

The purpose and function of educational institutions



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Although sociologists have debated the purpose and function of educational institutions, most agree that access to educational opportunities has a profound effect on individual life chances and attainment. We'll consider how specific education policies and practices -like school choice, curriculum differentiation, school finance, and school assignment - shape the range of educational opportunities afforded students. Because issues of equity have moved to the forefront of education policies during the past fifty years, we'll discuss the consequences of these policies and practices for students from different social backgrounds - primary among these differences are differences by social class, race/ethnicity, and gender.

During the next three weeks we'll consider different explanations for the existence of schools and mass education in modern societies. A central question is whether or not schools function to promote social mobility and economic well-being or whether or not schools function to reproduce social inequalities and secure valued resources for individuals from privileged social backgrounds.

An alternative, though not necessarily conflicting proposition, is that educational institutions promote social mobility, achievement, and economic growth in modern societies. The relationship between education and status attainment (e. g., earnings or occupational prestige) has often been provided as evidence that a country has an open and fluid society, one which provides individual opportunities for social advancement through the acquisition of technical skills and knowledge. This week we'll examine the status attainment paradigm and some research that seeks to test it

many sociologists point to the fact that educational attainment is also related to an individual's family background (i. e., one's socioeconomic status). These sociologists see educational institutions not as promoting social equality but as promoting social inequalities.

Conflict theory sees the purpose of education as maintaining social inequality and preserving the power of those who dominate society. Conflict theorists examine the same functions of education as functionalists.

Functionalists see education as a beneficial contribution to an ordered society; however, conflict theorists see the educational system as perpetuating the status quo by dulling the lower classes into being obedient workers.

Both functionalists and conflict theorists agree that the educational system practices sorting, but they disagree about how it enacts that sorting.

Functionalists claim that schools sort based upon merit; conflict theorists argue that schools sort along distinct class and ethnic lines. According to conflict theorists, schools train those in the working classes to accept their position as a lower-class member of society. Conflict theorists call this role of education the "hidden curriculum."

Marx

The political system, the legal system, the family, the press, the education system were all rooted, in the final analysis, to the class nature of society, which in turn was a reflection of the economic base. Marx maintained that the economic base or infrastructure generated or had built upon it a

superstructure that kept it functioning. The education system, as part of the <https://assignbuster.com/the-purpose-and-function-of-educational-institutions/>

superstructure, therefore, was a reflection of the economic base and served to reproduce it. This did not mean that education and teaching was a sinister plot by the ruling class to ensure that it kept its privileges and its domination over the rest of the population. There were no conspirators hatching devious schemes. It simply meant that the institutions of society, like education, were reflections of the world created by human activity and that ideas arose from and reflected the material conditions and circumstances in which they were generated.

Durkheim

Durkheim on Education:

Believed that education served many functions:

1) To reinforce social solidarity

Pledging allegiance: makes individuals feel part of a group and therefore less likely to break rules.

2) To maintain social roles

School is a society in miniature: it has a similar hierarchy, rules, expectations to the “ outside world,” and trains people to fulfill roles.

3) To maintain division of labor

School sorts students into skill groups, encouraging students to take up employment in fields best suited to their abilities.

Durkheim said that one of the ways to maintain the division of labor, schools should sort students into skill groups, encouraging students to take up employment in fields best suited to their abilities.

Emile Durkheim provided one of the initial explanations for the emergence of mass education in modern societies – nation building and social control.

Durkheim believed that the role of educational institutions in modern societies was to replace, or at least supplement, the role that religious institutions and families played in traditional societies – namely, socializing young people into a common culture and the moral foundations of collective life. Subsequent sociologists expanded these ideas to examine the role of educational institutions in the development of nation-states and the transmission of cultural values and social roles.

dynamics of education revolve and are implicated in the unequal

distribution of resources in society, Marxian and Weberian theories)

Weber

Consequences of class position

Different consumption of social goods is the most visible consequence of class. In modern societies, it manifests as income inequality, though in subsistence societies it manifested as malnutrition and periodic starvation.

Although class status is not a causal factor for income, there is consistent data that show those in higher classes have higher incomes than those in lower classes. This inequality still persists when controlling for occupation.

