1. The three concepts that people should know about are cultural capital, the different forms of parenting, and learning competencies. These three concepts help illuminate various indirect and obscure ways in which socioeconomic disparity leads to educational inequality and thereby hampers social mobility. In a society widely believed to offer opportunities for success to those who are qualified, these particular pathways that perpetuate inequality are often overlooked. Unlike economic capital, differences in cultural capital, parenting and learning competencies are hard to measure and even harder to trace back to social origin, but a nuanced understanding of these concepts adds another dimension to the discussion of inequality.   
     
   First, cultural capital is not patently recognizable like economic capital. It manifests in the possession of certain culturally valuable objects, social manners, behavioral tendencies, credentials and more. Cultural capital is formed mainly by transforming economic capital. The problem with cultural capital is that its close association with socioeconomic class is not widely recognized, and therefore it is used as a reliable indicator of ability/worthiness. People wealthy in cultural capital have an advantage in school. They are likely to be the subject of high teacher expectations, and embodied cultural capital is regarded as a merit in university admissions. Thus, cultural capital enables the perpetuation of inequality through the school system. Furthermore, it adds another layer to the preexisting financial barrier between the lower class and the middle and upper classes. The sheer purchase power of educational resources and opportunities ceases to be the only obstacle in the lower class’s road to high educational attainment. On top of financial capital, they must also gain cultural capital to access the same opportunities and privileges enjoyed by the fortunate, but for a person of modest origins, cultural capital can be even more difficult to gain than financial capital. Understanding this elusive concept can help steer people’s attention to subtler sources of inequity and break away from the simplistic notion that overcoming financial barriers ends the debate on inequality and paves the way to a truly opportunistically egalitarian society.

Parenting is another factor that is indispensable to and yet all too often forgotten in the debate of inequality. It is a universally acknowledged truth that parenting is pivotal to a child’s development and socialization. The formation of one’s character is in large part accredited to the environment they were raised in, and in most cases it is the parents that are responsible for shaping this environment. If the significance of parenting in children’s development is well recognized, what is not is the close ties between parenting and socioeconomic class. There are roughly two styles of parenting employed by people: concerted cultivation and the accomplishment of natural growth. The former is characterized by active intervention of the parents on their children’s lives; teaching them skills, assisting them with their school lives, constantly monitoring and communicating with them in order to collect information and make minor adjustments to steer them down the right path. Needless to say, this kind of attention towards children positively affects their performance in school and beyond. Children backed by strong parental support have a considerable advantage in many affairs when compared to children who are left to navigate their lives on their own. This is called the accomplishment of natural growth, and it is the parental belief that children will grow up without particular involvement by their parents in their everyday lives. Parents who practice this form of parenting do not discuss school with their children or try to weigh in on important life decisions that the children might make. Their support is limited, and they do not take initiative to plan out and pave a path for their children; instead they believe that growth will be accomplished naturally. There is nothing inherently wrong or inferior about this style of parenting, but when compared with concerted cultivation, it is indisputable that the latter fares better in school and other social institutions. Therefore, when considering that concerted cultivation is practiced mainly by middle and upper class parents and the accomplishment of natural growth by working class parents, parenting becomes another channel by which socioeconomic inequality is dynastically transmitted through the school system. Indeed, Heckman et. al. (2017) have estimated a return on investment of around 13% for an early childhood program that seeks to simulate the effects of concerted cultivation on children from birth to the age of 5. In the present society children are deemed as their parents’ responsibility, and public policy aimed at rectifying differences derived from parental style are lacking. However, Heckman’s proposal points to an alternative, pareto efficient path in which difference in parenting can be accounted for and controlled to a certain extent, introducing further equality.

Finally, learning competencies may be the most obscure of the three concepts listed here. This is because the consensus among the public is that certain faculties to learn such as the ability to self-learn are either innate and are determined by nature or are a product of effort and an indicator of conviction. Following this intuitive and misguided understanding, the thought that differences in learning competencies must be controlled for is absurd to many. In capitalism, the ideal for society is meritocracy, where all are given an equal chance, but effort and natural ability differentiate those worthy of success and those who are not. It may come as a surprise to such uncritical worshippers of the capitalist model that learning competencies (e.g., eagerness to learn, a good learning habit, the ability to learn how to learn) are not distributed based on genetics or a product of one’s own determination, but picked up from one’s environment. Middle and upper class children are more likely to pick up learning competencies that facilitate further learning than are children who grew up in a working class environment. Even the ability to learn is not open to all, and an admissions system based on educational ability alone still cannot eradicate the influence of socioeconomic class on educational achievement.

As these three concepts show, educational inequality is a multilayered issue that must not be chalked up to purely economic barriers. The push for a truly fair and inclusive society must take into account the subliminal ways in which socioeconomic class influences outcome. However, as it stands, discussion of inequality that includes these dimensions are rare. The dissemination of information regarding these concepts are a prerequisite for igniting such discussions, ultimately leading to a push for change.

Garcia, J. L., Heckman, J. J., Leaf, D. E., & Prados, M. J. (2017). *Quantifying the life-cycle benefits of a prototypical early childhood program*. (NBER Working Paper No. 23479). Retrieved from National Bureau of Economic Research website: http://www.nber.org/papers/w23479

1. The knowledge that I’ve gained in this course has already drastically altered the way I perceive the world and added nuance to the way I assess others. I used to believe humans had a degree of control over their lives and therefore found it appropriate to judge them based on their achievements and effort. I was clueless as to how limited people are by their environment. I do not have a specific, detailed vision for my life and have no plans of having children, so it is unclear to me how I can apply these concepts in the future. However, what I do know is that I would be much more careful to judge others and will make sure to always take their background into account. Specifically, in the realm of politics, I have noticed the emergence of an increasingly condescending left wing in recent years. The strong correlation between education and liberal views is well known. Due to this correlation and the existence of educational inequality, proponents of liberal values are likely to be privileged whereas followers of conservative ideology, especially the populistic trend of conservatism that has been a defining phenomenon of the 21st century, tend towards lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Criticism of conservativism that fails to consider this wider social context is ineffectual, classist and ignorant. Going forward, I would like to make use of the knowledge I have accumulated in this class by vigilantly monitoring such ignorance in myself and in others. Furthermore, I want to pay special attention to educational inequality in my academic career, making educational reform such as the aforementioned proposal by James Heckman a focal point of my research.

(Total words: 1389)

Message to Mr. Matsuoka:

先生の授業からはいつも多くを学んでいて，学術的な成長以上に個人としての成長を促されている気がします．先生のことも先生として以上に一人の個人としてすごく面白く，大好きです．時々（というか頻繁に）この好意が crosses the threshold of what is sensibly permitted between a professor and their studentかもしれませんけど，それでも温かく受け入れてくれてありがたいです．

先生はいつも一人で多くのものと闘っていて，孤独になってしまわないか心配することがあります．僕なんか先生にとっては目の中のゴミ的な存在かもしれないですけど，いつも先生のことを応援しているので，少しでもその応援を支えにしていただければと思います．

また今期も有意義で楽しい授業をありがとうございました．

あなたのお気に入りのジェイクより

PS. I read up on the harmful effects of marijuana and though I am still very much in support of decriminalizing it, I won’t be partaking in it going forward (not to admit that I ever have, just highlighting that I won’t in the future). Have a great summer :)