CHAPTER 1
What Is Sociology of Education?

Theoretical Perspectives

A whole new perspective on schools and education lies in the study of sociology of education. How sociologists understand education can contribute to informed decision making and change in educational institutions. Sociologists of education focus on *interactions* between people, *structures* that provide recurring organizations, and *processes* that bring the structures such as schools alive through teaching, learning, and communicating. As one of the major structural parts, or *institutions*, in society, education is a topic of interest to many sociologists. Some work in university departments teaching sociology or education, others work in government agencies, and still others do research and advise school administrators. Whatever their role, sociologists of education provide valuable insights into the interactions, structures, and processes of educational systems. Sociologists of education examine many parts of educational systems, from interactions, classroom dynamics, and peer groups to school organizations and national and international systems of education.

Consider some of the following questions of interest to sociologists of education: What classroom and school settings are best for learning? How do peers affect children's achievement and ambitions? What classroom structures are most effective for children from different backgrounds? How do schools reflect the neighborhoods in which they are located? Does education "reproduce" the social class of students, and what effect does this have on children's futures? What is the relationship between education, religion, and political systems? How does access to technology affect students' learning and preparation for the future? How do nations compare on international educational tests? Is there a global curriculum? These are just a sampling of the many questions that make up the broad mandate for sociology of education, and it is a fascinating one. Sociologists place the study of education in a larger framework of interconnected institutions found in every society, including family, religion, politics, economics, and health, in addition to education. In this chapter, we examine the basic building blocks for a sociological inquiry into education and the theories that are used to frame ways of thinking about education in society (Ballantine, Hammack, and Stuber, 2017).

With a focus on studying people in groups, sociologists study a range of topics about educational systems. Chapters in this book focus on how sociologists study schools; the environment surrounding schools; the organization of schools and education; the roles people play in schools (teachers, students, administrators, and others); what we teach in schools; processes that take place in schools, including those that result in unequal outcomes for students; how different racial/ethnic groups, genders, and social class backgrounds of students can affect educational outcomes; the system of higher education; national and international comparisons of learning and achievement in different regions and countries; and educational reform. No other discipline has the broad approach and understanding provided by sociology of education.

Theories

Sociologists of education start with perspectives or *theories* that provide a framework to search for knowledge about education systems. Theories are attempts to explain and predict patterns and practices between individuals and in social systems—in this case, educational systems. Theories are carefully structured explanations or arguments that are applied to real-life situations. Since theories are not descriptions of what is happening in schools but only carefully thought-out explanations of why things happen, we can apply more than one theory to explain educational phenomena. An understanding of several theoretical approaches gives us different ways of thinking about educational systems. Theories guide research and policy formation in the sociology of education and provide logical explanations for why things happen as they do, helping to explain, predict, and generalize about issues related to schools. It is from the theories and the resulting research that sociologists of education come to understand educational systems. This chapter provides an overview of sociological theories as they are related to sociology of education, followed by classical and contemporary readings on the major theories. These theories also appear in readings throughout the book.

Following the open systems model discussed in the Introduction enables us to visualize the school system and its relationships with other organizations in its social context, or environment. By visualizing the dynamics inside a school, we can use theories to explain various situations within schools, such as the roles individuals play in schools and interactions between administrators, teachers, students, and other staff; equal opportunity within individual school organizations; social class dynamics as played out between peers in schools; formal and informal dynamics within schools; and the organization of school systems.

What You Will Find in Chapter 1

The purpose of the first chapter is to introduce you to the sociology of education through some key perspectives and theories in the field. The first reading discusses the relationship between sociology and education, why it is useful to study the sociology of education, who has a stake in educational systems and why they are likely interested in the field, and questions asked by sociologists of education. The second reading, by the book's editors Jeanne Ballantine and Joan Spade, outlines early theories in sociology of education and how they have influenced contemporary theories and theorists. This provides an introduction to the remaining readings, which include original works in various theories of sociology of education.

Current sociological theories have a long history in sociological thought, flowing from the early works of Émile Durkheim, Max Weber, and Karl Marx. The excerpts included in this chapter build upon their early ideas in attempting to understand the social world from the perspective of the "new" discipline of sociology in the early 1800s. Durkheim's study of the impact of the social system on maintaining order in society is considered the basis for functional theory.

The third reading provides a classical excerpt from Émile Durkheim, generally considered to be the first sociologist to write extensively about education. As a French professor of pedagogy at the Sorbonne in Paris, France, he used sociology to study education, a field in which he wrote and lectured for much of his career, until his death in 1917. Durkheim defined the field of sociology of education and

contributed to its early content. He was particularly concerned with the functions or purposes of education for society, the relationship between education and social change, the role of education in preparing young people to adhere to societal norms, and the social system that develops in classrooms and schools. In the reading in this chapter, Durkheim discusses the role that schools play in socializing the young. *Moral Education*, the focus of Durkheim's excerpt here, and his other works in sociology of education helped lay the foundation for more recent functional theorists. Functions are at the root of discussions of education; you will see them reflected in readings throughout the book. Sociologists using the functional perspective see the survival of society at stake—if a society fails to train its members in the skills and knowledge necessary for perpetuating that society, order and social control will be compromised. Durkheim and other functionalists were concerned with how educational systems work in conjunction with other parts of society to create a smooth-running social system.

Historically, the second major theoretical perspective to develop was conflict theory. It became a dominant theory in response to functional theory's focus on the need to preserve stability in society, sometimes at a cost to disadvantaged groups in society. Conflict theorists ask how schools contribute to unequal educational outcomes and distribution of people in stratification systems (such as social classes). A major issue for sociologists of education in the conflict tradition is the role education plays in maintaining the prestige, power, and economic and social position of the dominant groups in society. They contend that more powerful members of society maintain the most powerful positions in society, and the less powerful groups (often women, disadvantaged racial and ethnic groups, and lower social classes) are "allocated" to lower ranks.

Karl Marx and Max Weber set the stage for contemporary conflict theories, and the reading in this chapter by Randall Collins (1971) provides an example of this perspective applied to education. Classical conflict theorists argue that those who dominate capitalist economic systems also control other institutions in society, such as education. Capitalists use these institutions to maintain power and enhance their own profits, although not without resistance by some students and community groups. Collins also provides an overview of another approach to conflict theory, discussing the use of Weber's concept of "status groups." Weber points out the strong relationship between students' social class origins, their preparation in school, and the jobs they move into after school. Weber argued that schools teach and maintain particular "status cultures"—that is, groups in society with similar interests and positions in the status hierarchy. Located in neighborhoods, schools are often rather homogeneous in their student bodies and teach to the local constituency, thus perpetuating status cultures in neighborhoods and communities.

David Swartz describes a fairly recent branch of conflict theory: "social reproduction." It is based on the question of whether schools help reproduce students' social class by treating students differently based on their class background or other distinguishing factors. Reproduction theorists explore such questions as whether "working-class" students are destined to become working-class adults, and the role schools play in the process. The concept of "cultural capital" (and social and economic capital) focuses, in part, on micro-level issues such as individual student's language patterns and background cultural experiences. Swartz gives an overview of this branch of conflict theory.

Functional and conflict theorists have been debating how to explain what happens in schools since Marx, Weber, and Durkheim's times. Each function of education (discussed in the second reading) has generated controversy. For example, functionalists argue that schools prepare young members of society for their adult roles, thus allowing for the smooth functioning of society, whereas conflict theorists

counter that the powerful members of society control access to the best educations, thus preparing only their children for the highest positions in society and retaining their positions of power.

The third major theoretical perspective in sociology of education is interaction theory, a micro-level theory that focuses on individual and small-group experiences in the educational system: the processes and interactions that take place in schools. In *interaction* or *interpretive theory*, individuals are active players in shaping their experiences and cultures and not merely shaped by societal forces. By studying the way participants in the process of schooling construct their realities, researchers can better understand the meaning of education for participants. The final reading by Ray Rist (1977) comes from the interaction theory tradition, and it focuses on *labeling theory*.

One important factor in the teaching and learning process is what teachers come to expect from their students. The concept of *self-fulfilling prophecy* applied to the classroom was made famous by Rosenthal and Jacobson's (1968) book *Pygmalion in the Classroom*. They studied how teachers form judgments about their students and *label* them based on objective but also subjective factors, such as social class, appearance, and language patterns. The reading by Rist argues that utilizing labeling theory, and an outcome of labeling called the *self-fulfilling prophecy*, helps us to understand school processes from the standpoint of both teachers and students.

As you read about the theories presented in this chapter, try to picture the open systems perspective (discussed in the Introduction) with its many parts, activities, participants, structures, contexts or environments, and processes such as conflict. These readings provide an overview and examples of theoretical perspectives that will help you to understand the education system, interrelationships between parts, and many of the readings in the book that use these theories. In the following chapters, other parts of the open systems model are examined. Some readings take an institutional perspective, looking at how social structure affects the institution of education; others take a more micro-level focus on individuals, classrooms, and interactions in schools. All can be placed in the educational context of the open systems model, and all can be better understood with knowledge of the theories that are discussed in this chapter.

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Sociology of Education

A Unique Perspective for Understanding Schools

Jeanne H. Ballantine and Floyd M. Hammack

For many readers, sociology of education is a new field of inquiry. It provides new perspectives on education for future teachers and administrators, parents, students, and policy makers. These first two articles lay the groundwork for understanding the importance of the sociological perspective and theories in researching schools and effective teaching and learning strategies. This reading focuses specifically on what sociologists of education study and how such research is useful in understanding schools in our society.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What can sociology contribute to our understanding of education?

2. Who can benefit from studying the sociology of education, and how?

3. What are some topics of importance to sociologists of education?

Education is a lifelong process. It begins the day we are born and ends the day we die. It is found in every society and comes in many forms, ranging from the "school of hard knocks," or learning by experience, to formal institutional learning—from postindustrial to nonindustrial communities, from rural to urban settings, and from youth to older learners. Sociologists of education look into a range of questions such as the following: How can we increase academic achievement? Do schools simply perpetuate the country's stratification system, rich versus poor? What moral or religious impact should schools have on young people? Are children who have access to technology in schools better

prepared for the future? While sociologists do not try to answer questions of right and wrong, good and bad, they do consider the state of education and the outcomes of certain policies and practices.

Sociologists study people who are interacting and in small to large group situations. Within this broad framework are many specialties; these can be divided into studies of institutions in societies (established aspects of society that address common needs of people), studies of processes, and studies of interactions between individuals and groups. The structure of society—meaning the recurring patterns of behavior and ordered interrelationships to achieve the needs of people—is represented by six major institutions that constitute some of the major subject areas in sociology: family, religion, education, politics, economics, and health. Formal, complex organizations, such as schools, are part of the institutional *structures* that carry out the work of societies.

Processes, the action part of society, bring the structures alive. Through the process of socialization, people learn how to fit into society and what roles are expected of them. The process of *stratification* determines where people fit into the social structure and their resultant lifestyle. *Change* is an ever-present process that constantly forces schools and other organizations to adjust to new demands. *Learning* takes place both formally in school settings and informally by our family, peers, media, and other influences in our lives. Not all children in the world receive a formal school education, but they all experience processes that prepare them for adult roles. The institution of education interacts and is interdependent with each of the other institutions. For instance, the family's involvement in education will affect the child's achievement in school.

Sociology of education as a field is devoted to understanding educational systems; the subject matter ranges from teacher and student interactions to large educational systems of countries. By studying education systematically, sociologists offer insights to help guide policies for schools. Research on educational systems is guided by sociological theories and studied using sociological methods. Although sociology provides a unique and powerful set of tools to objectively explore the educational systems of societies, it may disappoint those who have an axe to grind or whose goal is to proselytize rather than objectively understand or explore. Sometimes simply raising certain questions is ideologically uncomfortable for those who "know the right answer," but where there is a controversy about educational policy, several different views emerge and proponents feel their view is the right answer. The goal of sociology of education is to objectively consider educational practices, sometimes controversial topics, and even unpopular beliefs to gain an understanding of a system that affects us all.

As you read this book, please ask questions. Challenge ideas. Explore findings—but do so with the intent of opening new avenues for thought, discussion, and research. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to acquaint you with the unique perspective of the sociology of education: the questions it addresses, the theoretical approaches it uses, the methods used to study educational systems, and the open systems approach used in this book. We begin our discussion with an overview of sociology of education.

Why Study Sociology of Education?

There are several answers to this question. Someday you may be a professional in the field of education or in a related field; you will be a taxpayer, if you aren't already; or you may be a parent with children in the school system. Right now you are a student involved in higher or continuing education. Why are you

taking this class? If you are a sociology major, you are studying education as one of the major institutions of society; if you are an education major, sociology may give you a new or different perspective as you prepare to enter the classroom. You may be at college in pursuit of knowledge; or this course may be required, you may need the credit, perhaps the teacher is supposed to be good, or it simply may fit into your schedule. Let's consider some of these reasons for studying sociology of education.

Teachers and Other Professionals. Between 2014 and 2024, kindergarten, elementary, and secondary school teachers' job growth will be 6 percent (between 1.5 and 1.6 million teachers), about the average growth in the labor market in the United States, due to projected increases in student enrollments and retirements of current teachers (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Yet the field is also experiencing a shortage, due to retirements.
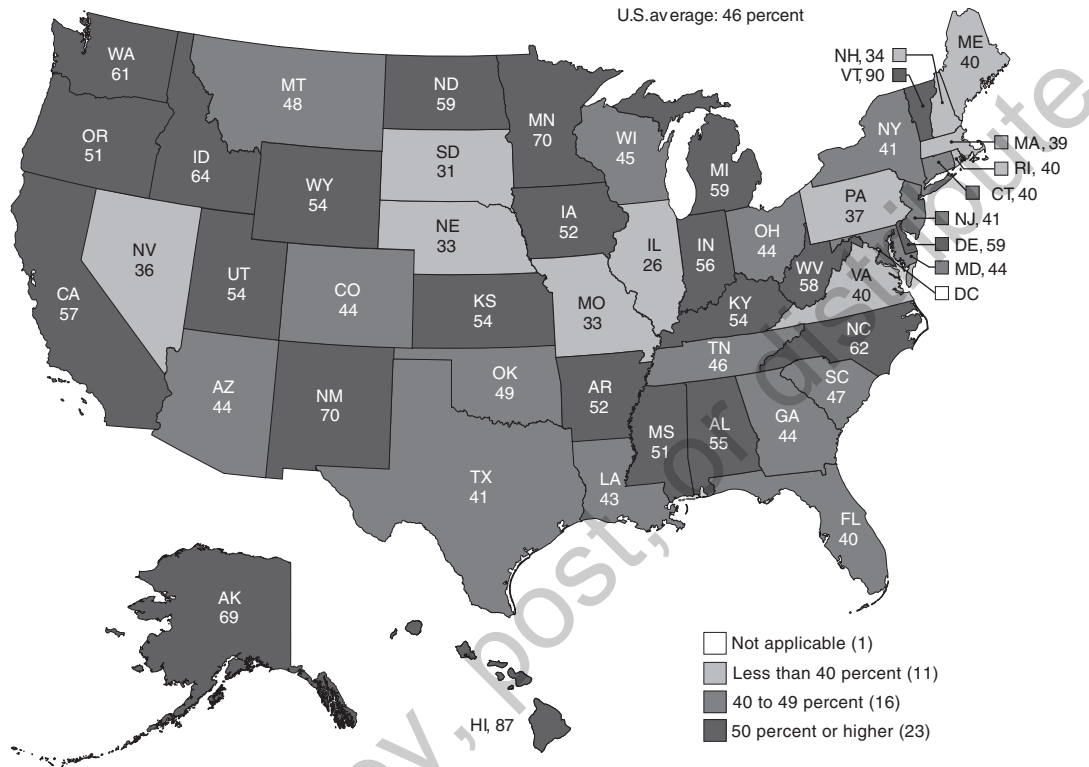
An estimated 3.1 million full-time teachers are involved in public school education (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). Other college graduates teach in their respective academic fields or become involved with policy matters in the schools. Professionals in such fields as social work and business have regular contact with schools when dealing with clients and employees. For both teachers and all of these other professionals, understanding the educational system is important knowledge for effective functioning.

Taxpayers. Taxpayers play a major role in financing schools at the elementary, secondary, and higher education levels, and they should have an understanding of how this money is being spent and with what results. Almost 100 percent of the money used to pay for physical plants, materials, salaries, and other essentials in the US public educational system is from taxes. Revenues for schools come from three main sources: local, state, and federal funds from sales, income, and property taxes. In 2016, the total government spending on education was $1 trillion, or 15 percent of the federal budget (US Government Spending, 2016).

