Discussion Questions – February 14

From Heck:

1) In a democracy, what drives educational policy? (p.xv)
   “In the American federalist system, policy change occurs as a result of collective action.”

2) Why has the political conflict changed particularly about educational policy since the nation’s founding? (p.xv)
   “…the scope of political conflict in American government has gradually widened since the founding of the country, as industrialization, urbanization, nationalization, and globalization have altered the meanings of local and national government.”

3) Why have federal policymakers become more active in education? (p.xvi)
   “Although the federal role in education could traditionally be described as an ‘interested bystander’ (because education is a state function), during the 1950s and early 1960s, federal policymakers became more active in education in order to address a number of social problems facing the nation (e.g. segregated schooling, Civil Rights, poverty).”

4) How has this increased role in education manifested itself? (pxvi.)
   Through federal funding of educational programs designed to address the school-related manifestations of segregation, Civil Rights, poverty, and physical disabilities.

5) What is ESEA? (p.xvi)
   The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 passed by the Johnson administration among the many laws enacted as part of the “War on Poverty.”

6) Why was ESEA passed? (From both Spring & Heck various references)
   ESEA was passed to address the many problems faced by schools that were associated with poverty as an integral part of the Johnson administration’s “War on Poverty.”

7) What was the Coleman Report? What did it state? (p.xvi)
   The Coleman Report was a federally-sponsored committee’s report in 1966 which “created an intellectual stir by suggesting that students’ backgrounds played a more powerful role in the quality of their academic achievement than school-based variables. The popular (and incorrect) conclusion drawn from the study was that schools make no difference.”
8) What was a *A Nation at Risk*? (AN@R) What did it state? (p. xvi)
“A Nation at Risk, released by the Reagan Administration in 1983 made the case that the nation was at risk of economic mediocrity, ironically because of years of federal overinvolvement in education. *A Nation at Risk* was not really a research report, but rather, an document outlining a policy agenda that used some description and much more prescription.”

9) What are the problems with policy research? (p. xviii)
(A) “Despite the growing professional literature on educational policy that has accumulated over its first two and a half decades, early reviews of its impact have concluded that this work produced little agreement on the goals or methods of policy research...”
(B) “Other scholars have suggested that previous research on educational policy has too often focused on specific issues and narrow time frames and, therefore, has been of little use in guiding policy development and change beyond limited settings.

10) What is the relationship, according to Heck between policy research and policymakers? (p. xix)
“Criticisms of policy reforms and policy research suggest there is often a disconnect among the worlds of policymakers, practitioners, and researchers.”

11) Heck states that there are 3 assumption. What are they? (p. xix)
(I) “First is the implied assumption that it is necessary for policymakers and researchers to agree on the nature of policy problems and the type of research they would find most useful.”
(II) Second is the assumption that research in the field of education is of general poor quality in comparison to other fields such as medicine and, because of this shortcoming, requires guidance from the federal level to strengthen its design and methodology.”
(III) “A third assumption is that policymakers would act on the basis of relevant studies if they existed.”

12) According to Heck what remedies are indicated by what we acknowledge about the failings of policy research to date? (p. xx & xxi)
(I) “One point concerns the quality of research produced and its potential usefulness in resolving problems.”
(II) “A second point is that longer time frames are needed to study policy change appropriately.
(III) “A third point is that policy activity resides primarily within policy subsystem
(IV) “A final point is that because policy often represents the views of those who can gain access to policy subsystems, it is essential to understand why some groups and values have been so much– or so little–represented in society and schooling in different times in our nation’s history.”
From Spring:
(Note: The term “Socratic” following a question means that the answer is not necessarily found in the reading but might be knowledge found in one's general experience or part of their formal education)

1) According to Spring, what important characteristic have of the country have politicians often tied to education? (p.1)
“From the cold war’s 1958 National Defense Education Act to the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, national politicians cited educational policy as a key to American military and economic global dominance.”