The conditions at work vary greatly depending on class. Those in the upper-

middle class and middle class enjoy greater freedoms in their occupations. They generally are more respected, enjoy more diversity, and are able to exhibit some authority. Those in lower classes tend to feel more alienated and have lower work satisfaction overall. The physical conditions of the workplace differ greatly between classes. While middle-class workers may “suffer alienating conditions” or “lack of job satisfaction”, blue-collar workers suffer alienating, often routine, work with obvious physical health hazards, injury, and even death.

In the more social sphere, class has direct consequences on lifestyle. Lifestyle includes tastes, preferences, and a general style of living. These lifestyles could quite possibly affect educational attainment, and therefore status attainment. Class lifestyle also affects how children are raised. For example, a working-class person is more likely to raise their child to be working class and middle-class children are more likely to be raised to be middle-class. This perpetuates the idea of class for future generations.

Max Weber agrees with the fundamental ideas of Marx about the economy causing class conflict, but claims that class conflict can also stem from prestige and power [6]. Weber argues that classes come from the different property locations. Different locations can largely affect one's class by their education and the people they associate with [6]. He also states that prestige results in different status groupings. This prestige is based upon the social status of one's parents. Prestige is an attributed value and many times cannot be changed. Weber states that power differences led to the formation of political parties [6]. Weber disagrees with Marx about the formation of classes. While Marx believes that groups are similar due to their economic

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status, Weber argues that classes are largely formed by social status [6].

Weber does not believe that communities are formed by economic standing, but by similar social prestige [6]. Weber does recognize that there is a relationship between social status, social prestige and classes [6].

The functionalist perspective suggests that everyone benefits from the functions carried out by the education system. Conflict theories such as the Marxist approach argue that this is not the case, rather education, is seen as the apparatus that legitimizes and reproduces society's inequalities and divisions. The Marxist approach is relevant because it is interpreted as helping to legitimize class divisions because they promote the idea that the middle class receive education while the lower-classes/working receive training.

Emile Durkheim is known as functionalist, states that everything serves a function in society and his main concern to discover what that function was. On the other hand Karl Marx, a conflict theorist stresses that society is a complex system characterized by inequality and conflict that generate social change. Both Durkheim and Marx were concerned with the characteristics of groups and structures rather than with individuals.

The functionalist perspective in society is a view of society that focuses on the way various parts of society have functions, or possible effects that maintain the stability of the whole. Durkheim developed the idea of society as an integrated system of interrelated parts. He wanted to establish how the various parts of society contribute to the maintenance of the whole. He also focused on how various elements of social structure function to maintain

social order and equilibrium. Durkheim stressed that culture is the product of a community and not of single individuals. He argued that the ultimate reality of human life is sociological and not psychological. The sociological reality, which Durkheim called the collective conscience, exists beyond the...

Conflict theories draw attention to power differentials, such as class conflict, and generally contrast historically dominant ideologies.

According to Conflict Theory, society is:

A struggle for dominance among competing social groups (classes, genders, races, religions, etc.). When conflict theorists look at society, they see the social domination of subordinate groups through the power, authority, and coercion of dominant groups. In the conflict view, the most powerful members of dominant groups create the rules for success and opportunity in society, often denying subordinate groups such success and opportunities; this ensures that the powerful continue to monopolize power, privilege, and authority. You should note that most conflict theorists oppose this sort of coercion and favor a more equal social order. Some support a complete socioeconomic revolution to socialism (Marx), while others are more reformist, or perhaps do not see all social inequalities stemming from the capitalist system (they believe we could solve racial, gender, and class inequality without turning to socialism). However, many conflict theorists focus on capitalism as the source of social inequalities.

The primary cause of social problems, according to the conflict perspective, is the exploitation and oppression of subordinate groups by dominants.

Conflict theorists generally view oppression and inequality as wrong,
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whereas Structural-Functionalists may see it as necessary for the smooth running and integration of society. Structural-Functionalism and Conflict Theory therefore have different VALUE-ORIENTATIONS but can lead to similar insights about inequality (e. g., they both believe that stereotypes and discrimination benefit dominant groups, but conflict theorists say this should end and most structural-functionalists believe it makes perfect sense that subordinates should be discriminated against, since it serves positive social ends). Conflict theory sees social change as rapid, continuous, and inevitable as groups seek to replace each other in the social hierarchy.