On average, local governments account for 44 percent, states 49 percent, and federal support 13 percent. Average spending per student in the United States is $10,314 (McCann, 2016), with low-income areas receiving significantly less than high-income areas. Sociology of education helps taxpayers understand the school system for which they are paying. Figure 1.1 shows the average percentage of school budgets that comes from state revenues in the United States, primarily from state taxes. In 23 states, over half of educational funding comes from the state; in another 14 states, at least half is from local revenues; and in the remaining states, no single source of revenue—local, state, or federal—reaches 50%.

Parents. A large percentage of adults in the United States are parents, with an average household size of 2.54 members (Statista, 2015). That is a lot of parents who have children in schools—and many want to understand what is happening during the six to seven hours a day their child is away from home. Sociology of education has some answers! According to the "47th Annual PDK/Gallup Polls of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools" (PDK International 2015), adults expect schools to teach basic skills, discipline children, and instill values and a sense of responsibility. The concerns of the American public regarding schools have shown a high level of consistency from year to year (see Table 1.1) (Bushaw and Lopez, 2012). Lack of financial support and lack of discipline topped the list of problems seen by the public in 2012, with overcrowding being third. Fighting and gang violence and drugs were numbers 4 and 5 on the list.

Figure 1.1 State Revenues for Public Elementary and Secondary Schools as a Percentage of Total Public School Revenues, by State: School Year 2013–2014

U.S. average: 46 percent

Not applicable (1)
Less than 40 percent (11)
40 to 49 percent (16)
50 percent or higher (23)

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), "National Public Education Financial Survey," 2013–2014.

Parents agree with students and educators that there is too much emphasis on standardized testing (64 percent), and 41 percent of respondents say parents should be able to have their children opt out of standardized testing. Ninety-five percent of respondents feel quality of teachers is important to improve public schools, and 84 percent support mandatory vaccinations. These are just a few of the findings from this representative national poll (NEA, 2016), but they illustrate the concerns parents have in their children's schools.

Students. Children spend many hours a day in school. They may not question the sociological researchers that try to understand their experiences, but they do think about the good and "bad" teachers, nice classmates and bullies, and easy and hard classes they have. The knowledge that researchers provide can help educators understand what students face and how to make the road smoother and more

Table 1.1 What Do You Think Are the Biggest Problems That the Public Schools of Your Community Must Deal With?

	National Totals		Public School Parents	
	2008 (%)	2012 (%)	2008 (%)	2012 (%)
Lack of financial support	17	35	19	43
Lack of discipline	10	8	3	3
Overcrowding	6	5	11	6
Fighting/gang violence	6	4	8	5
Drugs	4	2	4	2

successful. Grade school education is mandatory in most countries. High school level education is mandatory in developed countries, and available in some developing countries. According to a study by Harvard University and the Asian Development Bank, only 6.7 percent of the world's population has a college degree (The Huffington Post, 2010). Within the United States and other economically advanced countries, many citizens have higher levels of education. In the United States, among adults age 25 and older, 32 percent have attained a bachelor's; 12 percent have attained a master's degree or higher; and 2 percent have completed a PhD (US Census Bureau, 2014).

College attracts a wide variety of students with numerous incentives and goals for their educational experience. For sociology majors, sociology of education provides a unique look at educational systems and their interdependence with other major institutions in society. For education majors, new insights can be gained by looking into the dynamic interactions both within educational settings and between the institution of education and other institutions in society These insights should give education majors the ability to deal with complex organizational and interpersonal issues that confront teachers and administrators.

Other reasons. Being an informed citizen, understanding how tax dollars are spent, and gaining knowledge for the sake of knowledge—learning what there is to learn—are among the other reasons to study sociology of education.

Questions Asked by Sociologists of Education

As students, parents, and members of a community, we face educational issues constantly. Consider the following examples:

Are Our Children Safe in Schools? Among the most serious school problems, according to surveys of the American public, are lack of discipline, fighting and gang violence, and drugs in schools (Bushaw and Lopez, 2012). National studies indicate that most students do not experience criminal victimization, and those that do are more likely to experience property crimes. Students in schools with gang

members present express more concern about safety. In addition, one-third of students indicate that drugs are available and one-fifth that alcohol is available at their school (Addington et al., 2002). Among US 8th, 10th, and 12th graders, however, recent studies show a decrease in use of alcohol, cigarettes, and illicit or illegal drugs, and no increase in marijuana use. However, there is also a decrease in the perceived harm of marijuana use, and use of e-cigarettes remains high (National Institute on Drug Abuse, 2016). Are our students safer in schools than out of school? This question depends on the school and neighborhood, but studies conclude that students in most schools are safe from violence and drug abuse (CDC, 2015).

Should Minimum Competency in Key Subjects Such as Reading and Math Be Required for High School Graduation? In many countries and in some parts of the United States, students are required to take reading and math exams in order to enter high school and graduate from it. The No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top federal policies in the United States require all students to be tested at various times throughout their school years on Common Core standards. More recently, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed by President Obama on December 10, 2015, reaffirms the right of every child to have an equal opportunity for education. With high school graduation rates up, dropout rates down, and more students going to college, this law focuses on preparing all students for college and careers. Increasingly, as states hold schools and teachers responsible for the academic competence of students who move through the system (Borman and Cotner, 2012), this law will set goals for the next phase of educational programming at the national level (US Department of Education, 2015). It also reflects the global concern about the school-to-work pipeline and how to improve its effectiveness. Standardized tests are viewed by many as one way to hold schools accountable for students' progress. Yet, some educators, researchers, and parents question the value of requiring competency tests because they have little benefit for students who pass them and can harm students who do not pass (Warren and Grodsky, 2009). What are some implications of requiring—or not requiring—tests? This question will be discussed in later chapters.

How Should Education Be Funded? Many countries have centralized governmental educational funding and decision making. Across the United States, however, local taxpayers vote on local school levies that provide over 40 percent of school funding. The criticism is that local school districts vary dramatically in property or other taxes available to pay their share for schools based on rich versus poor districts. Some schools are forced to curtail programs and cut the number of teachers because there is no money. Local school levies are failing, setting some districts even farther behind. This could be a result of dissatisfied parents, competition for resources, a bid for more community control, or rebellion against higher taxes. The federal government contributes only about 2 percent of its total budget to schools (or $78.9 billion in 2016, and $85 billion proposed for 2017), and that is to support special initiatives (Tucker, 2015). Some aspects of these difficult issues will be addressed in the following chapters.

What Types of Teachers and Classroom Environments Provide the Best Learning Experience for Children? Educators debate lecture versus experiential learning, and cooperative learning versus individualized instruction. Studies (e.g., Pescosolido and Aminzade, 1999) of effective teaching strategies provide information to help educators carry out their roles effectively. For example, research on the

BOX 1.1 Current Research in the Sociology of Education

The following sampling of current research questions gives an idea of the wide range of subject matter:

If parents are involved in their children's schooling, are children more successful in school?

How effective are different teaching techniques, styles of learning, classroom organizations, and school and classroom size in teaching students of various types and abilities?

What are some community influences on the school, and how do these affect devision making in schools, especially as it relates to the school curriculum and socialization of the young?

Do teacher proficiency exams increase teaching quality? Do student achievement exams improve education?

Can minority students learn better or more in an integrated school?

Do schools perpetuate inequality?

Should religion be allowed in schools? What are the practices around the world?

most effective size of classes and schools attempts to provide policymakers with data to inform decision making (Darling-Hammond, 2010). What other classroom factors influence teaching and learning?

A review of the titles of articles in the premiere journal *Sociology of Education* provides an overview of current topics being studied in the field. For example, researchers explored immigrant education, causes of academic failure and dropping out, social class differences in college expectations and acceptance, interracial friendships, racial segregation in schools, educational attainment and attitudes toward schooling, higher education aspirations and enrollments, and females and males in different academic fields. Look through this and other sociology of education resources to add to the list of questions asked by sociology of education; they cover a fascinating array of topics. Sociological research sheds light on educational issues, and thus helps teachers, citizens, and policy makers with the decision-making process. Multitudes of questions arise, and many of them are being studied around the world.

From what you have read so far, what topics in sociology of education interest you?

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Getting Started

Understanding Education Through Sociological Theory

Jeanne H. Ballantine and Joan Z. Spade

Each of us has opinions about schools. These opinions, particularly if held by people in power-ful positions in society, often translate into policy decisions related to schools and votes on tax levies. Theories provide sociologists and policy makers with a choice of frameworks to view educational systems in more depth, rather than simply using opinions, and help us to under-stand the research that sheds light on what happens in schools, enabling informed decisions about school policies. In this reading, we outline key elements of several major theoretical approaches in sociology of education to provide multiple frames from which to view educa-tional issues discussed in this book.

Questions to consider as you read this article:

1. How can theories in the sociology of education help us understand educational systems?

2. What are some research questions that microlevel and macrolevel theorists might address? How do they differ?

3. Think of a current issue in education that is of interest to you, and consider how the theories discussed in this reading would help you understand that issue.

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To understand how education systems work—or don't work—social scientists develop theories providing logical, carefully structured arguments to explain schools and society. Theories together with research provide valuable insights into all parts of education. Those parts are represented by the open systems model discussed in the introduction to this book. Some theories have limited use, but others stand the test of time and have relevance beyond the immediate circumstances that generated them.

The purpose of this discussion is to review some of the leading theoretical approaches used in the sociology of education to develop questions about educational systems as a way to help organize discussion. The theories in this reading are divided into micro and macro levels of analysis. Microlevel explanations focus on the individual and interactions between individuals, such as how teachers, administrators, students, parents, or others perceive and respond to educational settings and how their responses shape interactions. For example, we can use microlevel theories to understand how teachers respond differently to some children based on their gender or the social class of their families. Macrolevel explanations, on the other hand, focus on the institution of education in societies and the world, and how schools fit into the larger social structure of societies. As such, macrolevel theorists might study why different educational structures emerge in different societies, looking at the role of schools in society as a whole. Our discussion of these theories begins with microlevel explanations and moves to macrolevel theoretical perspectives.

For over a half-century, *Why Johnny Can't Read* (Flesch, 1955) and numerous other books explored problems in school systems, from teachers' expectations of students to classroom dynamics and school policies such as tracking and testing. These issues continue to be debated today in both national and international contexts. We use the question of "why Johnny can't read" to illustrate the theories we introduce in this reading.

Microlevel Theories of Education

Efforts to understand why Johnny can't read are typically found at the micro level of analysis. They focus on interactions and experiences in the classroom between the student and others, often attributing failure to the students themselves, to their teachers, or to their home environments. *Interaction theorists* focus on the interpersonal dynamics of the situation and assume that individuals socially construct their lives based on the environments in which they find themselves. With origins in the field of social psychology, symbolic interaction theories link individuals with the symbols they use to understand the situations they are in. These symbols are developed and understood in their immediate social contexts, groups, and society. For example, the names students in each school or classroom call each other or the meanings they give to their schoolwork vary both within and between schools and are often linked to the social class backgrounds of students and their peers.

Nothing is taken for granted in interaction theory; what most people accept as given is questioned and studied. Thus, the question of why Johnny can't read begins with Johnny's "social construction of reality," as well as the socially constructed realities of his teachers, school administrators, parents, and others in his social world and embedded in all interactions Johnny has (Berger & Luckmann, 1963). Add to the puzzle complications of race, class, and gender, socially constructed categories themselves, and we have the context for symbolic interaction theory as illustrated in the reading by Morris in Chapter 7.

Interaction theories also focus on what teachers and students *do* in school. These theories grew from reactions to the macrolevel structural-functional and conflict theories, which focus on society and how schools as institutions fit into the big picture. The criticism is that macrolevel approaches miss the dynamics of everyday school interactions and life in classrooms that shape children's futures. Interaction theorists question things many people overlook, such as how students get labeled and tracked in schools; they ask questions about the most common, ordinary interactions between school participants. Sociologists of education using this approach are likely to focus on students' attitudes, values, and achievements, such as their motivations to do well in school; students' self-concepts; and how interactions between peers, students, teachers, and principals are shaped by the social class backgrounds of all participants.

Among the several approaches taken by interaction theorists are symbolic interaction, role theory, and labeling theory; dramaturgy and ethnomethodology; and phenomenological sociology. The following discussion gives an overview of some of these approaches.

Symbolic Interaction Theory

Symbols are the concepts or ideas that we use to frame our interactions. These concepts can be expressed by words or gestures; they define reality and affect our sense of self and the social hierarchies that surround us. As such, children are viewed as active participants in school and are, therefore, agents in creating the social reality in which they live. For example, popularity is a major issue for many children, especially in middle school years. Popularity is mostly a function of being visible and having everyone know who you are, but it also specifies a symbolic hierarchy of social power. Sometimes popularity is gained by representing the school in an athletic contest, by being attractive, or by being in a leadership position. The difficulty is that positions of popularity are scarce. Thus, competition is created, and some individuals are going to be "losers," with less social power, while a few others are "winners" in this socially defined popularity contest. Consider also the example of academic grouping. No matter what teachers or administrators call reading groups and different levels of English, mathematics, or science classes, children quickly learn whether they are "good" or "bad" students. Thus, symbols define students' and teachers' interactions—specifying who is "bright," "cooperative," "trouble," and so forth. Symbols define what experiences are "good" or "bad." In other words, symbols create our social reality.

Considerable inequality occurs in the symbols students bring with them to school. Children from families who cannot afford to purchase desired clothing or other status symbols are more likely to be the "losers." Those who "win" are more likely to have access to symbolic resources, including higher class–based language patterns and social experiences. The winners are given special privileges in the classroom or school. These students, who exude privilege in the symbols they bring with them, are more likely to develop leadership skills and generally feel good about themselves.

Symbolic interaction theory has its roots in the works of G. H. Mead and C. H. Cooley on the development of the self through social interaction, whether in school or in other areas of life. People within a culture generally interpret and define social situations in similar ways because they share experiences and expectations (Ballantine, Roberts, and Korgen 2018). Students look to others, particularly their teachers, to understand their place in this culture. Common norms evolve to guide behavior. Students learn through interaction how they are different from others based on individual experiences, social class, and status.

Labeling Theory

Labeling theory is closely related to the symbolic interactionist perspective (Goffman, 1967). If Johnny is told often enough that he is stupid and can't do the work, the label of "stupid" can become a *self-fulfilling prophecy* as he comes to incorporate that label into his sense of self. Then, teachers and others who create and reinforce the label continue to respond to Johnny as if that symbol is an accurate reflection of his abilities. Using labeling theory, we can better understand how teachers' expectations based on students' race, class, ethnic background, gender, religion, or other characteristics affect students' self-perceptions and achievement levels.

Labeling theory helps us to understand how microlevel interactions in the school contribute to individuals' formations of their sense of self. Young people from 6 to 18 years old spend much of their time in school or school-related activities; therefore, *student* is a status that has enormous impact on how they see themselves. Interaction with others in school affects students' sense of self. The image that is reflected back to someone—as student or as teacher, for example—can begin to mold one's sense of competence, intelligence, and likability. The school creates a symbolic structure that influences how individuals make sense of their reality and interact with others. Official school positions such as president of the student council, lower-level reader, or athlete can become important elements of a student's sense of self.

The powerful interactions between labelers and labeled have been studied in schools. A classic study found that students in classrooms where the teachers were told that students in their classes were "late bloomers" and would "blossom" that year achieved much more academically than students in classrooms where the teacher had no expectations for, even though students in both classrooms were similar in ability and potential (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

The process of labeling by assigning students to academic and nonacademic tracks and ability groups serves to reproduce inequalities in society. Low-income students are often placed in low-ability groups, which can become a "life sentence" affecting achievement and future opportunities. Interactions between participants in the school and classroom give insight into the labeling process. For example, in another classic study, Rist (1970, 1977) found that teachers formed expectations for students based on their race, class, ethnicity, and gender and that these expectations had long-term effects on students' achievement and sense of themselves. The result is that low-income students are more likely to be placed in lower-ability groups that do not reflect their actual ability (Rist, 1970, 1977; Sadovnik, 2007).