2) What was the role of the Cold War in educational policy? (p.1)
“The cold war between the United States and the Soviet Union prompted the passage of the 1958 National Defense Education Act (NDEA). This federal legislation provided money to educate mathematicians, engineers, scientists, and foreign language experts to ensure U.S. economic and military power.”

3) Were those assumptions ever proven correct? (p.2)
“... there was no clear proof that public schools were in fact the weakest link in national defense or that they were responsible for the United States falling behind the Soviet Union in technological developments. In fact, there was little evidence that the United States, despite the failure to be the first in space, was actually losing the military-technological race. But that didn’t keep politicians from criticizing the schools and demanding federal intervention which eventually came in the form of the NDEA.”

4) What indicators do we have about the consistency of political rhetoric? (p.2-3)
“If schools were truly the problem in the cold war struggle with the Soviet Union then it would have been logical to politicians to praise schools when the Soviet Union collapsed in the 1990s.”

5) What specific characteristic of American education did conservatives blame? (p.2)
(a) “The launching of Sputnik energize other groups who in the 1950s complained that child-centered education was destroying the skills. Led by the Council for Basic Education, which was founded in 1956, these groups demanded that schools return to a teaching of ‘the basics.’”
(b) Adding fuel to criticism of public schools were self-proclaimed anti-Communist groups who claimed that child-centered education and related textbooks were education children for a collectivist society such as the Soviet Union.”

6) Were conservative assumptions ever proven correct? (p.2)
There have been no credible studies that have tied “child-centered” teaching practices to any of the societal problems of the nation as alleged by conservative critics.
7) How were committee chairs selected in Congress until the early 1970s? (general political science)
They were selected by virtue of seniority alone. That is, seniority of the majority party. This resulted in politicians from where there was little inter-party competition, that is, primarily the South (prior to the re-emergence of the Republican party in that region)

8) What role did school integration play in the establishment of national educational policy? (Socratic)
After about 100 years it was clear that the South, the region that had once held African Americans as slaves, would not allow them to attend public schools with white children. Though Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas had ruled that segregation was unconstitutional in 1954, nine years later most of the South’s schools were still segregated.

9) What does Spring list as the 4 critical elements shaping educational policy. (p.3)
   (I) “Outspoken criticism of public schools for failing to teach ‘basic’ subjects by individuals and organized groups.”
   (II) “Claims by politicians and others that public schools are hurting America’s chances at maintaining global military and economic power.”
   (III) “Political concern about balancing local with federal control of education.”
   (IV) “Failure by politicians to praise public schools when global goals are achieved.”

10) What does Spring say about AN@R? (p. 4)
“The report launched an era of national politicians rushing to support curriculum standards and testing as a means of halting America’s supposed economic decline in the world markets.”

11) According to AN@R what is this age (as in era) are we living in? (p.4)
The report stated that we are living in an “information age” when there is intense competition among nations.

12) What was one of the primary proposals of AN@R? (p.5)
“One of the lasting recommendations of the Nation at Risk report was greater testing of students by state and local governments particularly between grade levels and for high school graduation.”

13) What law was The No Child Left Behind Act of 2000 (NCLBA) a renewal of? (p.8)
The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965.

14) What were the shortcomings, according to Spring, of President Clinton’s (and before that Governor Clinton) educational policies? (p.10-11)
“The idea of statewide standards for educational reform would haunt education politics throughout the 1990s and the early part of the twenty-first century.”
15) **What were the long-term policy effects of President Clinton’s educational policy?** (p. 11)
(1) “State politicians discovered that they could win votes by claiming they would improve public schools with state-mandated educational standards and testing programs.”
(2) “The power relations among local schools, state education agencies, and the federal government changed as national and state politicians learned the political value of educational issues.”

16) **What is the paradox of corporate support of education?** (p. 11)
“As a special-interest group, the corporate sector is often interested in contradictory government policies– low taxes and schools that educate quality workers.”

17) **What did Clinton claim to be the cause of schools not succeeding that Spring took issue with?** (p. 12)
“As an example of the role of corporate interests in state politics, it is important to note that Clinton identified low academic standards, as opposed to underfunded schools, as the reason for poorly educated students.”