- In contrast to Structural-Functionalists, who argue that the most talented individuals occupy the highest positions, conflict theorists argue that dominant groups monopolize positions of power, maintaining power from generation to generation and keeping subordinate groups out. Also in contrast to Structural-Functionalists, who argue that the most important positions in society are the best rewarded, conflict theorists argue that dominant groups get inordinate power to define which positions are socially rewarded. Highly-paid positions are not necessarily most important for society, they argue, but keep power in the hands of the privileged and powerful.

Education

McLeod's "Ain't No Makin' It" is a good example of conflict theory as applied to education. He argues that teachers treat lower-class kids like less competent students, placing them in lower "tracks" because they have generally had fewer opportunities to develop language, critical thinking, and social skills prior to entering school than middle and upper class kids. When <https://assignbuster.com/the-purpose-and-function-of-educational-institutions/>

placed in lower tracks, lower-class kids are trained for blue-collar jobs by an emphasis on obedience and following rules rather than autonomy, higher-order thinking, and self-expression. They point out that while private schools are expensive and generally reserved for the upper classes, public schools, especially those that serve the poor, are underfunded, understaffed, and growing worse. Schools are also powerful agents of socialization that can be used as tools for one group to exert power over others – for example, by demanding that all students learn English, schools are ensuring that English-speakers dominate students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Many conflict theorists argue, however, that schools can do little to reduce inequality without broader changes in society (e. g. creating a broader base of high-paying jobs or equalizing disparities in the tax base of communities).

Every society has specialized individuals who fulfill certain positions that require extended education.

Functionalists take the view that society must be divided into separate groups, each of which performs a task that is necessary to the survival of society as a whole – the organic whole. Societies function well when people accept internally, either consciously or unconsciously, the need to contribute to the organic functioning of the whole of society. People agree voluntarily to submerge part of their individual identity in favour of the survival of all. They do this because they recognise that there is no simple alternative to society. They would accuse Marxists of “ utopianism” – that is, dreaming up a “ perfect”, but wholly unrealistic and unrealisable society based on a dream world. When people accept their role in society they develop a form of social conscience, which Durkheim labels the “ conscience collective”.

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Functionalists tend to look to the sociologist Emile Durkheim as the founder of their point of view. This is not entirely true. Modern functionalists, like Talcott Parsons, seek to defend capitalism, but Durkheim's vision of the organic society of the future was one in which there would be no inheritance of capital, so people would be assigned their functional role on the basis of merit alone. Modern capitalist societies are not meritocracies in this sense. Different individuals find different roles in society, but the opportunities of individuals are considerably affected by their class situation. Although Durkheim is not exactly a defender of capitalism, his functionalism, which tells us that every social grouping is a functional part of the whole of society, tends to favour a defence of capitalism. Capitalists see the educational system as fair, and as preparing individuals for their roles in adult society according to their abilities. Talcott Parsons sees the school classroom as a microcosm of society. It is a bridge between the family and wider society. In wider society status is achieved. Education socialises young people for adult roles. According to Talcott Parson's Functionalism individuals interact with each other through the medium of social structures. They accept common standards of evaluation, which are moral standards or 'norms'. Sociological processes maintain these structures, and ensure stability through adherence to the norms. This is called a 'structuralist-functionalist' approach to social systems analysis. Parsons analyses the functions of society into: 1.

Adaptation - the provision of physical necessities - the economic system; 2. Goal attainment - the establishment of the goals of society as a whole - the political system; 3. Pattern maintenance and tension management - serves to motivate individuals and resolve conflicts - kinship, family & marriage; 4.

Integration - socialisation of individuals to accept the norms and control
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them if they don't - schools, churches, media, police and judicial system.

Therefore, Parsons sees education as serving a part in the function of integration. Through education individuals are socialised to conform.

Education also supports the economic "imperative" of society by: 1.

Inculcating certain technical skills and requirements; 2. Separating out potential workers for different points of entry to the labour market.