Outside-of-school statuses can be an important basis for interactions in schools. In addition to social class, gender is reinforced in social interactions in the classroom, as shown in research findings indicating that girls struggle more with self-esteem, especially in middle school, than do boys (AAUW Educational Foundation, 2001). Sadker and Sadker (1994) have found clear and distinct patterns in the way teachers interact with boys and girls in the classroom. Teachers tend to call on boys more, wait longer for boys' responses to questions, and expect boys to act out more in the classroom. Girls, on the other hand, are expected to be quiet and compliant, and teachers tend to do things for girls, rather than push them to succeed. Given how gendered expectations shape interactions in the classroom, it is not surprising that girls tend to struggle with self-esteem issues at adolescence. In Chapter 7, Roslyn Arlin Mickelson discusses gender differences in classrooms for boys and girls and how these differences are changing.

Furthermore, these patterns of gender and class differences vary by race and ethnicity (Carter, 2006; Grant, 2004). The point is that schools are powerful institutions, and the interactions within them heavily influence how children think about themselves and their futures. Students from different social classes, races, genders, and sexual orientations bring different orientations, patterns, and behaviors into the schools, resulting in unique symbolic and interactional experiences (see Rist in this chapter's readings).

Dramaturgy

Erving Goffman looked for connections between the micro levels and macro levels of sociology. Stemming from Durkheim's ideas of the importance of rituals and symbols in everyday life, the messages they transfer, and the collective conscience that develops from them, Goffman wrote that everyday interactions are based on codes or systems that represent rules of the larger society (Antikainen et al., 2010). He compared social life for individuals to front-stage and backstage behavior on which people perform differently depending on the impressions they wish to project to the audience (Goffman, 1959). Goffman's influence is also seen in the study of school interactions with his concepts of "encounters"—conscious and planned interaction (Goffman, 1990). As Johnny comes to school, he goes "on stage" and presents himself through his clothing and other symbols that he adopts. He attempts to manage the impressions he gives to others, including teachers and peers, in order to manipulate how they define him as he struggles with learning to read.

Rational Choice Theory

While rational choice theory does not ignore symbols and interactions, this theory focuses primarily on the assumption that there are costs and rewards involved in our individual decisions within the classroom and school. According to rational choice theory, if benefits outweigh costs, the individual is likely to act in order to continue receiving benefits. If costs outweigh benefits, the individual will seek other courses of action. In education, the question is how weighing of costs and benefits influences decisions about educational choices by students, teachers, and administrators in the conduct of school experiences.

For example, students who consider dropping out of school likely go through some analysis, comparing benefits of staying in school, such as ability to get a better job, with costs to themselves, for instance their battered self-esteem in schools. For Johnny, deciding whether to do what is necessary to learn to read or to focus on behaviors that gain him esteem in other areas may be part of his school day. Whether we would agree that individuals have assessed the costs and the benefits correctly is not the point; the issue is how individuals evaluate the benefits and costs at a given moment in making what theorists describe as a *rational choice* for them.

Rational choice theory can also be applied to the issue of teacher retention. Of those teachers who made over $40,000 in their first year of teaching 97% returned the next year. Only 87% who earned less than $40,000 returned, illustrating that a rational choice about financial incentives influenced teacher decisions (NCES, 2015). Rational choice theorists would explain this in terms of the perceived costs—relatively low salary for a college graduate; minimal respect from parents, students, and administrators; long days for 9 months of the year; and little opportunity to participate in teaching- and job-related decisions (Dworkin, Saha, & Hill, 2003). Teachers compare these costs to the benefits of teaching—the feeling

of making a contribution to society and helping children; time off in the summer; and enjoying aspects of teaching, coaching, or directing. When costs are seen as higher than benefits, teachers leave the profession, resulting in high teacher burnout and dropout rates (Dworkin, 2007). Rational choice theory extends interactionist theories and is useful as we try to understand decision making of individuals in schools.

Macrolevel Theories of Education

Whereas microlevel theories focus on the individual's construction of reality in educational settings and interpersonal interactions between individuals and in small groups within schools, macrolevel explanations focus on larger societal and cultural systems. As such, schools as organizations, the processes of teaching and learning, and the interactions within schools and classrooms are viewed as part of larger social contexts.

Functional Theory

Functional theory helps us to understand how education systems work and what purpose education serves in societies. While this is not a leading theory in sociology of education today, we describe it here because of its historical importance and influence on the field today, and because other theories arose as reactions to or modifications of functional theory. Functional theory starts with the assumption that education as an institution in society operates, along with other institutions, to facilitate the stability of society. There is a relationship between schools and other institutions in society, as all institutions must fulfill necessary societal functions to maintain society. Each part of a society—education, family, political and economic systems, health, religion—works together to create a functioning social system. Each part contributes necessary elements to the functioning and survival of the whole society, just as multiple parts of the body work together to keep us healthy and active. As such, in functional theory schools are analyzed in terms of their functions, or purposes, in the whole system (see the discussion of school functions below). The degree of interdependence among parts in the system relates to the degree of integration among these parts; all parts complement each other, and the assumption is that a smooth-running, stable system is well integrated. Shared values, or consensus, among members are important components of the system, as these help keep it in balance and working smoothly. In terms of why Johnny can't read, it may be that it is not important to society for Johnny to read, or it is simply not functional for all students to know how to read. Consider why this might be so.

Functional theories of education originated in the work of Émile Durkheim (1858–1917), who contributed a method for viewing schools and an explanation of how schools help to maintain order in societies. According to Durkheim, a major role of education in society was to create unity by providing a common moral code necessary for social cohesion in a society. Durkheim's major works in education were published in collections titled *Moral Education* (1925/1961), *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1938/1977), and *Education and Society* (1903/1956), all written in the early 1900s. In these works, he set forth a definition of education that has guided the field.

In *Moral Education*, Durkheim outlined his beliefs about the function of schools and their relationship to society. Moral values are, for Durkheim, the foundation of the social order, and society is perpetuated through its educational institutions, which help instill values and a sense of moral order in

the youngest members of society. In this work, he analyzed classrooms as "small societies," or agents of socialization, reflecting the moral order of the social system at that time. The school serves as an intermediary between the *affective morality* (or a morality related to emotion or feeling) of the family and the rigorous morality of society. Discipline is the morality of the classroom, and without it the classroom can become like an undisciplined mob, according to Durkheim. Because children learn to be social beings and develop appropriate social values through contact with others, schools are an important training ground for learning social skills and the "rules" of the larger society (instrumental skills), as opposed to the more emotional (affective) character of families. Functionalists also argue that the passing on of knowledge and behaviors is a primary function of schools, one necessary to maintain order and fill needed positions in society. Following Durkheim, sociologists see the transmission of moral and occupational education, discipline, and values as necessary for the survival of society. Thus, schools play a very important role in maintaining functioning of the larger society.

Durkheim was concerned primarily with value transmission for the stability of society. He did not consider the possible conflict between this stable view of the values and skills, and what is necessary for changing emerging industrial societies. He argued also that education should be under the control of the state, free from special interest groups; however, as we know, most governments are subject to influence from interest groups and changes in society, as you will read throughout this book. Talcott Parsons (1959) developed modern functional theory. He saw education as performing certain important tasks or "functions" for society, such as preparing young people for roles in a democratic society. Parsons argued that female elementary school teachers (he assumed all elementary school teachers should be female) play a role in transitioning children from the home and protection of mother to schools where a more impersonal female role socializes children to meet the less personal and more universal demands of society (Parsons, 1959). This linking of teachers to their role in the larger society is only one example of how functionalists have viewed the role of teachers (see the reading by Ingersoll and Merrill in Chapter 5).

Other functionalists argued that some degree of inequality is inevitable in society because the most challenging positions required attracting the most talented individuals who must spend time and money getting the necessary education to fill important roles in society. These theorists saw schools as part of a large system in which individuals who dedicate themselves to training for higher-level occupations would receive greater rewards in terms of income and prestige (Davis & Moore, 1945). This functional theory sees achievement in schools as based on merit, not one's status. Thus, the function of education is to support capitalism through the distribution of labor, allowing those with the most "merit" to achieve and fill higher-level positions in society.

Later functional theorists built on the base provided by Durkheim, Parsons, and others. For example, Dreeben (1968) considered the social organization of schools, while others examined the values taught in school and how these lead to greater societal consensus and preparation for one's role in society (Cookson & Sadovnik, 2002). To summarize, social scientists who research and interpret events from the functional perspective focus on the central functions of education for society as a whole (Ballantine, Hammack, and Stuber, 2017). We briefly summarize those functions as follows:

Socialization: Teaching Children to Be Members of Society. Most people remember their first day of elementary school, marking a transition between the warm, loving, accepting world of the family and a more impersonal school world that emphasizes discipline, knowledge, skills, responsibility, and

obedience. In school, children learn that they must prove themselves; they are no longer accepted regardless of their behaviors as they were in their families. They must meet certain expectations and compete for attention and rewards. They also must prepare to participate in their society's political and economic systems, in which a literate populace is necessary to make informed decisions on issues. Citizens expect schools to respond to the constant changes in societies. In heterogeneous societies with diverse groups and cultures, school socialization helps to integrate immigrants by teaching them the language and customs of the larger society and by working to reduce intergroup tensions. This provides cohesion and order in society as a whole.

Teaching Children to Be Productive Members of Society. Societies use education to pass on values, skills, and knowledge necessary for survival. Sometimes this process occurs in formal classrooms, sometimes in informal places. For example, in West African villages children may have several years of formal education in a village school, but they learn future occupational roles informally by observing their elders in their families and by "playing" at the tasks they will soon undertake for survival. The girls help pound cassava root for the evening meal while boys build model boats and practice negotiating the waves. It is typically only the elite—sons and daughters of the rulers and the wealthy—who receive formal education beyond basic literacy in most traditional societies (Ballantine, Roberts, and Korgen, 2018). However, elders and family members in developed societies cannot teach all the skills necessary for survival. Formal schooling emerged to meet the needs of industrial and postindustrial societies, furnishing the specialized training required by rapidly growing and changing technology. Schools in industrialized societies play a major part in placing students into later work roles.

Selection and Training of Individuals for Positions in Society. Most people have taken standardized tests, received grades at the end of a term or year, and asked teachers to write recommendation letters. Functionalists see these activities as part of the selection process prevalent in competitive societies with formal education systems. Schools distribute credentials—grades, test scores, and degrees—that determine the college or job opportunities available to individuals in society, the fields of study individuals pursue, and ultimately individual status in society. For example, selection criteria determine who gets into the "best" colleges or even into college at all, thereby sealing one's place in society. As you will read later in this book, countries today are using standardized tests in a competition to provide the "best" education in our global society.

Promoting Change and Innovation. Institutions of higher education are expected to generate new knowledge, technology, and ideas, and to produce students with up-to-date skills and information required to lead industry and other key institutions in society. In a global age of computers and other electronic technology, critical thinking and analytical skills are essential as workers face issues that require problem solving rather than rote memorization. Thus, the curriculum must change to meet the needs of the social circumstances. Familiarity with technological equipment—computers, Internet resources, electronic library searches, and so forth—becomes a critical survival skill for individuals and society. Colleges and universities are called on to provide ideas and innovations as well as skilled workers. Consider the example of India, which has top-ranked technical institutes training their graduates to meet changing world needs. These highly skilled graduates of India's colleges and universities are employed by companies around the world, including those from Europe and the United States, to

process information and send it back the next morning. Thus, well-trained, efficient engineers and computer experts working in India for lower wages than in many developed countries have become an essential part of the global economy (Drori, 2006). Many technologically trained graduates from India also come to the United States on special H1B visas, but the current U.S. government is tightening restrictions on these visas (Ainsley, 2017).

Latent Functions of Education. In addition to these intended functions that are filled by schools, education provides unseen latent functions. These are unintended consequences of the educational process. For example, schools keep children off the streets until they can be absorbed into productive roles in society, serving an informal "babysitting" function. In fact, in the United States, children now stay in school well into their 20s, and the age at which they join the labor force or start families is much later than it was in previous generations. Schools also provide young people with a place to congregate, which fosters a youth culture of music, fashion, slang, dances, dating, and sometimes gangs. At the ages when social relationships are being established, especially with the opposite sex, colleges serve as "mating" and "matching" places for young adults. Education also weakens parental control over youth, helps them begin the move toward independence, and provides experiences in large, impersonal secondary groups (Ballantine & Roberts, 2014).

Functional theorists believe that when the above social functions are not adequately addressed, the educational system is ripe for change. The structure and the processes within the educational institution remain stable only if the basic functions of education in society are being met.

Functionalist arguments, therefore, look to how the structure of schooling "works" within the larger societal context. Understanding why Johnny can't read, thus, is not as important as understanding how Johnny's inability to read fits within the larger social order.

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists challenge the functionalist assumptions that schools are ideologically and politically neutral and that schools operate based on meritocracy where each child is able to achieve to the highest level of his or her own ability so as to better meet the needs of society. Conflict theorists, instead, argue that inequality is based on one's position in the social system, not merit, and that schooling privileges some children and disadvantages others. There are several branches of conflict theory, which include different explanations of the role education systems play in maintaining inequality. Recent theories integrate ethnicity, race, and gender issues and add politics and culture to the traditional Marxist class and economic issues. In addition, issues of "reproduction and resistance" are recent additions to the conflict perspective. Origins of conflict theory are situated in the writings of Marx (1847/1955) and later Max Weber (1948a, 1948b, 1961).

In contrast to functional theory, conflict theory assumes a tension in society created by the competing interests of groups in society. Conflicts occur even when teachers, students, parents, and administrators agree on the rules. Each group obeys the rules even though the rules are not in their best interests because they may not see alternatives or may fear the consequences of not obeying. However, conflict theorists disagree on whether participants in the education system generally conform to the rules, rebel against them, or feel they have no choices. The roots of conflict thought are outlined below, and contemporary conflict theory, originating in the 1960s and 1970s, is discussed.

Karl Marx (1818–1883) was outraged over the social conditions of the exploited workers in the class system that resulted from early industrialization. He contended that the economic structure of industrialization, or what he called capitalism, created competing groups, the "haves" and the "have-nots," who lived in a constant state of tension (conflict) over resources that one had and the other wanted. The basis of this struggle is that the haves (or the owners of the means by which goods are produced in a society) control economic resources and thus have power, wealth, material goods, privilege (including access to the best schools and education), and influence. The have-nots (or the people who work for those who own the factories that produce goods in society) present a constant challenge as they seek a larger share of economic resources (wages) for their own survival. According to Marx, the haves often use coercive power and manipulation to hold society together. However, power can also be maintained by ideology—controlling ideas, or what people believe to be true. Conflict theorists view change as inevitable, as conflicts of interest should lead to the overthrow of existing power structures. Marx believed that class conflict would continue until the capitalist system of economic dominance was overthrown and replaced by a more equitable system. However, this revolution has yet to happen.

Marx argued that schools create and maintain inequality by teaching students an ideology that serves the interests of the rich and instills in students a sense of "false consciousness." That is, students in schools learn to accept the myth of meritocracy, that all have an equal chance of achieving. Those who buy into this ideology and fail often believe that their failure is due to their own shortcomings and lack of ability. Students learn to internalize their own lower position in society and their lowly fate, thus accepting a false consciousness and legitimizing the wealth and power of capitalists. Marx would also argue that the organization of schooling is set up in such a way that all students will not receive the same quality of education; thus, some students coming out of the educational system will work in factories for less pay.

Weber's Contributions to the Sociology of Education. Max Weber (1864–1920) was said to have argued with Marx's ghost because he believed that conflict in society was not based solely in economic relations as Marx had argued. Weber contended that inequalities and potential conflict were sustained in different distributions of status (prestige), power (ability to control others), and class (economic relations). While Weber also felt that conflict was a constant possibility, he focused more on power relationships between groups and differences in status that create a structure of inequality in societies.

Weber provided a less systematic treatment of education than Durkheim. His work in the field of sociology, however, has contributed to our understanding of many aspects of education. He is noted for his contributions to the understanding of bureaucracy and for the concept of *status groups.* In fact, he writes that the primary activity of schools is to teach particular "status cultures." Status cultures can be thought of as subcultures based on the social status of the group in society, such as working-class or upper-class culture. Each status group has its own set of symbols (e.g., sneakers that are "cool"), values (how important it is to go to college), and beliefs (whether studying and learning are important) that are known to the individuals in the group, but not fully understood or available to those outside the group. Power relationships and the conflicting interests of individuals and groups in society influence educational systems, for it is the interests and purposes of the dominant groups in society that shape the schools.

