

Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools

Jonathan Kozol
1991

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Things to keep in mind...

- The “analysis of diverse personal traits” activity in which we looked at the influences of each of our trait.
- How these inequalities play a role in any classroom.
- What this means to us as future educators.

All About Jonathan Kozol

- Kozol first came to attention in 1967- *Death at an Early Age*- Documents his experiences as a substitute teacher in the Boston school system.
- His books examine social context of schools.
- Observed schools and conditions of lives of families.
- Conducted study of revolutionary Cuba's educational system
- Has studied the lives of students, teachers, parents who face “savagely” complex circumstances

Within Savage Inequalities

- Kozol argues that America's schools are more segregated now than they were in 1954.
- His points are based on two years of observations and interviews with students, teachers, and parents.
- Shows how much work still needs to be done in public education in the U.S.
- (Looks a lot at urban schools)

Kozol's Example of Inequality in 1964

- He began teaching in 1964 at a segregated public school in Boston-
- Fourth grade class that had no classroom, over 35 students, had 13 different teachers in one year, and hadn't had a permanent teacher since kindergarten
- **RESULTS:** Reading= second grade level
Math= first grade level

1964 Example Continued

- Presented the class with poetry to get students interested:
- Langston Hughes “Dream Deferred”

What happens to a dream deferred?

Does it dry up

like a raisin in the sun?

*He was fired after reading this because it was one of the poems on a list of fourth grade poems that are not allowed because they were “too advanced” or “inflammatory. (Deviating from the curriculum).

The FlipSide in the Suburbs

- He moved to a suburban school in Boston- very wealthy, 21 children, cheerful building, and a staff that welcomed innovation.
- After this, he began exploring issues of health education of farm workers, adult illiterates, homeless.
- Came to New York then returned to Boston in 1988 and realized he missed the children and spending time in public schools.

Kozol's Journey- 1988

- Set off in 1988 for a two year journey- visited schools and spoke with children in about 30 neighborhoods (Illinois, Washington D.C., New York, San Antonio, etc.)
- In his travels he was shocked about how much racial segregation still persists in the public schools.

Brown v. Board of Education

- Kozol found that this supreme court decision that found segregated education unconstitutional because it was “inherently unequal” did not have much effect on the urban schools he visited.
- Schools were 95-99 percent non-white.
- No school he saw in the US had nonwhite children in large amounts mixed with white children.

Blind to It All

- Not many wanted to address this situation, and referred to segregation as something of the past that was already handled- “a past injustice.”
- National reports did not mention segregation/inequality either- just low reading scores, high dropout rates, poor motivation
- Baltimore, Milwaukee and Detroit proposed separate schools/classes for black males.

Blind To it All Continued

- Washington, Philadelphia, New York also considered the segregation of black males as the answer.
- Booker T. Washington usually cited, not W.E.B. Dubois.
- Martin Luther King was only mentioned a few times of year- “The Dream”- but then disregarded in practice or belief that white and black kids should go to school together.

Disregarding *Brown v. Board of Ed*

- Kozol states that the world has turned its back on the legal ramifications of the *Brown* decision and is instead closer to the struggles of *Plessy v Ferguson* (1896)- segregated institutions are okay as long as they are equal.
- In urban schools he has seen that only one school is “restructured” or reformed to make it seem as if things are being taken care of, but the reforms usually don’t reach beyond that school.

Ghetto Education

- Restructuring just seems to be moving around the same decaying furniture and resources.
- Schools are still segregated.
- “Ghetto education as a permanent American reality appeared to be accepted.”
- “Perceived objective was a more efficient ghetto school.”

Social Policy- Death Zones

- Kozol says that in public schooling social policy has been set back almost 100 years.
- Urban Schools- unhappy places- bleak, tall housing projects with barbed wire, Drug-free zone signs, guarded doors, police, steal window grates
- “every face was a black face.”
- Death Zone= reference to the rate of infant death in ghetto neighborhoods.

“Death Zones”

- This idea spread through the schools
- Kozol said he did not understand why people would let their children go to schools in places like this where no politicians, school board president, or CEO would even work.
- Found that children have the same questions and know what is going on.

The Children Know

- Children are often more perceptive and interesting about the day to day realities of life in school but the children's voice was missing from these discussions.
- Kozol decided to listen to children and let their voices be heard through his books.

East St. Louis

- Has some of the sickest children in America
- Out of 66 cities in Illinois it ranks 1st in fetal death and premature birth, and 3rd in infant death.
- Health & Well-being Concerns- sewage in streets, foul air, high lead levels in soil, poverty, lack of education, crime , insufficient health and hospital care, unemployment.
- No where for a women to have a baby safely- infant death rate is rising.
- Along with this, poor nutrition for children- average daily food expenditure= \$2.40 per child
- Of every 100 children, 55 were incompletely immunized for polio, diphtheria, measles, and whooping cough.