Regarding the integration "imperative" schooling specifically causes children to internalise social values and norms at a level which the family alone cannot achieve. In America elementary school education teaches American youth the value of fair competition. "It includes, above all, recognition that it is fair to give differential rewards for different levels of achievement, so long as there has been fair access to opportunity.."

Functionalists maintain that there is a high degree of equality of opportunity within the education system. Functionalism stresses the link between education and the economy. A malfunctioning educational system would be one in which individuals are not assigned the most appropriate role, and will hence lead to inefficiency. This could be taken as an argument against elitism in education and in favour of a comprehensive system. Davies and Moore follow Parsons claiming that "Education is the proving ground for ability and hence the selective agency for placing people in different statuses according to their capacities." Thus modern functionalists tend to assume that the education system is a meritocracy. Functionalists believe that the demands of industrial society for a skilled workforce are met by the educational system. In criticism of functionalism: 1. Functionalism does not appear to offer a satisfactory account of conflict within educational systems.

The goals and purposes of education are not generally agreed by
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professionals and employees within it. 2. It fails to deal adequately with the content of the curriculum and teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom. 3. It treats individuals as if they were the “puppets” of society. “Nothing more than the product of the societal norms and values which they internalise through their experiences of socialisation in the home, school, workplace etc.” 4. Functionalists, especially of the Talcott Parsons type, tend to idealise existing society and ignore facts that are critical of their own views. Seeking to argue that society is a meritocracy based on equality of opportunity, functionalists tend to be wilfully blind to the very real differences of educational experience between members of different classes. They seek to paint a rosy picture in which the functions of individuals in society are all assigned to them by the educational system, rather than by class.

Education is an important aspect of the work of society and it will raise the countryside issues and promote knowledge and understanding of rural communities. One of the education essential tasks is to enable people to understand themselves. Students must be equipped with knowledge and skills which are needed to participate effectively as member of society and contribute towards the development of shared values and common identity. Education has a vital role to play in assisting students to understand their cultural identity. Education acts as the distribution mechanism of the cultural values such as it more layered the society and participate in society that carries the culture.

Education and society provides a forum where teachers and scholars all over the world are able to evaluate problems in education and society from a balanced and comparative social and economic perspective. Education is an <https://assignbuster.com/the-purpose-and-function-of-educational-institutions/>

important aspect of the work of society and it will raise the countryside issues and promote knowledge and understanding of rural communities. One of the education essential tasks is to enable people to understand themselves. Students must be equipped with knowledge and skills which are needed to participate effectively as member of society and contribute towards the development of shared values and common identity.

Education has a vital role to play in assisting students to understand their cultural identity. Education acts as the distribution mechanism of the cultural values such as it more layered the society and participate in society that carries the culture. In our culture today, there is a great emphasis on higher education. In a society, more educated you are, better off you are. Every society has specialized individuals that require extended education to fulfill certain main positions. These persons are normally known as professors, priests, doctors, mechanics or artists. Education has been a higher part of every culture on earth and education is a systemic project. Whole society should care for and support the education patriotism, cause and socialism among the young people.

Everyone must do work hard to cultivate moral conduct. Education mainly begins at home; one does not acquire knowledge from a teacher, one can learn and get knowledge from a parent or a family member. In almost all societies, receiving education and attending school is very necessary is one wants to achieve success. Education is the key to move in the world, seek better jobs and ultimately succeed in life. Schools play a vital role in preparing our children and young people for effective participation and responsible citizenship in society. The development of education and <https://assignbuster.com/the-purpose-and-function-of-educational-institutions/>

educational opportunities is built on creativity tempered by knowledge and wisdom gain through the experience of learning.

Investment in human capital, life long learning and quality education help in the development of society. Teachers are the most important factors for an innovative society because teachers' knowledge and skills not only enhance the quality and efficiency of education, but also improve the prerequisites of research and innovation. Many members of our society are not provided with a safe and secure environment in which children can develop, child abuse, violence against women and interpersonal violence cause a cancer on our society. Society play a key role in the realization of life long learning. The improvement of social education facilities such as libraries and the learning opportunities are implemented by the local governments. Students today are exposed to loads of technology and information at everywhere.