Weber (1961) spoke of the "tyranny of educational credentials" as a prerequisite for high-status positions, which thus maintains inequality in the social order of society. This theme is continued by

Randall Collins (see his reading in this chapter), another conflict theorist following in Weber's tradition. Collins focuses on the increased requirements for higher-level positions used by more advantaged individuals to further their status (often called credentialism) (Collins, 1979). The rapid expansion of educational qualifications, faster than the number of jobs, has led to "credential inflation," yet these credentials are not necessary for most jobs. The result is that the credentials required for jobs keep increasing, further separating those who can afford the time and money to achieve these credentials and those who cannot.

Within the school there are "insiders" whose status culture, Weber believed, is reinforced through the school experience, and "outsiders" who face barriers to success in school. As we apply these ideas to school systems today to explain the situation of poor and minority students, and why Johnny can't read, the relevance of Weber's brand of conflict theory becomes evident. His theory deals with conflict, domination, and status groups struggling for wealth, power, and status in society. While education is used by individuals and society as a means to attain desired ends, it also creates unequal groups in society. Relating this to Karl Marx's writings on conflict theory, education produces a disciplined labor force for military, political, or other areas of control and exploitation by the elite. Status groups differ in property ownership; cultural status, such as social class or ethnic group membership; and power derived from positions in government or other organizations.

Weber, however, can also be considered a functionalist whose writings, using cross-cultural examples and exploring preindustrial and modern societies, shed light on the role of education in different societies at various time periods (Weber, 1948a). In preindustrial times, education served the primary purpose of training people to fit into a way of life and a particular station in society. With industrialization, however, new pressures faced education from upwardly mobile members of society vying for higher positions in the economic system. Educational institutions became increasingly important in training people for new roles in society (Weber, 1948b).

Conflict Theory Today. Marx and Weber set the stage for the many branches of conflict theory advocated by theorists today. Research from the conflict theorists' perspective tends to focus on those tensions created by power and conflict that ultimately cause change. Some conflict theorists, following from Marx's emphasis on the economic structure of society, see mass public education as a tool of powerful capitalists to control the entrance into higher levels of education through the selection and allocation function. Marx argued that schools contributed to a "false consciousness," the equivalent of teaching students that the oppressive conditions that shape their lives cannot be changed. They must simply accept their situations, or even believe that they are not as worthy as others who are more powerful or have more advantages. Many conflict theorists believe that until society's economic and political systems are changed, school reform providing equal access to all children will be impossible (Bowles & Gintis, 1976).

Conflict theorists studying education systems point out that differences in the achievement of students are not based primarily on their ability or intelligence; rather, schools reflect the needs of the powerful, dominant groups in society and serve to perpetuate a capitalistic system that reproduces social classes. Teacher expectations based on characteristics of children, such as race and social class background, shape students' learning experiences and affect their achievements. For instance, teacher expectations may differ for poor students who have more limited language skills or speak with a dialect and lack middle-class dress, appearance, and manners. Some also argue that differential funding and

resources for schools affect achievements of students. Poor and minority students are also more likely to be placed or tracked into lower reading and academic groups, placements that are hard to change. These groups are given different curricula. The higher-class students receive more mentally challenging curricula that prepare them to think creatively and make decisions, and the lower-class students experience less challenging curricula that prepare them for manual labor. The reading in this chapter on Social Reproduction (Swartz) describes a newer application of conflict theory. They are more likely to lead students to drop out of school. All of the above factors make it harder for Johnny to learn to read and serve to reproduce inequalities in society as a whole.

Other theorists apply conflict theory arguments to the school and classroom level of analysis. For example, Willard Waller believes that schools are in a state of constant potential conflict and disequilibrium; teachers are threatened with the loss of their jobs because of lack of student discipline; academic authority is constantly threatened by students, parents, school boards, and alumni who represent other, often competing, interest groups in the system; and students are forced to go to schools, which they may consider oppressive and demeaning (Waller, 1932/1965). Although larger conflicts between groups in society may be the basis for these within-school patterns, the focus of some conflict theorists is not on these larger societal relationships. Many of these examples reinforce the concept of reproduction, discussed next.

Reproduction and Resistance Theories. In the second half of the 20th century, reproduction and resistance theories further expanded the ideas of conflict theories. The argument of cultural reproduction and resistance theories, very generally, is that those who dominate capitalistic systems mold individuals to suit their own purposes. These theorists examine how forms of culture passed on by families and schools end up shaping individuals' views of their worlds (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The concept of social reproduction was developed in the late 1960s and early 1970s in Europe to explore the claim that schools actually increase inequality through the process of "teaching." At this time when equality was a central interest, the idea that schools might be contributing to societies' inequalities led to studies of the possibility that schools and families were actually perpetuating social class structures. Following from Marx, schools were viewed as part of a superstructure, along with family, politics, religion, culture, and economy, organized around the interests of the dominant capitalist group. The dominant group needs workers with good work habits, skills, and loyalty to produce products and services needed by capitalists in exchange for wages for their labor. Schools served the needs of the dominant group by teaching students their roles in society and perpetuating the belief that the system was a fair and merit-based way to select workers. For example, Bowles and Gintis's (1976) correspondence theory takes a macro view of schools, arguing that schools reproduce inequality and create class and power differences in societies. The reproduction process takes place through the student selection and allocation processes (see "Social Reproduction" article in this chapter). These processes create hierarchies within schools and societies, socializing students into these hierarchies of power and domination, and legitimizing the hierarchies by claiming they are based on merit. Following the assumptions of Marx, Bowles and Gintis argue that school structure is based on the needs and standards of the dominant capitalist group in society and thus serves the purposes of that group. Students both bring into and take away different cultural competencies. The bottom line is that schools motivate higher-class students to achieve and decrease ambitions of others, creating a false consciousness (Apple, 1993, 1996).

Resistance theories go beyond social reproduction theories by arguing that teachers and students are not passive participants in the school process and that they do not always follow the expectations that result in social reproduction. For example, students may resist their socialization into certain roles in society (Willis, 1979), just as teachers do not have to accept their role in facilitating reproduction. Teachers may work with all students to give them more equal chances in the system. Teachers can empower students with curricula that are participatory, affective, problem solving, multicultural, democratic, interdisciplinary, and activist (Shor, 1986). Therefore, participants in schools are not necessarily passive actors in the reproduction of inequality.

Contemporary Theories in Sociology of Education

Two concepts related to the development of reproduction and resistance theories are social capital and cultural capital. As you can see from the above, conflict theory started to move from strictly a macro/societal focus to more of a focus on interaction that maintains power and privilege. The concept of *cultural capital* was introduced in the 1970s primarily by Pierre Bourdieu (1973), and *social capital* was introduced by James S. Coleman (1988) in the late 1980s. These two concepts bridged macrolevel and microlevel explanations, attempting to understand how larger societal structures were maintained in day-to-day interactions.

Social capital refers to the social resources students bring to their education and future involvement in school or community. It results in building of networks and relationships students can use as contacts for future opportunities. Ultimately, these networks are connections that make achievement possible and connect individuals to the larger group. Several researchers have applied this concept to the study of students, teachers, and teaching. For instance, connections students make in elite private schools and alumni connections through private schools and colleges enhance future economic status. Coleman's concept of social capital was used to explain the role of schools in reproducing social class.

Bourdieu's *cultural capital* is used in many research studies today. Trained as a sociologist, anthropologist, and philosopher, Pierre Bourdieu (1931–2002) delved into education's influences on stratification and social class, trying to reconcile the influences of social structures on the subjective experiences of individuals. Among the many concepts attributed to Bourdieu and in use today are *cultural and symbolic capital, symbolic violence*, and *habitus* (Bourdieu, 1973). He saw individuals as having different cultural capital based on their social settings. *Social capital* (see above) included the sum of resources held by individuals or groups because of their respective contacts or networks. *Symbolic capital* referred to the prestige, honor, or attention an individual held. These were each sources of individual power. *Cultural capital* refers to cultural practices, including dress and mannerisms, language patterns and expressions, and knowledge of the world derived from life experiences such as visits to museums, all of which provide knowledge of middle-class and upper-class culture; that is, the culture of schools. Cultural capital does not refer to knowing about "culture," commonly thought of in terms of art, music, and theater. Rather cultural capital allows students from middle and upper classes to use patterns of talking, common words, general knowledge, and values from their lives outside of school to fit into the patterns of interaction in school (Lareau, 1989). All individuals have cultural capital, and the form of cultural capital one has is generally related to one's social class background. A child who can speak the teacher's "language" is likely to fare better in school than one who has not been

exposed to the cultural capital of the schools. Unfortunately, the cultural capital of children from working-class backgrounds is rarely valued in schools. Dominant groups pass on exposure to the dominant culture that their children take to school. Not only do their children know how schools work, but they also come to school with the knowledge of what to do to be successful there. Working-class children generally do not go to school with this advantage (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

The important point here is that higher social, cultural, and symbolic capital result in more power for the holder. Over time these power relationships come to be seen by individuals as legitimate. Consider how working-class children in schools might see the educational success of middle-class children as "legitimate" because they work hard or have more natural ability, whereas these advantages are bestowed on middle-class and upper-class children because of their advantaged position in the social structure (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977).

Cultural capital inadvertently is used by schools to reproduce inequality both in the interactions and in the structure of education. For example, different curricula in different tracks create a system of educational inequality for students. While the assignment of students to learning groups is supposed to be based on explicit criteria (merit) such as test scores or completion of previous work, in actuality cultural capital plays a considerable role in who is assigned to groups. As early as preschool, children experience different expectations from teachers (Lubeck, 1985). As noted earlier, Rist (1977) found that children were assigned to groups in kindergarten based on dress and speech patterns. Vanfossen, Jones, and Spade (1987) and Lucas (1999) found that family social class background was a strong predictor of the high school "track" in which students were placed. The end result is that students from working-class backgrounds end up learning more basic skills under strict rules because they are expected to cause problems in the classroom. Those from upper classes learn how to make decisions, be creative and autonomous, and prepare for college (Anyon, 1980; Miller, Kohn, & Schooler, 1985). And, students end up in networks within the learning groups they are placed in, further reinforcing their social and cultural capital advantages or disadvantages. At the college level, students are again tracked into two-year or four-year educations with differences in the curriculum, goals for educational outcomes, and economic results for students (Pincus, 1980, 2002). Therefore, schools end up perpetuating differences in cultural capital by maintaining groups in school that are generally homogeneous in terms of social class backgrounds. And, you thought Johnny couldn't read because he lacked the ability needed to read well!

Teachers also bring varying degrees of cultural capital to schools and classrooms. Some teachers come from working-class and middle-class backgrounds and bring that cultural capital to the education system, both in their own training and in how they teach others. However, in some cases, the students they teach may bring a different cultural capital to the classroom, cultural capital that is either higher or lower in the hierarchy of power and wealth. And, parents with higher cultural capital tend to be more involved in their children's schooling, more able to provide their children with stronger educational experiences, and more at ease with the cultural capital of the school (Lareau, 1989).

The concept of cultural capital has been used in a number of studies of schools and classrooms. Consider McLaren's (1989) study of his experiences as a middle-class white teacher teaching in an inner-city school, facing violence and hostile parents. The cultural capital mismatch he faced was one in which his middle-class cultural capital was ineffective in working with the children he taught. This situation is repeated over and over again because teachers, by the very fact that they have the credentials to teach, have adopted a cultural capital that is not compatible with the children they teach from economically disadvantaged neighborhoods.

Another study of social capital shows how resources in the family, community, and school serve as capital assets for improving student academic performance and psychological well-being (Schneider, 2002). This study points out that active involvement of parents at home with their children on homework and educational decisions can influence social capital and future opportunities. Portes and Fernández-Kelly (2008) further illustrate the value of cultural capital. They found that children of Mexican immigrants gained cultural capital in different ways, sometimes from people outside their families, to ensure that they went on to succeed in college. This study illustrates that the cultural capital children get from their social class backgrounds does not always have to hold them back. However, only a very few students in Portes and Fernández-Kelly's larger study actually made it to college and successful professional careers.

Code theory was developed around the same time as cultural capital. Code theory is presented in several volumes that lay out the sociolinguistic theory of language codes envisioned by Basil Bernstein (1924–2000). *Codes* refer to organizing principles used by members of a social group. The idea is that the language we use reflects and shapes the assumptions we hold about our relationship to a certain group. Our relationship with that group influences the way we use language.

Bernstein conceptualizes two types of codes—*restricted* and *elaborated*. Restricted codes are those we use with others who share the same knowledge base. It allows us to shortcut language because of assumptions and knowledge we share with those close to us. When we use restricted codes, our language is brief, and we expect the person or persons with whom we are speaking to fill in the rest of our meaning—for example, when we say, "Get that." With elaborated codes, on the other hand, we do not take shortcuts. Everything is spelled out in more detail to be sure the others understand what we are communicating (Bernstein, 1971). This form is used with people we do not know well and in formal speech, such as "Please pick up the hat on the table" (Littlejohn & Foss, 2007). People learn their place in the society by the language codes they use. The codes come to symbolize social identity.

As applied to schools, Bernstein was interested in the poor performance of working-class students, especially in language-based subjects. Though their scores in math-related classes were similar to the scores of middle-class students, lower performance in language signified to him a relation between social class and language. The result is that language codes aid in the social reproduction of class and differences in power, not only in school but also in politics and the workplace. Working-class children are at a disadvantage in schools because they do not share the dominant code of the middle-class and upper-class students. Even the curriculum and transmission of knowledge in schools reflect the dominant code. In trying to understand why Johnny can't read, it may be the codes he brings with him to the classroom.

Although code theory is used less often than cultural capital in understanding processes within schools, it provides an important perspective for us to think about as we study and try to understand inequality in educational achievement.

The last theoretical framework we discuss here is *feminist perspectives on education*. Feminist theorists have echoed the need to "hear" other voices in the education system, in particular women's voices, and to pay more attention to the situation of women. Much of the history of ideas is a history interpreted by men, generally white men in the European tradition. Feminists see the world from a different perspective, one that represents a sometimes forgotten element in past theoretical interpretations of education systems, one in which women were essentially denied education for most of the history of

the United States. They are still denied education in some countries of the world (see Lewis & Lockheed in Chapter 10; Spender, 1987).

While there are many branches of feminist theory, we mention several general feminist ideas that influence the understanding of schools. Early writings on gender and schooling expressed the concern that girl students and female teachers faced certain injustices. Different theorists related inequalities faced by women to differential access, different treatment and exploitation, patriarchy, and male dominance. This led to examination of educational policy and how it affected girls, women, and their future opportunities (Dillabough & Arnot, 2002). Although women have made many gains in educational attainment over the past century, many inequalities remain. As late as 1994, Sadker and Sadker found that girls were treated differently in the classroom—that girls were not called upon as often as boys and essentially not challenged as much as boys in the same classrooms. This discrepancy in classroom treatment likely contributes to lower self-esteem for girls, and it may also explain why men are more likely to enter higher-paying, more prestigious careers because women are less likely to pursue mathematics and science degrees (see the reading by Roslyn Arlin Mickelson in Chapter 7).

Not all feminist scholarship on education focuses on describing gender inequalities. Feminist theory can be used to criticize school practices, such as the assumptions that schools use to connect to parents, but actually meaning mothers, to engage in their children's educational experiences. For example, Stambach and David (2005) argue that school choice programs operate on the gendered assumption about family and employment, implying that mothers should be involved in their children's education and schools. Even today, schools in many European countries send children home for an extended lunch hour during the middle of the day, making it difficult for mothers to work full-time. Much of feminist scholarship focuses on the critical perspective at the macro level with concern about gender issues in educational environments and reproduction of gender inequality in schools. Radical feminists also link their theory to practice, as is the case with critical theorists, resulting in connections between policy and research. Thus, feminist theory and pedagogy rely on "lived experience" and concerted efforts to change the system as it exists to disadvantage women and girls.

Early feminist theories of education were criticized for having a middle-class bias and not adequately recognizing issues of concern for women of color, women from other cultures, nontraditional gender and sexual orientations, different ethnic or global identities, or political persuasions. As a result, various branches of feminist theory of education have arisen (Weiner, 1997) to address gender issues as they intersect with other categories of difference and inequality. It is expected that these multiple feminisms will result in a variety of challenges to educational practices and systems in addressing the teaching and learning experiences of all young women.

