

Term paper on sociological theories in education

Profession, Student



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There are many professionals in both the fields of sociology and the field of education. There are almost as many opinions on the topics that are studied as there are professions. Some of the topics that are frequently studied are the ways in which people learn, the ways in which they interact, and the ways in which they make choices in the early years and how these choices influence them throughout their lives. Fortunately, much of the research that has been done in these areas has come to a consensus and the professionals are learning to collaborate better with each other. For each of these topics, there is a theory, a school of thought, and much research on each to be shared with how it pertains not only in the classroom, but in the real world as well.

Functionalist Theory

Examples of fundamentalism in education can include anyone who comes from humble beginnings, has limited access to high-quality education, but through determination and discipline and realizing that education is a proactive endeavor, are still able to make something of them. A couple

examples of such people in history include George Washington Carver and Benjamin Franklin. More common examples include the children of uneducated immigrants who go on to graduate from college or even higher levels of education.

These examples are also the foundations of the principal of the functionalist theory of socialism of education. With a solid set of thinking skills, motivation, hard work, and discipline, achievement is possible. These core values are also aligned with the values of self-regulated learning (SRL) style of education (Vassallo, 2011, p. 32). Advocates of SRL describe this style of learning as the student being proactive in one's learning and uses self-initiated methods to monitor one's behavior, environment, and cognition to be able to obtain the best learning results from one's efforts (Vassallo, 2011, p. 27). Using the functionalist perspective along with the values taught with the SRL style students can use their own personal strengths to take advantage of opportunities that are available to them.

If viewing the functionalist theory alone, all individuals have an equal chance to obtain any social position. Students are not oppressed by any outside means, achievement is determined solely by the students' willingness to work hard, be disciplined and motivated, and imply various methods of thought (Vassallo, 2011, p. 33). According to these parameters, the primary function of a school is to socialize and the secondary function is to select the individuals who will eventually fill certain roles in society. It is the most talented individuals that will fill the roles requiring those talents. Others who meet certain expectations in school will be rewarded with certain positions in society that require such demands of those roles.

Even supporters of the functionalist theory of education are willing to acknowledge that resources are not equally divided. They do dispute that this uneven distribution is not what determines a disparity in academic outcomes. Functionalist theorists have the logic that all individuals, despite any disparities that they may face, possess opportunities where they can acquire certain qualities and are able to gain qualities of cultural and human capital. This will lead them to achieve economic capital. Even if, some theorists contend, there are some inequalities in society, they are offset by other structures that are in place to enable people the chance to have a fair competition for all positions. Opportunities can be considered as equal as long as the opportunity exists and the motivations are available for one to fulfill one's desires and explicit discrimination is absent in society.

The only way in which the SRL method in its entirety makes absolute sense is if there is no structural forces in place that are directly oppressive in nature. First, students have to buy in completely to the process of SRL taught by teachers who completely understand it themselves. Second, the human capital that the students must possess and acquire completely to be successful includes citizenship, industrial, cognitive, and anything else associated with productivity. Third, all must believe that the schools are just buildings where human capital and its components are transmitted to the eager learners. Fourth, this process needs to begin in elementary school and continue through secondary school and into one's higher education. It is only if all of these steps are followed that the greatest achievement for improved economic and social conditions can be achieved. When these steps are followed, then individuals and society will benefit from improved economic

and social conditions (Vassallo, 2011, p. 34).

Researchers who follow the SRL method do not believe that individuals can operate in a manner completely independent of their social constraints; they do believe that individuals so have some personal power in being able to create change for themselves and their environment as there are some people that do overcome major obstacles to become very successful in life. These determinations were made by studying students in the earliest stages of developing SRL. The study of successful students does have its merits. Successful students' habits can be used as examples to teach lower level students methods to have a more equal chance to compete fairly. There are, however, too few teachers that are familiar with, and even fewer who embrace SRL. Too few students are taught that they can and how they can overcome the challenges that they face in their lives. It is not demonstrated to them that rewards for good grades can lead to college acceptance which ultimately can mean acquiring a higher paying job and more satisfying career (Vassallo, 2011, p. 35).

Conflict Theory

Conflict exists in all arenas of life. It is a part of living in a social world.

Conflicts exist in all sizes as they can be between two people or multiple nations against multiple nations. They can last from seconds to centuries.

Educational conflict theorists study the conflicts that exist in schools. These conflicts can be numerous. Some are caused by tensions between students, differences between staff, friction between administration members, and relationship issues between members' at all three levels. Community members can also play roles in some of the tensions and conflicts that occur

in the schools. Tracking students is one of the issues that draw attention from community members even if they do not currently have children or family members in the school system. Civic groups are often involved and cause friction when there are issues concerning educational equality. In the past several years, the conflict issue that has gained and held the most attention in the media has been bullying. Many people were unaware how widespread and severe the issue was in the school system.

Some of what conflict theorists focus on is how to approach issues that cause conflict. Conflict can be handled in a constructive manner and also in a destructive way. It is possible to approach conflict in a manner that is constructive and avails cooperation from all parties that are involved. When it is handled in this style and positive manner, justice can be challenged and important issues can be brought into the spotlight. This has been the case with the issue of bullying in the schools. It has also been brought to the forefront that there is too much bullying occurring online. Some people had thought that since it was just some typed words that there were really no consequences to be had or harm being done, but research by conflict theorists and other professionals has been able to prove that this is not the case. Cyber-bullying is just as destructive and harmful as any physical bullying that occurs in the home, school, or community.

