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Darling-Hammond, Linda. (2010). *The Flat World and Education: How America's Commitment To Equity Will Determine Our Future*. NY: Teachers College Press.

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There exists a substantive literature base concerning educational policy, reform, and equity, particularly in recent years as the U.S. aims to improve the nation's perceived competitiveness in the global economy. However, few scholars have detailed equitable access to public education as clearly and descriptively as Linda Darling-Hammond. Throughout her career, Darling-Hammond has spoken explicitly about the increasingly inequitable structures of schools. Playing on Friedman's (2005) previously contested text title, Darling-Hammond lends a subtitle that speaks to Friedman's lack of conversation regarding equitable educational structures that might support U.S. students' ability to compete in the global market. In this text, she compiles her wealth of research, providing a clear history of education policy that

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brought our nation's schools to the place in which we find ourselves today. Darling-Hammond challenges the 19th century factory model on which the U.S. public school system was designed while detailing the ways in which state and federal policy makers may support equitable opportunities for all students.

Much of the publicized discussion regarding education policy revolves around outcomes and often short-term solutions. Such short-term policy decisions often result in unintended consequences shortchanging historically underserved school communities (Smith & Hoffman, 2011). James Banks' forward sets the tone for the text as he provides an account of inequity across the increasingly diverse student populations in the U.S. He states that, as a call to action, this text vividly describes the ways in which "students of color in the United States are the canaries in the coalmine" (p. x) and what we must do in order to effect long-term change for the betterment of all U.S. citizens.

Divided into eight chapters, this text begins with an overview of the ways in which educational inequity and the global economy exist as interdependent entities. As segregation increased and disparities increased over the last two decades, progress regarding school finance reform and equitable educational practice has plateaued, according to the author. She states that unequal access to intellectually challenging progress measured on international assessments influences the country's low international rankings. She paints a clear picture of the funding structures that lead increasing populations of students of color to become incarcerated as they concurrently become under-educated and unemployed. As schools and prisons compete for state funding, the relationship between education, employment, and incarceration strengthens. According to the author, the United States:

finds itself in a catch-22 situation from which it cannot long sustain the healthy democracy and high-tech economy it needs to create a strong standard of living for most citizens. The failure of many states to invest adequately in the education of low-income children and new immigrants, to provide them with effective teachers and the necessary curriculum and

learning materials, results in growing numbers leaving school without the skills needed to become a part of the economy. (p. 25)

In the second chapter, Darling-Hammond provides a detailed account of how policymakers construct “the opportunity gap” by putting forth the five factors that contribute to unequal and inadequate educational outcomes in U.S. public schools:

1. high levels of poverty coupled with few supports for low-income children’s health
2. inequitable allocation of school resources, exacerbated by increasing school segregation
3. inadequate teacher preparation systems for all communities
4. “rationing” curriculum by within- and across-school stratification
5. factory model designs that lead to dysfunctional teaching and learning environments

This chapter also serves as a clear historical overview of the ways in which eugenics, the so-called science based on the assertion “that each individual’s immutable heredity sets limits on achievement” (Selden, 2007), impacted tracking policies created in the early 1900s and perpetuated today. Creating layers of inequitable practice based on debunked science over a century old, Darling-Hammond presents a meta-analysis of studies showing significant outcome disparities between advanced and remedial tracks, as well as between English speakers and English Language Learners.

Chapter three, *New Standards and Old Inequalities*, challenges notions of standardized testing and the focus on educational outcomes. Not mincing words, the author states:

students who have no control of the quality of education they receive are the ones held most accountable- and punished most severely and repeatedly for the failures of the system in which they are trapped. That there has been little outcry is undoubtedly linked to the fact that the victims are overwhelmingly poor children of color, viewed as expendable and undeserving of serious investment. (p. 79)

Outlining research reports that challenge assumptions regarding standardized testing and improved academic achievement, Darling-Hammond points to increasing discrepancies, rather than equitable gains, regarding schooling experiences for students of color.

Chapter four serves as a response to the challenges outlined in the previous chapter. Rather than the focus on outputs, such as standardized test scores and other accountability measures, Darling-Hammond focuses here on financial schooling inputs. She examines inequitable school funding structures, first challenging the belief that equitable input does not result in equitable outcomes. She states that this argument:

Takes two forms: first, that schools, especially the poor urban and rural schools that are the usual subjects of litigation, are incompetent or inefficient and would waste additional money if they received it, and second, that students are unable to benefit because they live in a “culture of poverty,” experience poor parenting, or are, implicitly, though it is not usually said straightforwardly, innately inferior. (p 120)

Following this strong set of assertions, Darling-Hammond provides a clear and concise outline of federal policies impacting inequitable school funding. The remainder of the chapter outlines New Jersey’s history of inequitable funding prior to 1998 and the drastic subsequent gains in both funding input and educational outcomes.