These concerns have resulted in feminist theorists struggling to understand the intersection of different categories of difference and inequality. Students are treated not solely based on gender, but also based on race and ethnicity, social class background, and other categories of difference and inequality, such as sexual orientation. These categories intersect to create complex patterns of oppression and suppression not captured by either early feminist theories or other theories discussed in this reading. For example, research by Grant (2004) finds that teachers use black girls to run errands in the classroom and, with findings similar to Ferguson (2000), that black boys are viewed by teachers as "trouble" long before they do anything wrong. Gender alone does not explain fully the experiences of children across categories of difference and inequality. Therefore, when trying to understand why Johnny can't read, we may want to consider effects of his gender and race.

Conclusion

There is a long and broad tradition of social science and sociological theories, beginning with the coining of the word *sociology* by Auguste Comte in 1838. These theories provide a range of explanations that can be used to examine issues and problems in educational systems in order to better understand the roles and activities in schools and society. All theories evolve. As described, interaction, functional, and conflict theories have gone through stages that attempted to explain the educational systems of the time and to react to previous theories that were inadequate to explain concerns of the education system. Recent trends see schools as "contested terrain" for determining curricula that meet diverse needs.

In short, different theorists help us to think differently as we attempt to explain why schools work as they do. This broad range of theories presents many alternative ways of thinking about schools and is valuable as policy makers and researchers try to find solutions to the multitude of problems plaguing education today, in both developed and developing countries.

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Moral Education

Émile Durkheim

Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) was an educator and sociologist in France, teaching at the Sorbonne. He wrote extensively on the functions of education in society, including the function of discipline for socializing the child to be a good citizen. In this reading, Durkheim provides insights into the education system, insights that guided later generations of theorists. First, he points to what he considers inevitable inequalities in educational outcomes as children come into the system from different backgrounds and exit with preparation for specialized positions in society. However, all children must learn a common base of knowledge to provide a common foundation that holds people together in society. Durkheim argues that leaders in each society have an idea of what skills and knowledge people need to develop, and education's responsibility is to help the child understand the importance of collective life. Durkheim also discusses the importance of rules, or discipline, in classrooms. If it is lacking, the class is like a "mob" of agitated students. Families are less disciplined by nature, but schools mirror adult society and prepare the young for their parts in society.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What is the role of discipline in schools, according to Durkheim? Does discipline serve the same function today? Explain.

2. How do schools instill discipline? Give an example.

3. What does Durkheim mean when he says we must develop the "habit" of self-control and constraint? Give an example.

There is a whole system of rules in the school that predetermine the child's conduct. He must come to class regularly, he must arrive at a specified time and with an appropriate bearing and attitude. He must not disrupt things in class. He must have learned his lessons, done his homework, and have done so reasonably well, etc. There are, therefore, a host of obligations that the child is required to shoulder. Together they constitute the discipline of the school. It is through the practice of school discipline that we can inculcate the spirit of discipline in the child.

Too often, it is true, people conceive of school discipline so as to preclude endowing it with such an important moral function. Some see in it a simple way of guaranteeing superficial peace and order in the class. Under such conditions, one can quite reasonably come to view these imperative requirements as barbarous—as a tyranny of complicated rules. We protest against this kind of regulation, which is apparently imposed on the child for the sole purpose of easing the teacher's task in inducing uniformity. Does not such a system evoke feelings of hostility in the student toward the teacher, rather than the affectionate confidence that should characterize their relationship?

In reality, however, the nature and function of school discipline is something altogether different. It is not a simple device for securing superficial peace in the classroom—a device allowing the work to roll on tranquilly. It is the morality of the classroom, just as the discipline of the social body is morality properly speaking. Each social group, each type of society, has and could not fail to have its own morality, which expresses its own makeup.

Now, the class is a small society. It is therefore both natural and necessary that it have its own morality corresponding to its size, the character of its elements, and its function. Discipline is this morality. The obligations we shall presently enumerate are the student's duties, just as the civic or professional obligations imposed by state or corporation are the duties of the adult. On the other hand, the schoolroom society is much closer to the society of adults than it is to that of the family. For aside from the fact that it is larger, the individuals—teachers and students—who make it up are not brought together by personal feelings or preferences but for altogether general and abstract reasons, that is to say, because of the social function to be performed by the teacher, and the immature mental condition of the students. For all these reasons, the rule of the classroom cannot bend or give with the same flexibility as that of the family in all kinds and combinations of circumstances. It cannot accommodate itself to given temperaments. There is already something colder and more impersonal about the obligations imposed by the school: They are now concerned with reason and less with feelings; they require more effort and greater application. And although—as we have previously said—we must guard against overdoing it, it is nevertheless indispensable in order that school discipline be everything that it should be and fulfill its function completely. For only on this condition will it be able to serve as intermediary between the affective morality of the family and the more rigorous morality of civil life. It is by respecting the school rules that the child learns to respect rules in general, that he develops the habit of self-control and restraint simply because he should control and restrain himself. It is a first initiation into the austerity of duty. Serious life has now begun.

This, then, is the true function of discipline. It is not a simple procedure aimed at making the child work, stimulating his desire for instruction, or husbanding the energies of the teacher. It is essentially an instrument—difficult to duplicate—of moral education. The teacher to whom it is entrusted cannot guard it too conscientiously. It is not only a matter of his own interest and peace of mind; one can say without exaggeration that the morality of the classroom rests upon his resolution. Indeed, it is certain that an undisciplined class lacks morality. When children no longer feel restrained, they are in a state

of ferment that makes them impatient of all curbs, and their behavior shows it—even outside the classroom. One can see analogous situations in the family when domestic education is overly relaxed. In school, this unwholesome ferment of excitement, the result of a failure of discipline, constitutes a more serious moral danger because the agitation is collective. We must never lose sight of the fact that the class is a small society. Thus, no member of this small group acts as though he were alone; each is subject to the influence of the group, and this we must consider most carefully. . . .

A class without discipline is like a mob. Because a given number of children are brought together in the same class, there is a kind of general stimulation deriving from the common life and imparted to all the individual activities—a stimulation that, when everything goes along normally and is well directed, emerges as more enthusiasm, more concern about doing things well than if each student were working individually. But if the teacher has not developed the necessary authority, then this hyperactivity degenerates into an unwholesome ferment, and a genuine demoralization sets in, the more serious as the class is larger. This demoralization becomes obvious in that those elements of least moral value in the class come to have a preponderant place in the common life; just as in political societies during periods of great flux, one sees hosts of harmful elements come to the surface of public life, while in normal times they would be hidden in the shadows.

It is important, therefore, to react against the discredit into which, for a number of years, discipline has tended to fall. Doubtless when one examines the rules of conduct that the teacher must enforce, in themselves and in detail, one is inclined to judge them as useless vexations; and the benevolent feelings, which childhood quite naturally inspires in us, prompt us to feel that they are excessively demanding. Is it not possible for a child to be good and yet fail to be punctual, to be unprepared at the specified time for his lesson or other responsibilities, etc.? If, however, instead of examining these school rules in detail, we consider them as a whole, as the student's code of duty, the matter takes on a different aspect. Then conscientiousness in fulfilling all these petty obligations appears as a virtue. It is the virtue of childhood, the only one in accord with the kind of life the child leads at that age, and consequently the only one that can be asked of him. This is why one cannot cultivate it too conscientiously. . . .

General Influence of the School Environment

To understand clearly the important role that the school environment can and should play in moral education, we must first realize what the child faces when he comes to school. Up to that point he has only been acquainted with two kinds of groups. In the family the sentiment of solidarity is derived from blood relationships; and the moral bonds that result from such relationships are further re-enforced by intimate and constant contact of all the associated minds and by a mutual interpenetration of their lives. Then there are little groups of friends and companions—groups that have taken shape outside the family through free selection. Now, political society presents neither of these two characteristics. The bonds uniting the citizens of a given country have nothing to do with relationships or personal inclinations. There is therefore a great distance between the moral state in which the child finds himself as he leaves the family and the one towards which he must strive. This road cannot be travelled in a single stage. Intermediaries are necessary. The school environment is the most desirable. It is a more extensive

association than the family or the little societies of friends. It results neither from blood relationships nor from free choice, but from a fortuitous and inevitable meeting among subjects brought together on the basis of similar age and social conditions. In that respect it resembles political society. On the other hand, it is limited enough so that personal relations can crystallize. The horizon is not too vast; the consciousness of the child can easily embrace it. The habit of common life in the class and attachment to the class and even to the school constitute an altogether natural preparation for the more elevated sentiments that we wish to develop in the child. We have here a precious instrument, which is used all too little and which can be of the greatest service.

It is the more natural to use the school to this end since it is precisely groups of young persons, more or less like those constituting the social system of the school, which have enabled the formation of societies larger than the family. With respect to animals, M. Espinas has already demonstrated that groupings of birds and mammals could not have taken shape if, at a certain moment in their lives, the young had not been induced to separate from their parents and formed societies of a new type, which no longer have domestic characteristics. Indeed, wherever the family keeps its members to itself it is easily self-sufficient; each particular family tends to live its own life, an autonomous life—tends to isolate itself from other families so as to provide more easily for itself; under these conditions, it is clearly impossible for another society to be formed. The small group appears only where the new generation, once it has been brought up, is induced to free itself from the family setting to lead a collective life of a new sort. Similarly, if, from the very beginning, inferior human societies are not limited to one household, if they comprise even in their humblest form a number of families, it is largely because the moral education of children is not undertaken by their parents, but by the elders of the clan. The elders would assemble the young, after they had reached a given age, to initiate them collectively into the religious beliefs, rites, traditions—in a word, to everything constituting the intellectual and moral patrimony of the group. Because of this gathering of the young into special groups, determined by age and not by blood, extrafamilial societies have been able to come into being and perpetuate themselves. The school is precisely a group of this kind; it is recruited according to the same principle. The gatherings of young neophytes, directed and taught by the elders, which we can observe in primitive societies, are already actual school societies and may be considered as the first form of the school. In asking the school to prepare children for a higher social life than that of the family, we are only asking something that is quite in accord with its character.

Furthermore, if there is a country in which the role of the school is particularly important and necessary, it is ours [France]. In this respect, we are living under quite special conditions. Indeed, with the exception of the school, there is no longer in this country any society intermediate between the family and the state—that is to say, a society that is not merely artificial or superficial. All the groups of this kind, which at one time ranged between domestic and political society—provinces, communes, guilds—have been totally abolished or at least survive only in very attenuated form. The province and the guild are only memories; communal life is very impoverished and now holds a very secondary place in our consciousness. . . .

For morality to have a sound basis, the citizen must have an inclination toward collective life. It is only on this condition that he can become attached, as he should, to collective aims that are moral aims par excellence. This does not happen automatically; above all, this inclination toward collective life can only become strong enough to shape behavior by the most continuous practice. To appreciate social life

to the point where one cannot do without it, one must have developed the habit of acting and thinking in common. We must learn to cherish these social bonds that for the unsocial being are heavy chains. We must learn through experience how cold and pale the pleasures of solitary life are in comparison. The development of such a temperament, such a mental outlook, can only be formed through repeated practice, through perpetual conditioning. If, on the contrary, we are invited only infrequently to act like social beings, it is impossible to be very interested in an existence to which we can only adapt ourselves imperfectly. . . .

If, then, with the exception of the family, there is no collective life in which we participate, if in all the forms of human activity—scientific, artistic, professional, and so on—in other words, in all that constitutes the core of our existence, we are in the habit of acting like lone wolves, our social temperament has only rare opportunities to strengthen and develop itself. Consequently, we are inevitably inclined to a more or less suspicious isolation, at least in regard to everything concerning life outside the family. Indeed, the weakness of the spirit of association is one of the characteristics of our national temperament. We have a marked inclination toward a fierce individualism, which makes the obligations of social life appear intolerable to us and which prevents us from experiencing its joys. . . .

The school is a real group, of which the child is naturally and necessarily a part. It is a group other than the family. Its principal function is not, as in the case of the family, that of emotional release and the sharing of affections. Every form of intellectual activity finds scope in it, in embryonic form. Consequently, we have through the school the means of training the child in a collective life different from home life. We can give him habits that, once developed, will survive beyond school years and demand the satisfaction that is their due. We have here a unique and irreplaceable opportunity to take hold of the child at a time when the gaps in our social organization have not yet been able to alter his nature profoundly, or to arouse in him feelings that make him partially rebellious to common life. This is virgin territory in which we can sow seeds that, once taken root, will grow by themselves. Of course, I do not mean that education alone can remedy the evil—that institutions are not necessary demanding legislative action. But that action can only be fruitful if it is rooted in a state of opinion, if it is an answer to needs that are really felt. Thus, although we could not at any time do without the school to instill in the child a social sense, although we have here a natural function from which the school should never withdraw, today, because of the critical situation in which we find ourselves, the services that the school can render are of incomparable importance. . . .

To bind the child to the social group of which he is a part, it is not enough to make him feel the reality of it. He must be attached to it with his whole being. There is only one effective way of doing this, and that is by making his society an integral part of him, so that he can no more separate himself from it than from himself. Society is not the work of the individuals that compose it at a given stage of history, nor is it a given place. It is a complex of ideas and sentiments, of ways of seeing and of feeling, a certain intellectual and moral framework distinctive of the entire group. Society is above all a consciousness of the whole. It is, therefore, this collective consciousness that we must instill in the child.

Of course, this penetration of the child's consciousness is effected in part by the mere fact of living, by the autonomous play of human relations. These ideas and sentiments are all around the child, and he is immersed in them by living. But there is another operation much too important to

leave to chance. It is the business of the school to organize it methodically. An enlightened mind must select from among the welter of confused and often contradictory states of mind that constitute the social consciousness; it must set off what is essential and vital; and play down the trivial and the secondary. The teacher must bring this about and here again history will furnish him the means to this end.

The point is that to imbue children with the collective spirit it is useless to analyze it abstractly. On the contrary, they must be put in direct contact with this collective spirit. Now, what is the history of a people if not the genius of that people developing through time? By making the history of their country come alive for the children, we can at the same time make them live in close intimacy with the collective consciousness. Is it not through intimate and prolonged contact with a man that we finally get to know him? In this respect, a history lesson is the lesson of experience. But since our national character is immanent in historical events, the child would neither see nor feel them if the teacher did not try to set them off in bold relief, especially highlighting those events that merit it. Once again, the point is not to give a course on the French character. All that is needed is a knowledge of what it is and how to disentangle it from the welter of facts.

READING 4

Conflict Theory of Educational Stratification

Randall Collins

Education prepares students for their positions and roles in society. In the excerpt that follows, Randall Collins relates education to occupations by using conflict theory, showing how students receive educations common to their status group. Similar to Max Weber's concept of status groups, these status groups correspond to the idea that schools prepare the young to fit an occupational position commensurate with their status in society. The type of education students receive seals their future status because their education is viewed as appropriate preparation for future jobs.

> **Questions to consider for this reading:**
>
> 1. What is the meaning of *status groups,* and how are they related to the education of children?
>
> 2. What role does education play in preparation for membership in a status group?
>
> 3. According to Max Weber's conflict theory (see Ballantine and Spade's reading as well as this one), how are education and occupation related?
>
> 4. What is the role of conflict theory in Collins's discussion?

Status Groups

The basic units of society are associational groups sharing common cultures (or "subcultures"). The core of such groups is families and friends, but they may be extended to religious, educational, or ethnic communities. In general, they comprise all persons who share a sense of status equality based on participation in a common culture: styles of language, tastes in clothing and decor, manners and other ritual observances, conversational topics and styles, opinions and values, and preferences in sports, arts, and media. Participation in such cultural groups gives individuals their fundamental sense of identity, especially in contrast with members of other associational groups in whose everyday culture they cannot participate comfortably. Subjectively, status groups distinguish themselves from others in terms of categories of moral evaluation such as "honor," "taste," "breeding," "respectability," "propriety," "cultivation," "good fellows," "plain folks," etc. Thus the exclusion of persons who lack the ingroup culture is felt to be normatively legitimated.

There is no a priori determination of the number of status groups in a particular society, nor can the degree to which there is consensus on a rank order among them be stated in advance. These are not matters of definition, but empirical variations, the causes of which are subjects of other developments of the conflict theory of stratification. Status groups should be regarded as ideal types, without implication of necessarily distinct boundaries; the concepts remain useful even in the case where associational groupings and their status cultures are fluid and overlapping, as hypotheses about the conflicts among status groups may remain fruitful even under these circumstances. Status groups may be derived from a number of sources. Weber [1968] outlines three: (a) differences in life style based on economic situation (i.e., class); (b) differences in life situation based on power position; and (c) differences in life situation deriving directly from cultural conditions or institutions, such as geographical origin, ethnicity, religion, education, or intellectual or aesthetic cultures.