There are going to be times when attempts to resolve issues in a peaceful manner fail. It is important that students learn the skills to be able to share their concerns and opposition in a non-violent manner. If students are taught these skills as children, they are more likely to practice them as adults. The authors who wrote the Seville Statement on Nonviolence were 20 scientists

and they were able to scientifically argue that there are no biological roots to organized violence. People are just as destined to peaceful solutions as they are to outbreaks of violent behaviors. It is the cultural influences and the social learning that determine if peaceful solutions or the use of violence are what is chosen in any given circumstance.

Granted, peace is not as simple as it is portrayed. Ideally, peace is a long-term solution that requires work on the parts of the people that are enforcing and accepting it as the present state. It is a state where violence is minimized and one's basic human right for peace is maximized. Even in a state of peace, there will be social conflicts. The challenge is to solve these conflicts in a peaceful manner; use collaboration of the parties involved, and tries to enhance the quality of life of all members.

This transpires into the modern educational process from the United Nations and also into the neighborhood classroom. The United Nation is focusing its effort from trying to deal with societies after conflict has caused devastation to a new realm where instead violence is attempted to be eliminated by trying to find some cooperation before the violence begins. The focus is on educating leaders and other people that are affected about nonviolence. This has been done through the use of mass media to reach adults and the use of the classroom to reach children, trying to change all generations' though at the same time.

Peace education, for children in the classroom, and for adults alike, needs to help change the conditions that foster violent behaviors. The courses should stress the importance of fostering a new philosophy and view of the importance of peace. Emphasis should be placed on skills such as active

listening, self-reflection, peaceful and calm methods to solve problems, cooperation between people, and being able to resolve conflicts. By educating people with these skills and the attitude that it is possible to create and live in a safe world, the environment can become more stable. This education can certainly be taught to children in the K-12 schools, but also should be incorporated into undergraduate programs, covered in graduate school, and be a part of professional workshops and any other adult education opportunities that are available. There is no sector of society that could not benefit from some training about peace. Conflict theorists realize that peaceful solutions are the best solutions, and more mainstreamed people are in agreement now more than ever. More adults are realizing that non-violent solutions for their conflicts are needed and dialogue is better than destruction.

The world is a violent and frightening place. There are too many kinds of conflict. International, regional, religious, racial, and between social classes name only a few of the ones that exist today (Opatow, Gerson, & Woodside, 2005). Now is a time when people are open to the concept of lifelong learning as a need. Institutional pressures are also beneficial in helping conflict theorists promote the idea of peaceful resolutions over conflict. Philosophy views education as a positive in and of itself and the public is placing demands and accountability on the educational system. These demands are not only including academics, such as test scores, but character education, such as conflict resolution skills (Hager, 1998, p. 324).

Interactionism Theory

The interactionism theory of sociology is also known as the symbolic interaction perspective. It assumes that people place subjective meanings on behaviors, events, and objects. Within this theory, the subjective meaning becomes the primary meaning because people behave because of their beliefs rather than rely on objective facts. This is one reason why society is thought to be constructed in a social manner through the interpretations of people. As people interpret the behaviors' of others, some people decide to form social bonds with others.

This is important in the framework of education since students learn from each other in the classroom as well as from the teacher. Most children make their earliest true friendships in their educational settings. It is through the theory of interactionism that helps children determine which classmates will be selected as close friends, which ones will be acquaintances, and perhaps which members of the class will be their foes. Much of what students learn from each other has to do with social structure and social situations. These earliest formations of what is deemed as important, right and true are often the foundations of how that particular student will make acquaintances and decide with whom to interact on the basis of close friendships for the remainder of one's life. This being the case, interactionism is an important concept of focus for early education instructors.

Pre-school and kindergarten of years ago were not educational learning environments, but rather these grades were merely places where children learned how to get along with each other. Much of the time was spent in play situations. Teachers were present to ensure that each child knew how to

share toys, speak with respect to peers and adults, and learn how to follow some classroom structure. Learning some letters, numbers, and colors were some bonuses that might occur in the program. If they did not, there was no reason to fear or worry. If the children had learned how to get along with each other, the year was deemed to be a success.

Now, there are more pressures facing teachers even at the earliest grade levels. Some children enter pre-school knowing letters, numbers, and colors. Some can write their name and maybe read a little. By kindergarten, they are well on their way to being a student who is eager to learn reading, writing and arithmetic. Other children enter kindergarten with no academic or social skills. In most school, homogenous grouping is used. So, the teachers have students at all levels in the same classroom. All students are expected to be academically challenged and be prepared for the first grade curriculum in nine months, no matter what level they were at when the school year started. Facing such academic issues, few teachers of kindergarten classes now have time for children to play and social skills are taught during instructional time as a secondary focus, not a primary objective. Without the emphasis that it used to receive, some interactionism theorists have concerns over the children's ability to be leaders and followers, participators and listeners, and have many other diverse skills that use to be taught in an instructional manner (Hatcher, 1998).

This theory does have critics that state the big picture of society is not represented by symbolic interactionism. Opponents claim that there is too much focus on one person and their relationships with others rather than focusing on social issues faced by society at large. The argument is that

people will make their friendships and interact with whomever they wish, but in the end, that is not what determines how a community, a region, or a country is run (Porter & Cordoba, 2008, p. 332).

Conclusion

The different sociology theories focus on very different aspects of education. Functionalist theorists look at how challenges can be overcome and students can even the field on which they learn with motivation and determination. They believe that any child can get ahead in the world with the right mindset, despite the circumstances one might be faced with in their present day. Conflict theorists focus on how to teach people to use peaceful solutions rather than turn to violence to solve their problems. Interactionism looks at the way individuals' structure their relationships. All are important areas of study. All are relevant both on a micro and macro scale. All have implications which can better society, be it the neighborhood or the world.

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