

Social theory in the function of education



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Over the last three decades, the social sciences have witnessed a number of exciting theoretical developments. Regrettably, the sociology of education has not always reflected these new developments, preferring instead to restrict its reading of social life to a truncated theoretical framework and epistemological parochialism.

Social theory and education strands as an important exception to such sociological inertia. The whole history of educational thought has developed in the context of a dialogue with the social theory of its time. Social theory encompasses meta-theory, on the one hand and the range of substantive questions entailed in the construction of the theories of society within which sociologists of education are elaborated (Morrow and Torres, 1995 p. 10).

The patterns in social life are not simply the accidental result of people who happen to run into each other; they are not just causal connections between events that happened to be discerned. When human beings act socially, they become enmeshed in relationships, institutions, and societies that maintain a distinct unity (Turner, 2000 p.

112). The primary concepts of Functionalism, Marxism, Interpretive, and Post-modernism are the main theoretical frameworks introduced in the overall discussion. These theories not only form part of large sociological theoretical systems, but also evidently, provide actual explanation in terms of social angles present in the community. In the course of the discussion, these theories have been critically scrutinized and assessed in order to provide the strengths and weaknesses that might play special contribution in the stand of American education perspectives, which is also the primary aim of the entire course discussion. Discussion Functionalism Functionalism in

social theory is part of a broad stream of ideas developed since the late 19th century, a set of beliefs and values that underlines utility and functional relations.

In modern social theory, functionalism emerged as a distinct school, first in social anthropology early in this century, and later in sociology, beginning in the 1930s. Despite the drubbing it has taken from its critics over many years, functionalism is still probably the most favored social theory in the social sciences produced in English-speaking countries (Andersen and Kaspersen, 2000 p. 14). The concept of social roles stems largely from functionalism. The stability that functionalists emphasize in society stems from the socialization process – that is, people learning the values, norms, and social identities that help to hold society together. As the social institution where people first learn social roles, the family helps stabilize society.

Socialization occurs in social institutions that function to maintain social order (Andersen and Taylor, 2000 p. 97). Functionalism emphasizes that social structure, not just individual motivation, produces deviance. The emphasis in functionalist theory is on social structure and culture, not individual action.

Utilizing functionalism, education functions not for basic units of the society but plays as a needed role for societal order and cohesion. As emphasized by the theoretical perspective, education plays significant roles in the society as a whole contributed by the subunits (Arnove and Torres, 2003 p. 27).

However, critics of the functionalist perspective points out that functionalistic

views does provide considerations with subcomponent details that should play part in sociological analysis (Andersen and Taylor, 2000 p. 76). Marxism Marxism is essentially a historical interpretation of the evolution of societies or social systems.

It explains social change historically by examining the evolution of modern industrial society up to the present. Marxism is also deterministic in that it predicts the evolution of capitalist society into socialist society. Marxism perceives society with aspects of totality, a structure of interrelated levels. The theoretical framework sees society as a product of the conflict, and predicts that the struggle will be resolved through revolutionary rather than evolutionary.

However, contrary to the latter theory, it is through the sub-units' activity as members of a social class having a distinctive class-consciousness that the social and historical world is created and changed (Bond and Bond, 1994 p. 22). Social change is brought about the social awareness wherein the population or the sub-units recognized the need for social change. In application, education in the contemporary American society can be best revolutionized if totality or majority has gained social consciousness in terms of the need for change. The function of education in society is brought by the people's perspective over education itself.

If the subunits recognize education as dire need of society, evidence should depict people's response to education as a must in society. On the other hand, the weakness of the theoretical framework deals mainly on the lack of objectivity among variances present in the sub-units that facilitate the

change (Andersen and Taylor, 2000 p. 176). Moreover, the intrinsic nature of the theory itself presents in a capitalistic angle and economic perspective.

The function of education does is solely based from economical demands of the neither society nor perceived change by the society, but with interrelated factors (e. g.

socio-cultural, economical, environmental, etc.). Interpretivism In the aspect of epistemological foundations, interpretivism is principally about understanding the ways in which individuals interpret the world around them. Interpretivism rejects the production of knowledge or truths about society because it asserts that the social world is entirely different to the natural world. The theoretical framework asserts that human attitudes and behavior need to be understood as a conscious and ongoing interpretation process of social context (Hyde, 2004 p. 72).

