

Sociology of education persuasive essay



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Sociology of Education A functionalist view is that education prepares children for their role in society. The view suggests that the education system is meritocratic with each pupil having an equal opportunity to succeed, and students who are the most hardworking will achieve the best grades. Functionalists suggest there are three main objectives of the education system.

One function is to provide secondary socialisation in addition to the family's role of primary socialisation. Through a formal and hidden curriculum pupils are taught societies norms and values. A second objective of the education system is to teach skills which are necessary for success in the workplace in modern society. These skills range from basic requirements such as reading and writing to skills which are needed to be able to perform specific jobs. The third role is to offer qualifications through assessments and examinations which enable a student to get a job in line with their individual talents.

There are criticisms of the functionalist perspective. This approach could be classed as too deterministic. It makes an assumption that the values taught in school will automatically be embraced by students. In reality some students will and some won't. Also the values taught are ethnocentric and pupils from different cultures often reject and rebel against this. A functionalist view could also be criticised by suggesting all pupils are not offered an equal chance to succeed, and therefore education is not meritocratic.

There is evidence which highlights working class pupils have a disadvantage and black pupils are labelled and discriminated against. Functionalism is too

simplistic in its approach. It suggests the higher a pupil's level of achievement academically, there will follow a greater reward in the workplace with a better paid job. However there are other factors involved in determining a person's level of reward, especially gender and ethnicity as many people are discriminated on those grounds irrespective of level of qualification. One role of education as stated by functionalists is to provide the skills and attitudes which are required in the workplace.

This could be criticised as schools are often accused of not promoting a strong enough work ethic. Punctuality is also poor amongst pupils, along with a high level of truancy. In addition to this many pupils are guilty of poor attendance. Credentialism is another criticism which could be attributed to a functionalists view. A qualification is a measure of a pupil's ability to learn a subject. However there is nothing to indicate whether that person has other qualities needed to perform the job to a required standard.

A Marxist perspective identifies two classes in society. The ruling class and the working class. Marxists suggest the hidden curriculum taught in schools is to prepare pupils to accept conformity to a capitalist society, whereas functionalists view the hidden curriculum to socialise pupils to societies shared values. Bowles and Gintis (1976) suggest the education system is no different to the workplace. In schools there is a hierarchy of teachers, who have authority over the pupils.

The pupils work for the teachers and the reward for this work comes in the form of qualifications. Pupils are rewarded in school at a young age. In primary schools children are given rewards and treats for conforming to the

rules. This is likened to the workplace, as there is a hierarchy of bosses and the rewards for work comes in the form of wages. Althusser (1972) claims the education system is not to transmit common values, but to encourage pupils to accept failure and the inequalities that exist in society.

He believes that the hidden curriculum tries to justify these inequalities.

Bowles and Gintis (1976) argue that the education system does not offer meritocracy, and a pupil's success is not always in line with their ability.

They suggest pupils who conform are more likely to rise to the top. There are limitations to the work of Bowles, Gintis and Althusser.

As the functionalist approach is too deterministic, the same criticism could be used for a Marxist perspective. The assumption is students will automatically fall into line and accept what they are told. There are many pupils who do not accept this and are disruptive in the classroom and develop an anti learning culture, and in many cases are not respectful to the teachers. The view is based on a theory and possibly exaggerates the relationship between school and work. Bowles and Gintis (1976) conducted a study in the USA and found in high school pupils were rewarded with better grades if they displayed certain traits such as a lack of independence and a willingness to conform.

In contrast non conformists achieved a lower grade. From this research they deduced that there was a correlation between a capitalist society and the education system. It is important to note that this research was conducted in only one country, so it is difficult to generalise these findings to other countries and cultures. In contrast to this research Paul Willis (1977)

conducted research in the UK. His findings allowed him to identify two subcultures within schools, which he termed 'earoles' and 'lads'.

The 'earoles' conformed to rules and were pro school, and the 'lads' misbehaved and developed an anti school attitude. A by product of this rebellion is there is a portion of the workforce who are able to accept lower paid work and get on with it. The New Right is a form of Conservatism. They are criticised for not portraying an objective viewpoint and having a bias. They are accused of not offering a sociological theory but pushing their political views and ideas. The New Right has influenced education with the introduction of league tables and increased competition, which they believe will raise standards within schools.