Struggle for Advantage

There is a continual struggle in society for various "goods"—wealth, power, or prestige. We need make no assumption that every individual is motivated to maximize his rewards; however, since power and

prestige are inherently scarce commodities, and wealth is often contingent upon them, the ambition of even a small proportion of persons for more than equal shares of these goods sets up an implicit counter-struggle on the part of others to avoid subjection and disesteem. Individuals may struggle with each other, but since individual identity is derived primarily from membership in a status group, and because the cohesion of status groups is a key resource in the struggle against others, the primary focus of struggle is between status groups rather than within them.

The struggle for wealth, power, and prestige is carried out primarily through organizations. There have been struggles throughout history among organizations controlled by different status groups, for military conquest, business advantage, or cultural (e.g., religious) hegemony, and intricate sorts of interorganizational alliances are possible. In the more complex societies, struggle between status groups is carried on in large part within organizations, as the status groups controlling an organization coerce, hire, or culturally manipulate others to carry out their wishes (as in, respectively, a conscript army, a business, or a church). Organizational research shows that the success of organizational elites in controlling their subordinates is quite variable. Under particular conditions, lower or middle members have considerable de facto power to avoid compliance, and even to change the course of the organizations (see Etzioni, 1961).

This opposing power from below is strengthened when subordinate members constitute a cohesive status group of their own; it is weakened when subordinates acquiesce in the values of the organization elite. Coincidence of ethnic and class boundaries produces the sharpest cultural distinctions. Thus, Catholics of immigrant origins have been the bulwarks of informal norms restricting work output in American firms run by WASPs, whereas Protestants of native rural backgrounds are the main "rate-busters" (Collins, Dalton, & Roy, 1946). Selection and manipulation of members in terms of status groups is thus a key weapon in intraorganizational struggles. In general, the organization elite selects its new members and key assistants from its own status group and makes an effort to secure lower-level employees who are at least indoctrinated to respect the cultural superiority of their status culture.

Once groups of employees of different status groups are formed at various positions (middle, lower, or laterally differentiated) in the organization, each of these groups may be expected to launch efforts to recruit more members of their own status group. This process is illustrated by conflicts among whites and blacks, Protestants and Catholics and Jews, Yankee, Irish and Italian, etc., found in American occupational life (Dalton, 1951; Hughes, 1949). These conflicts are based on ethnically or religiously founded status cultures; their intensity rises and falls with processes increasing or decreasing the cultural distinctiveness of these groups, and with the succession of advantages and disadvantages set by previous outcomes of these struggles which determine the organizational resources available for further struggle. Parallel processes of cultural conflict may be based on distinctive class as well as ethnic cultures.

Education as Status Culture

The main activity of schools is to teach particular status cultures, both in and outside the classroom. In this light, any failure of schools to impart technical knowledge (although it may also be successful in this) is not important; schools primarily teach vocabulary and inflection, styles of dress, aesthetic tastes, values, and manners. The emphasis on sociability and athletics found in many schools is not extraneous

but may be at the core of the status culture propagated by the schools. Where schools have a more academic or vocational emphasis, this emphasis may itself be the content of a particular status culture, providing sets of values, materials for conversation, and shared activities for an associational group making claims to a particular basis for status.

Insofar as a particular status group controls education, it may use it to foster control within work organizations. Educational requirements for employment can serve both to select new members for elite positions who share the elite culture and, at a lower level of education, to hire lower and middle employees who have acquired a general respect for these elite values and styles.

Tests of the Conflict Theory of Educational Stratification

The conflict theory in its general form is supported by evidence (1) that there are distinctions among status group cultures—based on both class and ethnicity—in modern societies (Kahl, 1957, pp. 127–156, 184–220); (2) that status groups tend to occupy different occupational positions within organizations (see data on ascription cited above); and (3) that occupants of different organizational positions struggle over power (Crozier, 1964; Dalton, 1959). The more specific tests called for here, however, are of the adequacy of conflict theory to explain the link between education and occupational stratification. Such tests may focus either on the proposed mechanism of occupational placement, or on the conditions for strong or weak links between education and occupation.

Education as a Mechanism of Occupational Placement

The mechanism proposed is that employers use education to select persons who have been socialized into the dominant status culture: for entrants to their own managerial ranks, into elite culture; for lower-level employees, into an attitude of respect for the dominant culture and the elite which carries it. This requires evidence that: (a) schools provide either training for the elite culture, or respect for it; and (b) employers use education as a means of selection for cultural attributes.

Historical and descriptive studies of schools support the generalization that they are places where particular status cultures are acquired, either from the teachers, from other students, or both. Schools are usually founded by powerful or autonomous status groups, either to provide an exclusive education for their own children, or to propagate respect for their cultural values. Until recently most schools were founded by religions, often in opposition to those founded by rival religions; throughout the 19th century, this rivalry was an important basis for the founding of large numbers of colleges in the United States, and of the Catholic and Lutheran school systems. The public school system in the United States was founded mainly under the impetus of WASP elites with the purpose of teaching respect for Protestant and middle-class standards of cultural and religious propriety, especially in the face of Catholic, working-class immigration from Europe (Cremin, 1961; Curti, 1935). The content of public school education has consisted especially of middle-class, WASP culture ([Becker, 1961; Hess & Torney, 1967]; Waller, 1932, pp. 15–131).

At the elite level, private secondary schools for children of the WASP upper class were founded from the 1880s, when the mass indoctrination function of the growing public schools made them unsuitable as means of maintaining cohesion of the elite culture itself (Baltzell, 1958, pp. 327–372).

These elite schools produce a distinctive personality type, characterized by adherence to a distinctive set of upper-class values and manners (McArthur, 1955). The cultural role of schools has been more closely studied in Britain (Bernstein, 1961; Weinberg, 1967) and in France (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1964), although Riesman and his colleagues (Jencks & Riesman, 1968; Riesman, 1958) have shown some of the cultural differences among prestige levels of colleges and universities in the United States.

Evidence that education has been used as a means of cultural selection may be found in several sources. Hollingshead's (1949, pp. 360–388) study of Elmtown school children, school dropouts, and community attitudes toward them suggests that employers use education as a means of selecting employees with middle-class attributes. A 1945–1946 survey of 240 employers in New Haven and Charlotte, N.C., indicated that they regarded education as a screening device for employees with desirable (middle-class) character and demeanor; white-collar positions particularly emphasized educational selection because these employees were considered most visible to outsiders (Noland & Bakke, 1949, pp. 20–63).

A survey of employers in nationally prominent corporations indicated that they regarded college degrees as important in hiring potential managers, not because they were thought to ensure technical skills, but rather to indicate "motivation" and "social experience" (Gordon & Howell, 1959, p. 121). Business school training is similarly regarded, less as evidence of necessary training (as employers have been widely skeptical of the utility of this curriculum for most positions) than as an indication that the college graduate is committed to business attitudes. Thus, employers are more likely to refuse to hire liberal arts graduates if they come from a college which has a business school than if their college is without a business school (Gordon & Howell, 1959, pp. 84–87; see also Pierson, 1959, pp. 90–99). In the latter case, the students could be said not to have had a choice; but when both business and liberal arts courses are offered and the student chooses liberal arts, employers appear to take this as a rejection of business values.

Finally, a 1967 survey of 309 California organizations (Collins, 1971) found that educational requirements for white-collar workers were highest in organizations which placed the strongest emphasis on normative control over their employees. Normative control emphasis was indicated by (i) relative emphasis on the absence of police record for job applicants, (ii) relative emphasis on a record of job loyalty, and (iii) Etzioni's (1961) classification of organizations into those with high normative control emphasis (financial, professional services, government, and other public service organizations) and those with remunerative control emphasis (manufacturing, construction, and trade). These three indicators are highly interrelated, thus mutually validating their conceptualization as indicators of normative control emphasis. The relationship between normative control emphasis and educational requirements holds for managerial requirements and white-collar requirements generally, both including and excluding professional and technical positions. Normative control emphasis does not affect blue-collar education requirements. . . .

Historical Change

The rise in educational requirements for employment throughout the last century may be explained using the conflict theory, and incorporating elements of the technical-functional theory into it at

appropriate points. The principal dynamic has centered on changes in the supply of educated persons caused by the expansion of the school system, which was in turn shaped by three conditions:

Education has been associated with high economic and status position from the colonial period on through the twentieth century. The result was a popular demand for education as mobility opportunity. This demand has not been for vocational education at a terminal or commercial level, short of full university certification; the demand has rather focused on education giving entry into the elite status culture, and usually only those technically oriented schools have prospered which have most closely associated themselves with the sequence of education leading to (or from) the classical bachelor's degree (Collins, 1969, pp. 68–70, 86–87, 89, 96–101).

Political decentralization, separation of church and state, and competition among religious denominations have made founding schools and colleges in America relatively easy, and provided initial motivations of competition among communities and religious groups that moved them to do so. As a result, education at all levels expanded faster in America than anywhere else in the world. At the time of the Revolution, there were nine colleges in the colonies; in all of Europe, with a population forty times that of America, there were approximately sixty colleges. By 1880 there were 811 American colleges and universities; by 1966, there were 2,337. The United States not only began with the highest ratio of institutions of higher education to population in the world, but increased this lead steadily, for the number of European universities was not much greater by the twentieth century than in the eighteenth (Ben-David & Zloczower, 1962).

Technical changes also entered into the expansion of American education. As the evidence summarized above indicates: (a) Mass literacy is crucial for beginnings of full-scale industrialization, although demand for literacy could not have been important in the expansion of education beyond elementary levels. More importantly, (b) there is a mild trend toward the reduction in the proportion of unskilled jobs and an increase in the promotion of highly skilled (professional and technical) jobs as industrialism proceeds, accounting for 15% of the shift in educational levels in the twentieth century (Folger & Nam, 1964). (c) Technological change also brings about some upgrading in skill requirements of some continuing job positions, although the available evidence (Berg, 1970, pp. 38–60) refers only to the decade 1950–1960. Nevertheless, as Wilensky (1964) points out, there is no "professionalization of everyone," as most jobs do not require considerable technical knowledge on the order of that required of the engineer or the research scientist.

The existence of a relatively small group of experts in high-status positions, however, can have important effects on the structure of competition for mobility chances. In the United States, where democratic decentralization favors the use of schools (as well as government employment) as a kind of patronage for voter interests, the existence of even a small number of elite jobs fosters a demand for large-scale opportunities to acquire these positions. We thus have a "contest mobility" school system (Turner, 1960); it produced a widely educated populace because of the many dropouts who never achieve the elite level of schooling at which expert skills and/or high cultural status is acquired. In the process, the status value of American education has become diluted. Standards of respectability are always relative to the existing range of cultural differences. Once higher levels of education become recognized as an objective mark of elite status, and a moderate level of education as a mark of respectable middle-level status, increases in the supply of educated persons at given levels result in yet higher levels becoming recognized as superior, and previously superior levels become only average.

Thus, before the end of the nineteenth century, an elementary school or home education was no longer satisfactory for a middle-class gentleman; by the 1930s, a college degree was displacing the high school degree as the minimal standard of respectability; in the late 1960s, graduate school or specialized professional degrees were becoming necessary for initial entry to many middle-class positions, and high school graduation was becoming a standard for entry to manual laboring positions. Education has thus gradually become part of the status culture of classes far below the level of the original business and professional elites.

The increasing supply of educated persons . . . has made education a rising requirement of jobs. . . . Led by the biggest and most prestigious organizations, employers have raised their educational requirements to maintain both the relative prestige of their own managerial ranks and the relative respectability of middle ranks. Education has become a legitimate standard in terms of which employers select employees, and employees compete with each other for promotion opportunities or for raised prestige in their continuing positions. With the attainment of a mass (now approaching universal) higher education system in modern America, the ideal or image of technical skill becomes the legitimating culture in terms of which the struggle for position goes on.

Higher educational requirements, and the higher level of educational credentials offered by individuals competing for positions in organizations, have in turn increased the demand for education by populace. The interaction between formal job requirements and informal status cultures has resulted in a spiral in which educational requirements and educational attainments become ever higher. As the struggle for mass educational opportunities enters new phases in the universities of today and perhaps in the graduate schools of the future, we may expect a further upgrading of educational requirements for employment. The mobilization of demands by minority groups for mobility opportunities through schooling can only contribute an extension of the prevailing pattern.

Conclusion

It has been argued that conflict theory provides an explanation of the principal dynamics of rising educational requirements for employment in America. Changes in the technical requirements of jobs have caused more limited changes in particular jobs. The conditions of the interaction of these two determinants may be more closely studied.

Precise measures of changes in the actual technical skill requirements of jobs are as yet available only in rudimentary form. Few systematic studies show how much of particular job skills may be learned in practice, and how much must be acquired through school background. Close studies of what is actually learned in school, and how long it is retained, are rare. Organizational studies of how employers rate performance and decide upon promotions give a picture of relatively loose controls over the technical quality of employee performance, but this no doubt varies in particular types of jobs.

The most central lines of analysis for assessing the joint effects of status group conflict and technical requirements are those which compare the relative importance of education in different contexts. One such approach may take organization as the unit of analysis, comparing the educational requirements of organizations both to organizational technologies and to the status (including educational) background of organizational elites. Such analysis may also be applied to surveys of individual mobility, comparing the effects of education on mobility in different employment contexts, where the status

group (and educational) background of employers varies in its fit with the educational culture of prospective employees. Such analysis of "old school tie" networks may also simultaneously test for the independent effect of the technical requirements of different sorts of jobs on the importance of education. International comparisons provide variations here in the fit between types of education and particular kinds of jobs which may not be available within any particular country.

The full elaboration of such analysis would give a more precise answer to the historical question of assigning weight to various factors in the changing place of education in the stratification of modern societies. At the same time, to state the conditions under which status groups vary in organizational power, including the power to emphasize or limit the importance of technical skills, would be to state the basic elements of a comprehensive explanatory theory of the forms of stratification.

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READING 5

Social Reproduction

David Swartz

Why do students who come into school leave with reinforced social class status? Do schools help reproduce social class? In the 1960s and 1970s, many sociologists of education (several using a Marxist perspective) addressed questions as to why students' school performance paralleled their status in the social class structure and their later work lives. Were schools contributing to reproduction of the class structure, and if so, how was this social reproduction taking place? Early reproduction theorists and researchers considered the social class background of students and their behaviors in and out of school. For example, they studied the relationship between workers and capitalists, the correspondence with the social class into which students were born, and experience in educational systems.

Another branch of reproduction theory, stemming from the theories of Weber and Durkheim, focused on cultural components, or "cultural capital," and how a student's cultural background influences his or her educational attitude and experience. Language, or "linguistic codes," also entered into the discussion, especially as students' language patterns affected their

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experiences in school. Cognizant that not all students accept their "fate" in schooling lying down, another group of theorists studied student resistance to their social status as defined by their backgrounds and schooling. This article illustrates how the work of earlier theorists has laid the foundation for more recent theorists to both raise questions in the field and build on previous work.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. To what extent do educational institutions influence the social class status of students who attend? How does this occur?

2. What aspects of curriculum and influences of school placement of a student might help reproduce a student's social class?

3. What does "agency" mean? Think of an example from your own school experience.

Social reproduction theory entered the sociology of education in the late 1960s and early 1970s as a critical reaction to liberal educational reform. Though liberal reformers expected public education to promote individual development, social mobility, and greater political and economic equality, social reproduction theorists contend that schools actually enhance social inequalities rather than attenuate them. Drawing particularly on the work of Karl Marx, but also Max Weber and Émile Durkheim, social reproduction theorists focus on how the social class structure is perpetuated from one generation to the next. Why, they ask, do working-class children tend to end up in working-class jobs whereas youth of privileged origins tend to secure positions of prestige and power? Concern with the effects of social background on educational performance and attainment and the contribution of schooling to occupational achievement have of course been long-standing concerns in the sociology of education (Davies, 1995:1449; Dreeben, 1994:29). But social reproduction theorists see in the class–education nexus an indicator of broader institutional arrangements that reveals a particularly rigid social class structure.

Social reproduction theorists differ, however, in their views on just how the stratification order is constituted and perpetuated. Differences can be observed on the following issues: How tightly coupled are education and the capitalist labor market? How much agency is introduced into a structural analysis? How much micro as well as macro levels of observation and analysis are carried out? How much gender, race, and other status factors as well as social class are considered? How much room is there for innovation or change? Although the antecedents and effects of social reproduction theory are many, this presentation is limited to only the few most influential theorists who have also conducted original research in education.

