Before I took the course EDU 700, my understanding for education equity and equality was very superficial and shallow. I thought it was only about students having same opportunity to enter the school and receiving same treatment from teachers. All of my concerns were about the same, not the fairness. However, this course stimulated me to think about the difference between equality and equity.

From the Oxford English Dictionary, “equality” is related more to numbers or quantity, while “equity” origins from the Latin word *æquitas* which means people exert their rights moderately and reasonably. In the class the widespread “watching baseball game” picture was displayed to explain equality and equity. Equality is about sameness; it focuses on making sure everyone gets the same thing. Equity is about fairness, it ensures that each person gets what he or she needs. Therefore, in educational field we should provide equal resources, treatments and opportunities to maintain equality, and at the same time avoid inequity such as rights of receiving education which cannot be exercised, resources for special education which are in lack of, and so on.

The more I learned about educational inclusiveness, the more I felt frustrated about my own country: China. Although in China we don’t have so many race issues in education as in the U.S., we are far away from educational equity and equality. China has been enduring a large amount of migration of working labors from rural areas to urban areas, whose children are recognized as “migrant children”. Surveys showed that there were approximately 6 million migrant children living in cities and 22 million left at their hometown with grandparents in 2007 (Wang & Holland, 2011). These children have difficulty being enrolled in public schools, especially when their migrant parents can not afford a house in the city. Researchers have found that 6.9% of migrant children had never attended school, and 47% started school after the age of six, which was the entry age by Chinese education law (Nielson, Nyland, Nyland, Smyth, & Zhang, 2006). Thus, in large cities like Beijing or Shanghai, there exists a separation between migrant children and local children, which is very similar to the segregation between African American students and white students.

The educational inequity of migrant children can also be analyzed in four levels. The inequity in historical level and institutional level is highly related. China has implemented a household registration system since the 1950s, which registers an individual at his or her birthplaces as a rural or urban resident and exercise tight control over the urban-rural division. The Chinese old generations thus have a deep-rooted concept of separation between rural areas and urban areas. The household registration system has become a *de facto* administrative system which has led to unequal opportunities and social-economic benefits between rural and urban residents (Wang, & Holland, 2011). In 1980s, the governments began to permit rural workers to move into cities to find a better job and legally transfer their household registration, in order to stimulate the economic development. However, the transference needs too
many requirements and rural workers are hard to get a good job.

Another institutional issue which further compounds the equitable issue of migrant children is the current public finance system in China. The funding for compulsory education belongs to the local governments’ responsibilities and is related only to the children whose household registration falls within their jurisdiction. Therefore, if a migrant child is enrolled in a public school in Shanghai, the school cannot receive extra funds neither from Shanghai government nor from the government of that child’s hometown. That’s why the urban school are unwilling to accept migrant children and sometimes requires extra fees from them.

On the structural level, migrant children usually come from a relatively lower social-economic backgrounds. Their parents come to big cities for a better job, but actually they are not competitive because most of them only have the middle school diploma. They cannot buy a house so their children have barriers to be enrolled in public schools. The expensive price of rent lease limited the size of their apartment, which leads to a bad learning environment of their children at home. Migrant parents usually work too much to have enough time caring for their children’s study and lives, which results in children’s low academic achievement at school. If they cannot transfer the household registration into the urban cities before their children grow to 15 years old, which is the end of the compulsory education in China, their children must go back to hometown to continue the high school or stay with parents but quit school. All these issues made migrant children hard to break through the educational barriers between them and urban children, which leads to reproduction of social class.

On the interpersonal level, migrant children have been enduring exclusion and discrimination from their local classmates. Feelings of “not welcomed and accepted by their host communities”, “lacking in a sense of security” and “isolated” are reported by migrant children (Wang, 2008). Many parents consider migrant children less educated and without good hygienic habits, thus they prefer their children to stay with local students. The dialects and different backgrounds make migrant children difficult to join in the local children’s groups, which brings them a strong feeling of exclusion.

As far as I am concerned, with the objective of achieving education equity in both rural and urban areas, the social-constructed believes should be reformed and supportive policies on educational equity should be implemented.

On one hand, local public schools should transform their stereotypes on migrant children. Schools with equity bring unlimited possibilities to the future of migrant children whereas schools separating migrant and local children are consolidating and reinforcing the current social structure. School teachers and administrators need to see the positive influence brought by different communities and backgrounds. The integration helps narrowing the achievement gap and the racial and social-economic makeups of school are 1¼-times more important in determining a student’s educational outcomes than the student’s own race, ethnicity or social class (Theoharis, 2015). More researches should be down on students’ achievements and competencies in class which integrated migrant children and local children, in order to help local parents and teachers see the benefits of integrated classrooms.
On the other hand, since the exclusion are mostly resulted from the household registration policy and educational funding system, the government must be the key factor of pushing educational equity of migrant children. The desegregation of black students began in 1964 when the Civil Rights Act was passed and has reached its peak in 1991 when the Supreme Court made its key decision about the termination of desegregation orders (Orfield, & Frankenberg, 2014). The government’s policy would directly reflect on the integration of students. In Beijing for example, although the Beijing Municipality has launched the Provisional Regulation for the Compulsory Education of Migrant Children and Juveniles in Beijing (BMCE, 2002), which indicated the local government and public schools in Beijing are responsible for providing education to migrant children. Nevertheless, the government didn’t solve the funding issues, hence districts of Beijing have designed their own detailed rules for the admission of migrant children. Such a general and vague policy meets lots of barriers in implementation. Therefore, the policies we need should be less vague and should be implemented with supportive policies, such as more resources for schools that accept migrant children and benefits also for local children.

In addition, in a macro-level, the national government should provide more funds and resources for supporting education in rural areas, so that migrant workers with higher educational level could have a better job in cities and have less difficulties in affording their children to public schools; migrant children could also have high-quality of education at hometown; local children and parents would have less stereotypes about migrant classmates. It’s human nature that people want to go to economically developed cities. If governments cannot give more developing opportunities for rural areas, all intelligent brains will flow into large cities, enlarging the gap between urban and rural areas.

The public school should be a regulator between the government policies and migrant families. The education provided by school and attitude exerted by school directly influence the learning experience of the children. Education is human rights, not a commodity. Sometimes schools are just passively acting under the current policies. We cannot deny the importance of economic development, but children are the future of the nation. The implementation of policies sometimes conflict with its original intentions and schools should be the first one to find that. In all, investments on education would benefit the social and economic development sooner or later. During the process schools should also play an active and positive role in promoting educational equity.

Reference

