Chapter nine by Sadovnik, Cookson, and Semel (2006) discusses various explanations that have been established over the years through research for educational inequality. The chapter begins by talking about two types of theories, functional and conflict, before breaking down the explanations further into both student-centered and school-centered explanations. Following the chapter is an interesting article by Karen Karp titled “Females + Mathematics = A Complex Equation.” This article talks about differences between males and females when it comes to math and science courses. The last article in the chapter, “A Black Student’s Reflection on Public and Private Schools” by Imani Perry also gives an eye opening look into the differences between private and public schools.

Sadovnik and researchers begin the chapter by explaining that functionalists believe the purpose of schools is to divide the best and brightest students from the low achievers. Essentially functionalists believe that all students are individuals and should be represented in such a way (Sadovnik et al., p.395). Whereas conflict theorists, aim for more than just the equality of opportunity.

A student-centered explanation for this inequality is shown in the Coleman Report which showed a larger achievement gap between students in the same school than students in different districts. I found this interesting but can see how it is true in that teachers in the same building are holding their students to different expectations and learning standards therefore creating large gaps in student achievement. And if all schools run in this way then the achievement gap between districts would be expected to be small.
Sadovnik and researchers pose an interesting question as they talk about the film *Educating Rita*. The film raises the question “is the price of losing one’s culture too high a price to pay” (Sadovnik et al., p. 402)? I feel as though I found the answer to this question as I read Perry’s article. From the article I would assume that Perry would agree the answer to this question would be no. I only assume this because in the end she decided to go back to private school knowing she would be a minority because she valued her education more than she valued her culture. I was happy that Perry decided to return to private school because I felt as though she was able to receive a more valuable education. I felt as though she was slipping through the cracks in public school as teachers did not take the extra step to help her because she was only average. This was not fair to her but unfortunately it does happen more often than not.

I found it interesting when I read that sixty percent of the freshman at universities such as Berkley and UCLA are made up of Asian Americans (Sadovnik et al., p. 404). This makes me wonder about our educational system and why these students, who English is a second language to, can succeed better than other ESL students. I suppose the answer to this is related to other student-centered explanations such as their family values, the high expectations set on them, social class standing, and that they come to the US with the tools they will need to be successful.

One of the school-centered explanations given by Slavin and researchers deals with school financing stating that students in New York City are given, through funding, less than $10,000 while students in Long Island are given on average more than $15,000. Why must there be such a significant difference? Although the majority of funding for schools is given by state and local taxes, is there something else we could do to make this gap smaller in order to really give our students an equal education?
Karp’s article was especially interesting to me. I feel like when it comes to math and science females have everything playing against them from social expectations to genetics and I just don’t see this as fair. I think that to keep things fair in this part of the educational system there have to be more people willing to put in the extra effort to show females they can do it if they really want. I remember back to when I was in middle school and high school and we had a team of female engineers come in and work with a small group of us girls once a month or so to show us that females can do well in math and science. Little things like this can make a world of differences.

Discussion Questions:

1. Do you think collaboration on part of the teachers would be of benefit to reduce effects of tracking in high school so that all students learn the same material at the same time? (In other words, all teachers create lessons, quizzes, tests, and homework together and teach the same thing each day).

2. The 10th Amendment to the Constitution declares education a local and state matter and that federal funding of education would take away from local decisions. But do you think it would be possible/ a valid idea to take all funding made from taxes and federal funds and put it into a large account and then divide the money equally between all children in the public school system to close the gap?