

Education's impact on social class



In the past centuries, education has been a field that often being related to various disciplines. This is probably because of its importance towards society thus making it an important area that a nation needs to addressed on occasionally. Having an education is important regardless of the types of education whether the education is formal, informal or non-formal. One of the functions of education mentioned by King (2004), education must incorporate human life concerning central as well as focusing morals. However, the result of education towards society varies. Therefore, various parties argue on the fairness of education system which should be more egalitarianism towards society. In this essay, I will describe and discuss views by various parties regarding this issue in order to decide for myself on my belief of the education roles towards a better egalitarian society.

Education has been an issue which requires a lot of attention from many disciplines such as sociology, psychology and so on. Most of the disciplines are in argument of what is the best knowledge to be put under education. Furthermore, the role of education towards producing a better and more egalitarianism society has often being questioned due to many factors. As a result, many parties are very concern of the many aspects of education such as the school curriculum, the syllabus of the subjects and the teacher's training.

Firstly, an important view about this matter is that school works as an important educational institution with the aim of promoting egalitarianism. School must serve three functions which are assisting one to assimilate into the society, producing a just competition and lessen inequality and thirdly, developing various individuals' potentials (Dewey, 1916 as cited in

Strathdee, 2003). The second function of school as stated by Dewey is seen as a good account of how education can help promote social equality in society. Based on this view, the school's system which consists of a standard curriculum formed by various agencies is a way of offering equal opportunities to societies. Besides, standard examinations work as a standardised way of evaluating students' performance in school. For instance, the New Zealand's National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA) are national qualifications for senior secondary school students. In a way, the national standards constituted by the authorised party such as the Ministry of Education helps promote egalitarianism.

Other point of view regarding this matter comes from a very famous sociologist, Durkheim who has a similar view with Strathdee. Durkheim, 1905 (as cited in Filloux, 2001) brings the notion of the underlying purpose of education through schools in order to build societies according to specific needs. An article written in 1905 on secondary education stated:

Any school system is made up of two kinds of components. On the one hand, there are a whole series of fixed stable arrangements and established methods, in a word, institutions; but, at the same time, within the machine thus constituted, there are underlying ideas at work, urging it to change. Seen from the outside, secondary education appears to us as a series of establishments whose physical and moral organization is fixed; but, seen from another angle, that same organization harbours aspirations seeking fulfilment. Underlying this fixed, consolidated existence there is a life on the move which, though less visible, is by no means insignificant (' L'évolution et

le rôle de l'enseignement secondaire en France', in: Education et sociologie, 1905, p. 122).

Furthermore, Durkheim sees school as the best place to seek for the importance of social relations involving the members of the society through knowledge acquiring. Durkheim (2001) also mentioned about teacher training that should contain ' psychological culture' as well as gaining guides from the sociologists' work in order for teachers to have a clearer picture of their role in the educational process. Teacher training is a part of educational system to standardise the teachers' qualifications before going to school to teach. Therefore, teacher training is regarded as a form of equality towards developing a better educational system that society can get benefits from.

Another view about this matter discussed the role of social capital in terms of benefiting the societies. According to Sandefur, Meier and Hernandez (1999), the quality of social capital and forms of social capital is an important aspect to be addressed on. This is right since they can affect the outcome of students' performance in education thus affecting their future undertakings in the job market. Therefore, the quality of the relationship between teachers and their students is an important aspect to focus on. Not only the teacher can play this role but other school personnel can be parts of the social capital in the educational environment. The implementation of rules in order to discipline the students is one way to make sure every student is treated equally in the school settings. This is according to Durkheim (as cited in Filloux, 2001):

Moral discipline is not only useful for moral life as such; its action extends beyond that. It plays a significant role in the shaping of character and of the personality in general. Indeed, what is most essential in character is the aptitude to exercise self-control, the faculty of restraint, or, as they say, inhibition that enables us to contain our passions and desires and to call them to order. (...) Discipline is useful, therefore, not only in the interest of society and as an indispensable means without which there would be no regular co-operation, but in the interest of the individual himself. Especially in democratic societies like ours children must be taught this healthy moderation. This is because the conventional barriers which forcibly curbed desires and ambitions in societies organized differently have partly fallen away and so only moral discipline is left to exercise this regulatory function (L'éducation morale, pp. 9-42)

On the other hand, opposing view of the fairness of education towards society is raised by other academicians. Curriculum does not only work to standardise the content of school's educational system but it sure has its hidden purposes. According to Vallance, 1991, p. 40 (as cited in Carpenter, 2001), hidden curriculum is:

...those practices and outcomes of schooling which, while not explicit in curriculum guides or school policy, nevertheless seem to be a regular and effective part of the school experience. (Vallance, 1991, p. 40)

Hence, school's hidden curriculum is perhaps considered as a form of unjust towards society. In some way, school educates students to face selected and specific positions in the workforce that might have no difference from their

parents' job. For instance, different expectation that a teacher has towards the students in the classroom might affect the students' performance especially for those in a lower streamed class. So, students are preparing themselves for a work that will suit their qualification as well as preparing themselves for social positions alike their parents'.

Based on three initial views in this essay, the arguments seem to be more on supporting the education role in promoting social equality in society. Most of the views are showing the equal opportunities that educational settings have offered to societies in order for them to gain success regardless of the background of the learners. In my opinion, the educational system is giving its best to serve society by its occasional development so that the system can fit into different sorts of societies. Since equal chance has been offered, what is left is the effort that the society can demonstrate in order to grab the opportunities so that individual skills can be developed. To be successful and to gain a better social status in the society, one must grab all the opportunities that have been offered especially by the government who has been providing vast chances for the people to be learned society. Therefore, societies need to help themselves in order to achieve success and improve their way of living.