Significantly, the theory argues that there are no absolutes and all phenomena can be studied and interpreted in different ways mainly due to people's variations (Arnové and Torres, 2003 p. 27; Bond and Bond, 1994 p. 22). Interpretivism developed as a paradigm as researchers came to understand that knowledge was socially created. Interpretivism perceives the function of education as one of the symbolical stature of humanistic need and/or society.

For this theoretical approach, education occurs not because of natural phenomena but mainly to symbolize the characteristics of human civilization (Chriss, 1999 p. 178). The function of education in American contemporary society greatly depends on its socio-cultural and intrinsic factors, which are

molded by the interrelatedly by the people and society themselves. From the very emphasis of the theoretical framework, interpretivism does provide free interpretations and perceives the dire function of education as a symbol of society; however, critics of this theory suggest that the lack of objectivity and unity among its subcomponents may produce inaccuracies or misinterpretations Bond and Bond, 1994 p.

22). If each person possesses their own interpretations, several unrelated or contradicting factors may arise, which can alter the actual picture of education's societal function. Post-modernism Post-modernism is a term that defines or suggests the overall character or direction of experimental tendencies, and often associated with a pluri-cultural range of styles, multiple voices, and moral and scientific uncertainty. Education in a post-modern context would include learning for a bicultural and multi-cultural perspective; for inclusiveness with respect to ethnicity, gender and disabilities; and learning the skills of critical thinking on the power relationships and ideologies embedded in policies and actions (Bell and Gilbert, 1996 p74).

Postmodernism is another fashionable current of thought that found its way into the literature on education wherein the propositions mainly coincide in the relationship between social conditions and knowledge as well as about the nature of science, truth and reason in postmodern era (Nola and Irzik, 2004 p. 348). For the post-modernistic perspective, education enables individuals to think freely and rationally, which makes social progress and innovation possible. The totality of educational function is diminished, and further individuality is encouraged. The post-modernistic perspective rejects <https://assignbuster.com/social-theory-in-the-function-of-education/>

the narrative view of education, which were greatly evident in the previous philosophical perspectives. The theoretical framework is skeptical of the claim that science and reason can answer all human problems or that there is one truth (Giddens, 2006 p.

714). On the other hand, due to the absolute objectivity implied by the theoretical framework of post-modernism, the advent of post-modernism is deemed to add-up and pile intellectual statements with lesser to irrelevant claims of the obvious (Giddens, 2006 p. 714; Bell and Gilbert, 1996 p74).

Postmodernism lacks the criteria to actually distinguished post-modernistic ideation (e.

g. post-modernism vs. modernism) due to its vague descriptions. Conclusion

Analyzing the entire discussion of the four conceptual frameworks, post-modernism is justified as the most applicable theoretical framework to explain the functions of education in the contemporary American society (Giddens, 2006 p. 714; Bell and Gilbert, 1996 p74; Nola and Irzik, 2004 p.

348). As the general idea implicates, post-modernism utilizes analytical and objective approach to knowledge and the phenomenon implicated in the society (Giddens, 2006 p. 714). Furthermore, the idea of post-modernism facilitates freedom of thinking (Nola and Irzik, 2004 p. 348), analysis and exploration of ideas, which are not recognized in the previous theoretical frameworks due to their broad and principle of totality (Giddens, 2006 p.

714; Bell and Gilbert, 1996 p74). The concept of post-modernism even encourages ideations and explorations in order to generate further knowledge, and further considering that the weakness involves generation of

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irrelevant or lesser important intellectual contributions, post-modernistic idea remains as the most practical framework to explain the trend of education. Education systems established aims to initiate gathering of data for further contribution in the body of knowledge; hence, the analysis and utilization of various body of knowledge (e. g.

art, philosophy, science, literature, etc.) are mainly evident (Giddens, 2006 p. 714; Bell and Gilbert, 1996 p74). The function of education in the society is to contribute in the body of knowledge in order to further improve societal status and quality of life.