New York City

- Dental problems plague the children- wear down the stamina of children and defeat their ambitions. Become used to feeling constant pain.
- No health care- red tape, waiting lists, problems with welfare cards makes it difficult to seek help from clinics.

The South Bronx

- Kozol spoke with a 16 year old students in the fall of 1989- said there was a lack of textbooks. The student did not have a science text the whole year, and got his English text 2 months into the year. Then the school takes away the books 1 week prior to the end of the semester.
- Forced to study without a textbook-feeling overwhelmed.
- Asked teacher for extra help- teacher says she has no time. Asked to come early- security precautions make it impossible.

Weight of the World

- This student is unable to answer the questions. He is in a dark room, worried about this and his mother's cancer. When it is time to say good-bye to Kozol, he breaks down and cries.
- Later informs Kozol that there are 42 students in science class, 40 in English, 45 in homeroom—people must stand in back of class.

Unproductive Learning Environments

- A Bronx high school teacher: 5 classes with 42 students each. More kids than desks. No textbooks yet. Noise from construction outside. Drilling in the hall right outside the classroom.
- Students end up leaving because there's no room for them.
- It's as if the schools count on the failure of one half of each class. If they didn't expect this maybe it'd be different?
- Smaller classes would allow teachers to spend more time, extra help, track students down, go to their homes.

Student Frustration

- 2 poems that students wrote:
- To Martin Luther King
 - “He tried to help the white and black/
Now that he’s dead he can’t do jack”
- “America the beautiful/ Who are you beautiful for?”
- In NYC 1 counselor to 700 student- little help available to those confused.

Lower Price Hill, Cincinnati

- Children living in poverty but they were poor Appalachian white children. Living in isolation from the rest of the city.
- Demographics- 27 % of adults finished H.S. Many need welfare but wont turn to it because they associate it with blacks. Low-education – lower paying jobs.
- Chemical pollutants and smoke from near by factories, prostitutes across the street, graffiti, abandoned building surround their schools.
- These kids have lowest skills in math and reading. Have a bleak and bare look on their faces.
- Poor resources and facilities- outdated and locked up
- Student have behavior problems- poor study habits- learn from the streets.

Cincinnati Reports

- School had second highest dropout rate, 85 % below the national median in reading. Too many students need the remedial reading programs and there's only one instructor.
- “The younger children seem to have a bit more fire” than those who are older.”
- Cross-busing will be done the following year with black students- never the middle class whites and asking why is a question that people wont ask.
- After all of this students can not pass the tests to get into good schools, and never mind college.

Kozol's Final Words

- Says that from many angles America has beautiful things to offer, and Kozol wonders would things be different if all children could see and experience the beautiful things America has to offer.
- He says that greatness should be shared no matter what you're born into.
- “They are all quite wonderful and innocent when they are small. We soil them needlessly.”

Some things to think about...

- Does this effect us as present or future educators?
How?
- This selection was written in 1991, do you think this all still exists now, in 2008?
- How can we confront these things as future educators?
- Imagine someone broke both of your arms and told you to write a 500 word essay in 40 minutes, is that very possible or fair? Oh yes, and your essays will be compared to others! (what should really be expected?)

Clip of Kozol on *The Shame of the Nation*

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VS9XHbEaFY>



Bibliography

- Schultz, F. (2000). *SOURCES: Notable selections in education*. New York: McGraw-Hill Dushkin.
- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7VS9XHbEaFY>

Extra Information

- These are some outside sources that deal with inequalities in America's schools:

[The Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America](#)

by Jonathan Kozol

Published in 2005

Amazing Grace: The Lives of Children and the Conscience of a Nation

by Jonathan Kozol

Published in 1995

More Extra Information

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu9PeeS0DG
Y&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bu9PeeS0DG
Y&feature=related)

(Jonathan Kozol: Letter to a Young Teacher)

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urBIZUrDm
Fo&feature=related](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=urBIZUrDm
Fo&feature=related)

(Jonathan Kozol: The Restoration of Apartheid
Schooling)

More Extra Information

<http://www.curp.neu.edu/sitearchive/staffpicks.asp?id=1117>

(A review of *Savage Inequalities: Children in America's Schools*)

http://www.blackcommentator.com/13_education.html

(*Black Children Still Victimized by "Savage Inequalities": Public education amid Racism and Isolation*)