In the subsequent chapter, Darling-Hammond continues her examination of funding structures by detailing the funding policies enacted in Connecticut, North Carolina, and California. Describing both state policies and local implementation of such policies, the author leads the reader through the ways Connecticut and North Carolina narrowed their achievement gaps while their populations of English Language Learners and low-income families grew. California serves as a case study of how poor funding structures coupled with policies regarding teacher preparation, curriculum, and short-term mandates may result in increasingly inequitable school outcomes. This stark contrast helps the reader to understand the nuances of school policy and the intricate ways in which the layered webs of school, district, state, and federal education

mandates intersect in ways that may be detrimental or beneficial to historically underserved groups of students.

After six chapters detailing the ways in which the United States fails to adequately provide equitable educational opportunities to all students, Darling-Hammond turns to strategies for improvement. Chapters seven through nine provide an optimistic and pragmatic approach to affecting change. In chapter seven, Darling-Hammond details how Finland, Korea, and Singapore achieve “extraordinary attainment.” Strong teacher education funded entirely by the government, reduced beginning teacher loads with mentoring, ongoing professional learning embedded in weekly collaborative planning time, leadership development, and equitable salaries competitive with other professional fields such as medicine create the foundation for such academic achievement. The chapter includes detailed means by which these aspects are implemented in national school systems and contrasts between the experiences of educators abroad and here in the U.S.

Chapter eight continues the author’s call to action as she calls for “major redesign” of schools. Those that have realized more equitable and higher achievement gains restructured to create: small units, student groups for multiple years, teacher groups, common planning time, cooperative learning, parental involvement, and school-wide staff decision-making. She continues, asserting that school districts also require redesign “from bureaucratic accountability... to professional accountability” (p. 270).

In the final chapter, Darling-Hammond summarizes the policies “needed to create a context in which the kinds of schools described here may become the norm rather than the exception, and all students, regardless of race, income, or zip code, achieve the right to learn” (p. 277). She presents “five key elements” for such a norm: 1) *meaningful learning goals*, 2) *intelligent, reciprocal accountability systems*, 3) *equitable and adequate resources*, 4) *strong professional standards and supports for all educators*, and 5) *schools organized for student and teacher learning*.

Strengths and Limitations of the Text

Darling-Hammond presents a case for rethinking the term *education reform*. Without pandering to any particular political party, she braids together research framed in various methodological genres in order to give the reader pause. Politically charged education agendas all fall under critique here, as Darling-Hammond paints a picture of U.S. schools and school reforms that fall short of leaving no child behind. Of particular interest is her ability to present the big picture while detailing the federal, state, and local structures that impact our nation's public schools.

If I might describe a limitation of the text, I should address the contested description of the world as flat. We often debate the idea of comparisons between schools in the U.S. and other nations as the differing positionalities and cultural norms make such comparisons challenging at best. However, the current dialogue on education reform and policy necessitates such a response. Darling-Hammond provides this response in such a way to address concerns regarding perceived global competitiveness of U.S. public school students as well as the increasing achievement gap through her complete analysis of current so-called reforms that perpetuate inequality. Taking this a bit further, the reader may conclude that much of what has been called education reform only serves to exacerbate unequal educational outcomes.

Scholarship regarding education reform often examines one phenomenon without an in-depth discussion of the interplay between many social structures. Whether the inquiry focuses on teacher preparation, teacher evaluation, student achievement gaps, funding structures, or policy implementation, the work comprises a piecemeal approach to large-scale concerns regarding the U.S. public school system. Darling-Hammond asserts that in order to prepare all students, we must move:

beyond a collection of disparate and shifting reform initiatives, only occasionally related to what we know about teaching and learning, to a thoughtful, well-organized, and well-supported set of policies that will enable students to learn how to learn, create, and invent the new world they are entering. (pp. 2-3)

Her text fills this important void, depicting the often-neglected relationships across and between education policies and practices. This thorough analysis of existing qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods education scholarship is an important read for all stakeholders actively involved in education practice or policy.

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