18) **What are the three points Spring said could be made about educational policy in the 1990s?** (p. 16)
“(1) Education became a central campaign issue in national politics.
(2) Democrats continued to link economic growth in global markets to school improvement
(3) Republicans continued worry about federal control of local schools, moral values in education, and school choice.”

19) **Spring claims compassionate conservatism is an idea that springs from Calvinism. What is Calvinism?** (p. 18)
Calvinism (like compassionate conservatism) believes “that social problems, such as poverty, are the result of poor moral character rather than economic and social conditions.”

20) **President Bush calls himself a conservative. How do his educational policies reflect conservative ideology?** (p. 21)
The entire Bush educational program increases federal control at the exp

21) **What is the ethnicity of most poor children?** (p. Socratic)
Most poor people are of European descent (i.e. white).

22) **What is Spring’s explanation as to why the term ‘disadvantaged children’ is used?** (p. 21)
“As an amendment to the 1965 Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, the No Child Left Behind Act connected standards and testing to providing equality of educational opportunity to disadvantaged children. While the term included children from low-income white families, a large percentage of
disadvantaged children came from descendants of enslaved African workers and those populations conquered by the United States, along with the children of immigrant workers."

23) Spring uses the term ‘conquered populations,’ what does he mean? (p.26)
As a Native American, Spring has sought a term that attempts to classify all oppressed and colonized ethnic groups under one term that reflects their current status as marginalized members of society.

From: The Creation of the Department of Education

1) When was the term ‘Department of Education’ first used?
In 1867, the term was first used by the federal government.

2) What harmed that first effort to elevate the coordination of educational policy?
The incompetence of the first secretary appointed resulted in the department being reduced in importance and placed in another department.

3) What was going on in the United States at that time which might have played a role in the creation of the Department? (Socratic)
The Reconstruction of the conquered South where no public school system had existed and having a public school system was a condition for readmission into the Union.

4) When did the federal government first become involved in education over vocational education?
In 1917 a law was passed which offered federal funding for vocational education.

5) What was the name of that law?
The Smith-Hughes Act.

6) What did President Harding try to do regarding educational policy and the federal government? (From the reading)
In 1922, President Warren Harding attempted to raise the agency which dealt with educational matters to the level of federal department.

7) What happened to that effort? (Socratic)
President Harding died during his first term just as a major scandal reduced his administration’s political power and its programs.
8) **What did President Roosevelt do regarding educational policy and federal involvement?**
In 1939 President Roosevelt moved the Office of Education from the Department of the Interior to the Federal Security Agency.

9) **What was going on in American society at that time?** (Socratic)
The Great Depression and the likely involvement of the United States in the war in Europe.

10) **What was the GI Bill? What was the impact of the GI Bill?**
It was a law which granted monies to veterans of World War II to enable them to pursue their education to improve their skills.

11) **What phenomenon led to a crisis in education during the late 1940s and 1950s? What was the federal government’s response to the crisis?**
The post war baby boom caught most local school districts unprepared for the exponential growth in the number of children entering school. The federal government would become involved in addressing the class shortage through providing funds to states and local districts to build new schools.

12) **What impact did the Soviet Union have on federal educational policy?**
The cold war resulted in an increased federal involvement in education. It was perceived that deficient schools were somehow to blame for the successes of the Soviet Union in everything from its international expansion following World War II to its success in being the first nation to place a person into space.

13) **What was the primary educational concern of the federal government during the 1960s?**
The primary concern of education reform during the 1960s was integration and associated concerns about Civil Rights, equity, and poverty.

14) **What was President Nixon’s plan for education? Why did it fail?**
President Nixon proposed moving all cabinet departments into a smaller number of “super agencies.” This plan was abandoned when high members of the Nixon Administration, including the President himself, were found to have engaged in illegal activities during what has become known as the Watergate Scandal.

15) **Why did President Jimmy Carter finally create the Department of Education?**
one of the primary reasons for President Carter’s creation of the Department of Education was that he had promised to do so and teacher organizations had been critical in his victory both in the Democratic primaries and in the general election against President Ford.