The New Right suggest education is not serving the needs of people because it is run by the state. The New Right and functionalists have shared ideals, both believe in meritocracy and believe school should socialise pupils to shared values and prepare them for work. John Chubb and Terry Moe (1990) argue that state education is not meritocratic and the middle classes have an advantage over the working class and ethnic minority groups. The 1988 education act introduced competition between schools by offering parents the right to choose their child's school. League tables were introduced to give parents an indicator to how schools were performing.

This created a situation where parents wanted to send their children to schools that were deemed to the 'best' as they were the top of the league. Schools received funding for each child, so schools at the top were generating more finance, and as schools wanted to remain at the top they

were selecting pupils they thought would generate positive results and therefore keep the school at the top of the league. Children were not all offered the same opportunities. Chubb and Moe (1990) also suggested that failing schools were unable to be held accountable by pupils, parents and local employers.

They also argued that state education starts a chain of lower standards which in turn leads to a workforce with inadequate qualifications which leads to a less successful economy. The New Right would like to privatise education with only a limited role for the state. Private schools would be accountable to the consumer and this would lead to schools run to a higher standard. Chubb and Moe suggest each family would receive a voucher would be exchanged for their child's education. Schools would redeem these vouchers and receive funds from the government.

This would be the schools main source of income, so if schools wanted to stay in business they would have to keep improving standards. Schools which were failing would be forced to close down. The Ridings in Halifax is a recent example of a school having to close when it shut in 2007. The states role would be to provide guidelines to which all schools would have to comply, and part of these rules would be schools publishing ofsted inspections and all examination results.

This would give a parent a base of information to enable them to choose the best school for their child. However just as in the 1988 education act where not everybody realistically had an equal choice the same problems would arise, and rather than create meritocracy, there would still be children who

were disadvantaged. The New Right see the other role of the state to provide a national curriculum which emphasises Christianity through daily assembly and a British national identity. However Britain is a multicultural society and this would be considered too British. A criticism of the New Right would be that poor standards of education are not necessarily the fault of state run schools, but are caused by inequalities in society.

The New Right would also like to socialise all pupils to a shared British culture, however Marxists would argue that education imposes a culture not representative of the British culture, but a culture of the ruling class. The New Right would like to take education away from being state run, whereas the social democrats believe the state should still control education, but do a better job of running it. Increased competition amongst schools leads to greater inequalities, particularly for the working class and ethnic minority groups. This is in contrast to the functionalist view of meritocracy. There is evidence of inequalities in schools with institutional racism and an ethnocentric education system.

Halsey has suggested material deprivation limits opportunities of the lower classes. Evidence to support this was published in 2003 which showed a correlation between pupils who receive free school meals and a lower level of achievement. In the tripartite system which was introduced in 1944, children were tested at age 11 and results determined what type of school a pupil attended from the ages of 11-16. Children who passed went to grammar schools, and those that failed went to secondary modern school. However the majority of pupils who attended grammar schools were middle class and this led to inequality with a division of social classes. This was

phased out in most areas and replaced with a single comprehensive system in order to try and end the divide.

Social democrats suggest the education system could promote greater opportunity and equality for all if 'run' better. This was endorsed by Anthony Crossland (1981) who suggested a better system would spread the rewards over a wider range of pupils, which in turn would 'blur' the lines between different social classes. There is evidence to suggest that young bright pupils, who are members of a poor family, are not achieving as well as less academically able students who are born into a wealthy family. This also shows that the meritocratic ideology of the Functionalists and the New Right is not evident. There has been little change to the divides in the class system within education. There have been initiatives such as education priority areas, where more funding is aimed at inner city areas which have been identified as deprived areas.

However recent statistics show that children who have wealthier parents achieve higher grades. Social democratic theory says a better organised education will lead to a better economy. In 2008 this idea remains the same with initiatives in place such as 'Train to gain' and learn direct aimed at providing 'skill' training to aim for a better qualified workforce. Alison Woolf (2002) views are in opposition to this theory. She would argue that by spending a lot more money to help more people gain qualifications that Britain will have a workforce that is over qualified. A degree is now a requirement for a job which previously was offered to, and was within the capabilities of a non graduate.

Her suggestion is the government should provide more opportunity for people to have 'on the job' training through apprenticeships rather than vocational training. This enables people to gain skills and experience which are more valuable to employers. These skills are perhaps more relevant if picked up in 'real' work situations rather than in a classroom. Alison Woolf has also studied research which has suggested increasing expenditure on education and training doesn't necessarily promote economic growth.