

Outline and assess functionalist explanations of the role of the education system...

[Education](#)



As a theory which places heavy emphasis on the analysis of institutions and their relationship with society, especially with regards to the functions of institutions, Functionalists place a significant amount of focus on the education system. However, this perspective is not always accepted, it's macro theory approach is often seen as too wide bearing to be applied to the study of the education system as well as critics which dispute the functions of the education system as portrayed by functionalists.

Nevertheless, its macro theory approach puts the education system in context and is therefore a theory which is notable when discussing the role of the education system. Firstly, it cannot be ignored that one of the main principles of the theory is that society is based upon consensus, - agreement between norms and values. As an institution of secondary socialisation, Functionalist theorists see the education system as one of the main institutions which help to achieve value consensus within society, allowing society to operate in a smooth manner.

Durkheim suggested that the education system is an institution which helps to create a " collective consciousness", uniting society into one body, with the system creating " social beings". As put forward by Durkheim, the education system helps to achieve this through the National Curriculum, brought in by the Education Reform Act 1988, which helps to create shared values amongst all pupils throughout the country.

Furthermore, Durkheim suggests that subjects made compulsory through the National Curriculum such as History and Religious studies help to enhance cohesion and social stability, minimising conflict within society through value

consensus,- keeping social order. In this sense, Functionalism places significant emphasis upon the education system as an institution which contributes to the wellbeing of society.

However, it may be that in reality value consensus does not exist, as today the diversity of society means that there is not agreement about norms and values. Ethnic and cultural diversity may therefore be attributed as factors which mean that the education system is not an institution which unites society, as it may not be able to change the norms and values instilled upon members of society by other forms of socialisation, such as the family or the areas of media young people are exposed to.

Although, in defence, it is very much true that educational establishments do aim to create a “ collective consciousness” through individual school ethos’s and uniforms, which are in operation to reduce conflict within society. Critically though, these could be seen as policies which aim to stabilise the school learning environment, as opposed to society.

In addition, it is true to say that the inclusion of Citizenship is evidence that the government and educationalists are aiming to use education as an institution which aims to promote social cohesion, and indeed “ social beings”. Perhaps it could also be seen, that in terms of the relationship between education and society, that the education system cannot necessarily make up for the diversity of attitudes within society,- to what degree can the education system compensate for differences in values and shape behaviours and attitudes?