Bowles and Gintis: The Correspondence Principle

The first social reproduction perspective to have a major impact on education theory and research is the neo-Marxist work of Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976). Central to their approach is the "correspondence principle," which builds from Marx's argument that the various parts of capitalist society fit together so that the exploitative social relations between workers and capitalists are reflected throughout society and perpetuated intergenerationally. Education in capitalist society reflects the hierarchical structure of the capitalist firm. The structural similarities between the social relationships that govern personal interaction in the workplace and those in the educational system can be seen in four ways. First, the patterns of power and authority between managers and workers and among administrators, teachers, and students leave little room for workers to control the content of their jobs and for students to control their curriculum. Second, wages, grades, and threat of unemployment and expulsion all impose external rather than internal motivational systems for work and learning. Third, the institutionalized competition and specialization of academic subjects reflect the fragmentation of jobs. And fourth, just as the lowest job levels in the capitalist enterprise emphasize rule following, the middle levels, dependability, and the highest levels of autonomy and self-direction, a similar hierarchy of values can be observed stretching from the lower levels and tracks of the educational ladder up through the middle and highest levels.

Because of this correspondence between schools and the workplace, schools reproduce capitalist society in three ways: they allocate students into different levels in the capitalist work hierarchy so that workers' children become workers and capitalists' children become capitalists; they socialize students to have the skills and attitudes appropriate to those different levels (self-direction for managers, but obedience for workers); and they legitimate these processes of allocation and socialization in terms of individual merit.

This early work represents a kind of neo-Marxian functionalism where the skills, values, and norms transmitted through education correspond directly to the needs for hierarchy in the capitalist firm and in the social class structure. The same tightly coupled education/capitalist labor market nexus can also be found in . . . Apple's (1979) early work . . . [that] uses the idea of the "hidden curriculum" to stress how school knowledge subtly transmits capitalist values. . . .

Pierre Bourdieu: Cultural Capital and Reproduction

Bourdieu (1984, 1988, 1996; Bourdieu and Boltanski 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977, 1979) is centrally concerned with how dominant class groups are able to pass their advantages on to their children so that their inheritance of privilege appears legitimate. Although this recalls Marxism, Bourdieu draws more from Weber and Durkheim to stress the cultural components of social stratification. Central to his argument, and his most important contribution to reproduction theory, is his landmark concept of "cultural capital." [For illustrative uses of this concept in education research, see Cookson and Persell (1985), DiMaggio (1982), DiMaggio and Mohr (1985), and Lareau (1989).] Cultural capital covers a wide variety of resources including general cultural awareness, knowledge, skills, and verbal facility that are acquired in childhood socialization and can be passed on from one generation to the next. Social

classes differ in the amounts and types of cultural socialization. Dominant class children inherit substantially more cultural capital than do working-class youth. Children who grow up in families that read books, attend concerts, visit museums, and go to the theater and cinema receive a distinct dominant culture of knowledge, style, and language facility.

Schools reward the inherited cultural capital of the dominant classes by implicitly requiring it for good academic performance and systematically devalue the culture of the subordinate classes. Some of Bourdieu's most insightful ethnographic observations about French schooling show how French teachers reward good language style, especially in essay and oral examinations, a practice that tends to favor those students with considerable cultural capital. Dominant class groups are able to capitalize on that advantage by translating their inherited cultural resources into high levels of scholastic performance and attainment. Moreover, schools legitimate this process by explaining academic success in terms of individual motivation and talent. Yet, school success, Bourdieu argues, is best explained by the amount and type of cultural capital inherited from the family milieu. Furthermore, dominant classes are able to reconvert their academic success into a competitive edge in the labor market, thereby reproducing the stratification order. . . .

Bourdieu (1973) points out that economic capital and cultural capital are not perfectly correlated. The dominant class is internally differentiated into two opposing segments: a dominant segment based on substantial economic capital and a dominated segment based on cultural capital. The dominant segment relies principally on its substantial economic capital to maintain power and privilege, whereas the dominated segment bases its claim to power on the investment and accumulation of cultural capital. Thus, the entire education system is not directly subordinated to the interests of the capitalist class and labor market as Marxists contend. Drawing inspiration from Weber, Bourdieu links higher educational expansion since World War II to conflicts between social classes over the cultural and economic capital and among cultural elites for positions in cultural markets and the state. Indeed, he suggests that the biggest beneficiaries of the expanding educational meritocracy are not the capitalists, as Marxists argue, but those richest in cultural capital, namely, intellectuals, professionals, and government officials. . . .

Bourdieu further distances himself from neo-Marxist accounts of reproduction by integrating a dynamic of agency into his structural analysis. His concept of "habitus," which is akin to the idea of class subculture, and established initially through childhood socialization, refers to a set of relatively permanent and largely unconscious dispositions about one's chances of success and how society works that is common to members of a social class or status group. The concept of habitus permits Bourdieu to stress that educational choices are dispositional, tacit, informal decisions rather than conscious, rational calculations. Yet, these dispositions lead individuals to act unwittingly in ways that can reproduce the prevailing structure of life chances and status distinctions. Bourdieu believes there is generally a high correlation between subjective hopes and objective chances. A child's ambitions and expectations with regard to education and career are the structurally determined products of parental and other reference-group educational experience and cultural life. Whether students stay in school or drop out, and the course of study they pursue, Bourdieu argues, depend on their practical expectations of the likelihood that people of their social class will succeed academically. Intergenerational reproduction is most likely to occur at the lower and upper reaches of the class structure where education opportunities, cultural capital, and habitus march. If working-class youth do not aspire to high levels of educational attainment, it is because they have internalized and resigned themselves to the limited

opportunities for success in schools that devalue their kind of cultural background. By contrast, dominant class youth internalize their social advantages and the school's validation of dominant class culture as expectations for academic success and stay in school. Bourdieu, thus, insightfully demonstrates how much educational selection in fact occurs through self-selection. . . .

Overall the social reproduction process seems to occur without great difficulty in Bourdieu's analyses. Schooling seems to ensure the privileged of success and the less fortunate of failure. Risks of downward mobility for upper-class individuals are only mentioned, not explored. And the chances for upward mobility for lower-class youth are suggested to be minimal.

Basil Bernstein: Linguistic Codes and Reproduction

The work of Basil Bernstein (1971, 1973, 1975) in Great Britain provides an influential elaboration of the importance of cultural resources and education in social reproduction by focusing on language patterns. Drawing more from Durkheim than from either Marx or Weber, Bernstein identifies an underlying relationship between the social division of labor, language socialization in families, and the education system. Working-class children grow up in families and communities where limited mobility and education and traditional authority roles at work and at home create familiar, taken-for-granted social relations. These children are socialized into "restricted" linguistic codes in which meanings remain implicit and embedded in their social context. By contrast, middle-class children grow up in families where education, mobility, and changing work and family roles create a cultural and social universe where appropriate roles need to be negotiated and specified. Meanings are less tied to local, taken-for-granted sets of social relations. These children are socialized into "elaborate" linguistic codes that oblige speakers to select from a broader array of syntactic and lexical alternatives to make explicit intended meanings. Because schools operate according to elaborated codes, working-class children find themselves at a distinct disadvantage, whereas middle-class children are linguistically equipped to meet school demands. Even progressive pedagogies that stress role negotiation and discovery put those with restricted codes at a disadvantage. Class relations are this way mediated and reproduced through the way schools deal with restricted and elaborated language patterns.

Reproduction and Resistance

The early stress on social reproduction predictably elicited a critical reaction against the structural determination emphasis by calling for greater attention to actual experience of schooling and to potential forms or protest and agency. By the early 1980s, the reproduction theme fell into disrepute even among some of its original proponents (Apple and Weis, 1983). . . . A new orientation emerged to see "reproduction through resistance," where opposition to school by working class youth would be seen as a youthful expression of proletarian culture. The study of reproducing patterns of educational and social inequality becomes mitigated by the search for sources of contradiction, conflict, and resistance.

Foremost among these critics is the British sociologist Paul Willis. Though working within the Marxist tradition, Willis sharply criticizes those versions of social reproduction that stress structural

determination, giving little attention to agency. His landmark work, *Learning to Labor* (1977), shifts the research focus from macrostatistical patterns to microethnographic observations. He studies a group of disaffected, white, working-class males in a British secondary school in order to understand how structural forces are mediated through cultural practices.

His study of working-class school boys identifies two distinct informal groups. The majority group, the "ear'oles," conform to school rules and norms and aspire to middle-class occupations much like Bowles and Gintis theorize for working- and middle-class groups. But a small nonconformist "counter-school culture" group of "lads" rejects school authority and ideals and actively seeks out every opportunity to "have a laff" by subverting teacher and administrator authority and mocking the ear'oles. They confront teachers, commit petty delinquency and truancy, smoke, fight, avoid schoolwork, drink, and swagger their sexual exploits.

Willis interprets these familiar expressions of student nonconformity as a form of class politics. On the one hand, their rejection of the school's achievement ideals shows profound insights, or "penetrations," into their limited upward mobility chances under capitalism. Because the lads understand that low-skilled work is unchallenging and only a few can hope to be upwardly mobile, conformism to school standards holds few rewards. Why sacrifice "a laff" for good behavior in school that will lead nowhere. School rebellion, therefore, embodies a submerged critique of capitalism.

On the other hand, this promising insight, which holds potential for generating class solidarity and collective action, is circumscribed by certain "limitations" in the lads' cultural outlook. The lads scoff at the mental labor of schooling, which they associate with the inferior status of femininity, and affirm manual labor, which they equate with masculinity. This anti-intellectual and sexist outlook leads them to understand their entry into the dead-end, low-paying jobs of their fathers and brothers as a free, uncoerced choice rather than a form of class domination. And it cuts them off from the possibility of using critical thought as a tool of social transformation. Thus, the lads' nonconformist resistance to the achievement ideals of schooling ultimately contributes to the reproduction of the class structure by channelling working-class youth into working-class jobs.

McRobbie (1981), Apple and Weis (1985), and Weis (1990) offer a feminized version of the Willis argument by claiming that school opposition by working-class females is less aggressive as their "resistance" finds expression in romantic infatuation and exaggerated femininity. By contesting the model student idea this way, they unwittingly reproduce their class position by becoming housewives and unskilled employees.

These studies illustrate that reproduction occurs through the cultural mediation of agency and that ethnographic observation of the everyday cultural practices of individuals and small groups offers insight into the dynamics of reproduction not captured by macrolevel statistical analysis. . . .

A landmark and original study by Jay MacLeod, *Ain't No Makin' It* (1995), insightfully synthesizes contributions from all the above theorists, particularly Bourdieu, to inform his ethnographic and participation observation study of two male teenage peer groups. He sees the reproduction process mediated through occupational aspirations that are shaped by a broad range of social and educational factors. His study testifies to the continued relevance of a social reproduction perspective that links ethnographic observation with structural opportunities, that examines youthful protest by situating actor behavior and interpretations within their broader context, and that takes into account other status factors like race.

More recently several of the key resistance theorists (Apple, 1989; Aronowitz and Giroux, 1991, 1993; Giroux and McLaren, 1989; Weis, 1990; Wexler, 1987)—including Willis (1990) himself—have assumed a "post-Marxist" position that extends the analysis beyond social class to include gender and race. The early social reproduction focus on class has been eclipsed by attention to the new social

movements of feminism, environmentalism, antiracism, and gay liberation. Indeed, critical theory in the sociology of education has shifted from a social reproduction perspective in the early 1970s to resistance theory by the late 1970s and now to post-Marxist analysis (Davies, 1995).

Yet both resistance and post-Marxist theories share with the earlier social reproduction perspective a common lineage: the search for a source of agency that embodies the promise and capacity for generating broad-based social transformation. This has been perhaps the most enduring impact of the social reproduction perspective on critical thinking about education since the 1960s.

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READING 6

On Understanding the Process of Schooling

The Contributions of Labeling Theory

Ray C. Rist

The final reading in this chapter on sociology of education and theory moves to the micro level, dealing with interactions between participants in schools. This is in contrast to the previous discussions of theories that more often dealt with large groups, educational systems, or even societal systems of education. Recall the discussion of interaction theory in the second reading

in this chapter by Ballantine and Spade. Ray C. Rist goes into detail to describe labeling theory, one type of interaction theory. He first points out the value of labeling theory for understanding what is happening in schools. In the first part of this reading, Rist explains how teachers label students as bright or slow, and the consequences of these labels for the students in school and in the future. He explains the importance of understanding how and why individuals are labeled—who applied the label to whom—and the results for the labeled person. In applying this to school settings, Rist focuses on teacher expectations of students that are based on the labels given to a student. He also points out the research on the relationship between class, race, ethnicity, and labels. Often teachers expect less of lower-class children than they do of middle-class children. Finally, Rist explains the self-fulfilling prophecy as it applies to schools—the idea that teacher expectations of students influence the actual behavior of the students. Labeling theory and the self-fulfilling prophecy are commonly used theories in sociology of education studies of school interactions.

Questions to consider for this reading:

1. What is the importance of labeling theory for understanding interaction dynamics in schools?

2. Explain the relationship between labeling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy as they relate to students and classrooms.

3. Of what use do you feel labeling theory might be for understanding the relationship between teachers and students?

4. How does labeling theory overlap with some of the arguments in conflict theories discussed in this reading?

I. Becoming Deviant: The Labeling Perspective

Those who have used labeling theory have been concerned with the study of *why* people are labeled, and *who* it is that labels them as someone who has committed one form or another of deviant behavior. In sharp contrast to the predominant approaches for the study of deviance, there is little concern in labeling theory with the motivational and characterological nature of the person who committed the act.

Deviance is understood, not as a quality of the person or as created by his actions, but instead as created by group definitions and reactions. It is a social judgment imposed by a social audience. As Becker (1963: 9) has argued:

The central fact of deviance is that it is created by society. I do not mean this in the way it is ordinarily understood, in which the causes of deviance are located in the social situation of the

deviant, or the social factors, which prompted his action. I mean, rather, that social groups create deviants by making the rules whose infraction constitute deviance, and by applying those rules to particular people and labeling them as outsiders. From this point of view, *deviance is not the quality of the act the person commits, but rather a consequence of the application by others of rules and sanctions to an "offender." The deviant is one to whom the label has been successfully applied. Deviant behavior is behavior that people so label* [emphasis added].

The labeling approach is insistent on the need for a shift in attention from an exclusive concern with the deviant individual to a major concern with the *process* by which the deviant label is applied. Again citing Becker (1964: 2):

The labeling approach sees deviance always and everywhere as a process and interaction between at least two kinds of people: those who commit (or who are said to have committed) a deviant act, and the rest of the society, perhaps divided into several groups itself. . . . One consequence is that we become much more interested in the process by which deviants are defined by the rest of the society, than in the nature of the deviant act itself.

The important questions, then, for Becker and others, are not of the genre to include, for example: Why do some individuals come to act out norm-violating behavior? Rather, the questions are of the following sort: Who applied the deviant label to whom? Whose rules shall prevail and be enforced? Under what circumstances is the deviant label successfully and unsuccessfully applied? How does a community decide what forms of conduct should be singled out for this kind of attention? What forms of behavior do persons in the social system consider deviant; how do they interpret such behavior; and what are the consequences of these interpretations for their reactions to individuals who are seen as manifesting such behavior? (see Akers, 1973).

The labeling perspective rejects any assumption that a clear consensus exists as to what constitutes a norm violation—or for that matter, what constitutes a norm—within a complex and highly heterogeneous society. What comes to be determined as deviance and who comes to be determined as a deviant is the result of a variety of social contingencies influenced by who has the power to enforce such determinations. Deviance is thus problematic and subjectively given. The case for making the societal reaction to rule-breaking a major independent variable in studies of deviant behavior has been succinctly stated by Kitsuse (1964: 101):

A sociological theory of deviance must focus specifically upon the interactions which not only define behaviors as deviant, but also organize and activate the application of sanctions by individuals, groups, or agencies. For in modern society, the socially significant differentiation of deviants from the nondeviant population is increasingly contingent upon circumstances of situation, place, social and personal biography, and the bureaucratically organized activities of agencies of social control.

