	08	08	.15	.36	.24*
Blacks	04	06	11	.20	.27	.32
Mexican Americans	04	05	11	.20	.23	.32
Japanese Americans	35	39	53	1.75	1.77	1.56
Chinese Americans	49	58	60	2.45	2.64	1.76
Philipino Americans	19	28	34	.95	1.27	1.00
Puerto Ricans	04	04	06	.20	.18	.18
Majority	20	22	34	1.00	1.00	1.00
Females						
Amer. Ind./Alask. Nat.	02	05	04	.10	.23	.12
Blacks	06	08	11	.30	.36	.32
Mexican Americans	02	03	05	.10	.14	.15
Japanese Americans	13	31	35	.65	1.41	1.03
Chinese Americans	26	42	44	1.30	1.91	1.29
Philipino Americans	16	50	51	.80	2.27	1.50
Puerto Ricans	01	03	04	.05	.14	.12
Majority	09	14	22	.45	.64	.65

^aThe percentage of persons from 25 to 29 years of age who have completed at least 4 years of college.

*This can be interpreted as follows: “In 1976 the college completion rate for American Indian and Alaskan Natives male was 24 percent of (or 76 percent below) the rate for majority males.”