Traditional notions of who is a deviant and what are the causes for such deviance are necessarily reworked. By emphasizing the processual nature of deviance, any particular deviant is seen to be a product of being caught, defined, segregated, labeled, and stigmatized. *This is one of the major thrusts*

of the labeling perspective—that forces of social control often produce the unintended consequence of making some persons defined as deviant even more confirmed as deviant because of the stigmatization of labeling. Thus, social reactions to deviance further deviant careers. Erikson (1966) has even gone so far as to argue that a society will strive to maintain a certain level of deviance within itself as deviance is functional to clarifying group boundaries, providing scapegoats, clearing out-groups who can be the source of furthering in-group solidarity, and the like.

The idea that social control may have the paradoxical effect of generating more of the very behavior it is designed to eradicate was first elaborated upon by Tannenbaum. He noted (1938: 21):

> The first dramatization of the "evil" which separates the child out of his group . . . plays a greater role in making the criminal than perhaps any other experience. . . . He now lives in a different world. He has been tagged. . . . The person becomes the thing he is described as being.

Likewise, Schur (1965: 4) writes:

> The societal reaction to the deviant then, is vital to an understanding of the deviance itself and a major element in—if not the cause of—the deviant behavior.

The focus on outcomes of social control mechanisms has led labeling theorists to devote considerable attention to the workings of organizations and agencies which function ostensibly to rehabilitate the violator or in other ways draw him back into conformity. Their critiques of prisons, mental hospitals, training schools, and other people-changing institutions suggest that the results of such institutions are frequently nearly the opposite of what they were theoretically designed to produce. These institutions are seen as mechanisms by which opportunities to withdraw from deviance are sealed off from the deviant, stigmatization occurs, and a new identity as a social "outsider" is generated. There thus emerges on the part of the person so labeled a new view of himself which is one of being irrevocably deviant.

This movement from one who has violated a norm to one who sees himself as a habitual norm violator is what Lemert (1972: 62) terms the transition from a primary to a secondary deviant. A primary deviant is one who holds to socially accepted roles, views himself as a nondeviant, and believes himself to be an insider. A primary deviant does not deny that he has violated some norm, and claims only that it is not characteristic of him as a person. A secondary deviant, on the other hand, is one who has reorganized his social-psychological characteristics around the deviant role. Lemert (1972: 62) writes:

> Secondary deviation refers to a special class of socially defined responses which people make to problems created by the societal reaction to their deviance. These problems . . . become central facts of existence for those experiencing them. . . . Actions, which have these roles and self-attitudes as their referents, make up secondary deviance. The secondary deviant . . . is a person whose life and identity are organized around the facts of deviance.

A person can commit repeated acts of primary deviation and never come to view himself or have others come to view him as a secondary deviant. Secondary deviation arises from the feedback whereby

misconduct or deviation initiates social reaction to the behavior which then triggers further misconduct. Lemert (1951: 77) first described this process as follows:

> The sequence of interaction leading to secondary deviation is roughly as follows: (1) primary deviation; (2) societal penalties; (3) further primary deviation; (4) stronger penalties and rejections; (5) further deviations, perhaps with hostilities and resentments beginning to focus upon those doing the penalizing; (6) crisis reached in the tolerance quotient, expressed in formal action by the community stigmatizing of the deviant; (7) strengthening of the deviant conduct as a reaction to the stigmatizing and penalties; and (8) ultimate acceptance of deviant social status and efforts at adjustment on the basis of the associated role.

Thus, when persons engage in deviant behavior they would not otherwise participate in and when they develop social roles they would not have developed save for the application of social control measures, the outcome is the emergence of secondary deviance. The fact of having been apprehended and labeled is the critical element in the subsequent construction of a deviant identity and pursuit of a deviant career.

II. The Origins of Labeling: Teacher Expectations

Labeling theory has significantly enhanced our understanding of the process of becoming deviant by shifting our attention from the deviant to the judges of deviance and the forces that affect their judgment. Such judgments are critical, for a recurrent decision made in all societies, and particularly frequent in advanced industrial societies, is that an individual has or has not mastered some body of information, or perhaps more basically, has or has not the capacity to master that information. These evaluations are made periodically as one moves through the institution of school and the consequences directly affect the opportunities to remain for an additional period. To be able to remain provides an option for mastering yet another body of information, and to be certified as having done so. As Ivan Illich (1971) has noted, it is in industrial societies that being perceived as a legitimate judge of such mastery has become restricted to those who carry the occupational role of "teacher." A major consequence of the professionalization of the role of teacher has been the ability to claim as a near exclusive decision whether mastery of material has occurred. Such exclusionary decision-making enhances those in the role of "teacher" as they alone come to possess the authority to provide certification for credentials (Edgar, 1974).

Labeling theorists report that in making judgments of deviance, persons may employ information drawn from a variety of sources. Further, even persons within the same profession (therapists, for example) may make divergent use of the same material in arriving at an evaluative decision on the behavior of an individual. Among the sources of information available to labelers, two appear primary: first-hand information obtained from face-to-face interaction with the person they may ultimately label, and second-hand information obtained from other than direct interaction.

The corollary here to the activities of teachers should be apparent. Oftentimes, the evaluation by teachers (which may lead to the label of "bright," "slow," etc.) is based on first-hand information gained through face-to-face interaction during the course of the time the teacher and student spent together

in the classroom. But a goodly amount of information about the student which informs the teacher's evaluation is second-hand information. For instance, comments from other teachers, test scores, prior report cards, permanent records, meetings with the parents, or evaluations from welfare agencies and psychological clinics are all potential informational sources. In a variation of the division between first-hand and second-hand sources of information, Johnson (1973) has suggested that there are three key determinants of teacher evaluations: student's prior performance, social status characteristics, and present performance. Prior performance would include information from cumulative records (grades, test scores, notes from past teachers or counselors, and outside evaluators) while social status and performance would be inferred and observed in the on-going context of the classroom.

What has been particularly captivating about the work of Rosenthal and Jacobson (1968) in this regard is their attempt to provide empirical justification for a truism considered self-evident by many in education: School achievement is not simply a matter of a child's native ability, but involves directly and inextricably the teacher as well. Described succinctly, their research involved a situation where, at the end of a school year, more than 500 students in a single elementary school were administered the "Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition." In actuality this test was a standardized, relatively nonverbal test of intelligence, Flanagan's (1960) Test of General Ability (TOGA). The teachers were told that such a test would, with high predictive reliability, sort out those students who gave strong indication of being intellectual "spurters" or "bloomers" during the following academic year. Just before the beginning of school the following fall, the teachers were given lists with the names of between one and nine of their students. They were told that these students scored in the top twenty percent of the school on the test, though, of course, no factual basis for such determinations existed. A twenty percent sub-sample of the "special" students was selected for intensive analysis. Testing of the students at the end of the school year offered some evidence that these selected children did perform better than the nonselected.

The findings of Deutsch, Fishman, Kogan, North, and Whiteman (1964); Gibson (1965); Goslin and Glass (1967); McPherson (1966); and Pequignot (1966) all demonstrate the influence of standardized tests of intelligence and achievement on teachers' expectations. Goaldman (1971), in a review of the literature on the use of tests as a second-hand source of information for teachers, noted: "Although some of the research has been challenged, there is a basis for the belief that teachers at all levels are prejudiced by information they receive about a student's ability or character." Mehan (1971, 1974) has been concerned with the interaction between children who take tests and the teachers who administer them. He posits that testing is not the objective use of a measurement instrument, but the outcome of a set of interactional activities which are influenced by a variety of contingencies which ultimately manifest themselves in a reified "test score." Mehan suggests (1971):

Standardized test performances are taken as an unquestioned, non-problematic reflection of the child's underlying ability. The authority of the test to measure the child's real ability is accepted by both teachers and other school officials. Test results are accepted without doubt as the correct and valid document of the child's ability.

Characteristics of children such as sex and race are immediately apparent to teachers. Likewise, indication of status can be quickly inferred from grooming, style of dress, need for free lunches, information on enrollment cards, discussion of family activities by children, and visits to the school by

parents. One intriguing study recently reported in this area is that by two sociologists, Clifford and Walster (1973: 249). The substance of their study was described as follows:

> Our experiment was designed to determine what effect a student's physical attractiveness has on a teacher's expectations of the child's intellectual and social behavior. Our hypothesis was that a child's attractiveness strongly influences his teachers' judgments; the more attractive the child, the more biased in his favor we expect the teachers to be. The design required to test this hypothesis is a simple one: Teachers are given a standardized report card and an attached photograph. The report card includes an assessment of the child's academic performance as well as of his general social behavior. The attractiveness of the photos is experimentally varied. On the basis of this information, teachers are asked to state their expectations of the child's educational and social potential.

Based on the responses of 404 fifth-grade teachers within the state of Missouri, Clifford and Walster concluded (1973: 255):

> There is little question but that the physical appearance of a student affected the expectations of the teachers we studied. Regardless of whether the pupil is a boy or girl, the child's physical attractiveness has an equally strong association with his teacher's reactions to him.

The variables of race and ethnicity have been documented, by Brown (1968), Davidson and Lang (1960), Jackson and Cosca (1974), and Rubovits and Maehr (1973), among others, as powerful factors in generating the expectations teachers hold of children. It has also been documented that teachers expect less of lower-class children than they do of middle-class children (cf. Becker, 1952; Deutsch, 1963; Leacock, 1969; Rist, 1970, 1973; Stein, 1971; Warner, Havighurst, & Loeb, 1944; Wilson, 1963). Douglas (1964), in a large-scale study of the tracking system used in British schools, found that children who were clean and neatly dressed in nice clothing and who came from what the teachers perceived as "better" homes, tended to be placed in higher tracks than their measured ability would predict. Further, when placed there they tended to stay and perform acceptably. Mackler (1969) studied schools in Harlem and found that children tended to stay in the tracks in which they were initially placed and that such placement was based on a variety of social considerations independent of measured ability. Doyle, Hancock, and Kifer (1971) and Palardy (1969) have shown teacher expectations for high performance in elementary grades to be stronger for girls than boys.

The on-going academic and interpersonal performance of the children may also serve as a potent source of expectations for teachers. Rowe (1969) found that teachers would wait longer for an answer from a student they believed to be a high achiever than for one from a student they believed to be a low achiever. Brophy and Good (1970) found that teachers were more likely to give perceived high achieving students a second chance to respond to an initial incorrect answer, and further, that high achievers were praised more frequently for success and criticized less for failure.

There is evidence that the expectations teachers hold for their students can be generated as early as the first few days of the school year and then remain stable over the months to follow (Rist, 1970, 1972, 1973; Willis, 1972). For example, I found during my three-year longitudinal and ethnographic study of a single, *de facto* segregated elementary school in the black community of St. Louis, that after only eight

days of kindergarten, the teacher made permanent seating arrangements based on what she assumed were variations in academic capability. But no formal evaluation of the children had taken place. Instead, the assignments to the three tables were based on a number of socio-economic criteria as well as on early interaction patterns in the classroom. Thus, the placement of the children came to reflect the social class distinctions in the room—the poor children from public welfare families all sat at one table, the working-class children sat at another and the middle class at the third. I demonstrated how the teacher operationalized her expectations of these different groups of children in terms of her differentials of teaching time, her use of praise and control, and the extent of autonomy within the classroom. By following the same children through first and second grade as well, I was able to show that the initial patterns established by the kindergarten teacher came to be perpetuated year after year. By second grade, labels given by another teacher clearly reflected the reality each of the three groups experienced in the school. The top group was called the "Tigers," the middle group the "Cardinals," and the lowest group, the "Clowns." What had begun as a subjective evaluation and labeling by the teacher took on objective dimensions as the school proceeded to process the children on the basis of the distinctions made when they first began.

Taken together, these studies strongly imply that the notion of "teacher expectations" is multi-faceted and multi-dimensional. It appears that when teachers generate expectations about their students, they do so not only for reasons of academic or cognitive performance, but for their classroom interactional patterns as well. Furthermore, not only ascribed characteristics such as race, sex, class, or ethnicity are highly salient, interpersonal traits are also. Thus, the interrelatedness of the various attributes which ultimately blend together to generate the evaluation a teacher makes as to what can be expected from a particular student suggests the strength and tenacity of such subsequent labels as "bright" or "slow" or "trouble-maker" or "teacher's little helper." It is to the outcomes of the student's having one or another of these labels that we now turn.

III. An Outcome of Labeling: The Self-Fulfilling Prophecy

W. I. Thomas, many years ago, set forth what has become a basic dictum of the social sciences when he observed, "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." This is at the core of the self-fulfilling prophecy. An expectation which defines a situation comes to influence the actual behavior within the situation so as to produce what was initially assumed to be there. Merton (1968: 477) has elaborated on this concept and noted: "The self-fulfilling prophecy is, in the beginning, a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true" (emphasis in the original).

Here it is important to recall a basic tenet of labeling theory—that an individual does not become deviant simply by the commission of some act. As Becker (1963) stressed, deviance is not inherent in behavior *per se,* but in the application by others of rules and sanctions against one perceived as being an "offender." Thus, the only time one can accurately be termed a "deviant" is after the successful application of a label by a social audience. Thus, though many persons may commit norm violations, only select ones are subsequently labeled. The contingencies of race, class, sex, visibility of behavior, age, occupation, and who one's friends are all influence the outcome as to whether one is or is not labeled. . . . Rosenthal and Jacobson's *Pygmalion in the Classroom* (1968) created wide interest in the

notion of the self-fulfilling prophecy as a concept to explain differential performance by children in classrooms. Their findings suggested that the expectations teachers created about the children randomly selected as "intellectual bloomers" somehow caused the teachers to treat them differently, with the result that the children really did perform better by the end of the year. Though the critics of this particular research (Snow, 1969; Taylor, 1970; Thorndike, 1968, 1969) and those who have been unsuccessful in replicating the findings (Claiborn, 1969) have leveled strong challenges to Rosenthal and Jacobson, the disagreements are typically related to methodology, procedure, and analysis rather than to the proposition that relations exist between expectations and behavior. In the context of a single student facing the authority and vested interests of a school administration and staff, the most likely outcome is that over time, the student will increasingly move towards conformity with the label the institution seeks to establish. Good and Brophy (1973: 75) have elaborated upon this process within the classroom as follows:

1. The teacher expects specific behavior and achievement from particular students.

2. Because of these different expectations, the teacher behaves differently toward the different students.

3. This teacher treatment tells each student what behavior and achievement the teacher expects from him and affects his self-concept, achievement motivation, and level of aspiration.

4. If this teacher treatment is consistent over time, and if the student does not actively resist or change it in some way, it will tend to shape his achievement and behavior. High-expectation students will be led to achieve at high levels, while the achievement of low-expectation students will decline.

5. With time, the student's achievement and behavior will conform more and more closely to that originally expected of him.

The fourth point in this sequence makes the crucial observation that teacher expectations are not automatically self-fulfilling. For the expectations of the teacher to become realized, both the teacher and the student must move toward a pattern of interaction where expectations are clearly communicated and the behavioral response is consonant with the expected patterns. The vulnerability of children to the dictates of adults in positions of power over them leaves the negotiations as to what evaluative definition will be tagged on the children more often than not in the hands of the powerful. As Max Weber himself stated, to have power is to be able to achieve one's ends, even in the face of resistance from others. When that resistance is manifested in school by children and is defined by teachers and administrators as truancy, recalcitrance, unruliness, and hostility, or conversely denied as a lack of motivation, intellectual apathy, sullenness, passivity, or withdrawal, the process is ready to be repeated and the options to escape further teacher definitions are increasingly removed.

Postscript: Beyond the Logjam

This paper has argued that a fruitful convergence can be effected between the research being conducted on the self-fulfilling prophecy as a consequence of teacher expectations and the conceptual framework

of labeling theory. The analysis of the outcomes of teacher expectations produces results highly similar to those found in the study of social deviance. Labels are applied to individuals which fundamentally shift their definitions of self and which further reinforce the behavior which had initially prompted the social reaction. The impact of the self-fulfilling prophecy in educational research is comparable to that found in the analysis of mental health clinics, asylums, prisons, juvenile homes, and other people-changing organizations. What the labeling perspective can provide to the study of educational outcomes as a result of the operationalization of teacher expectations is a model for the study of the *processes* by which the outcomes are produced. The detailing over time of the interactional patterns which lead to changes in self-definition and behavior within classrooms is sadly lacking in almost all of the expectation research to date. . . .

To extend the research on the educational experiences of those students who are differentially labeled by teachers, what is needed is a theoretical framework which can clearly isolate the influences and effects of certain kinds of teacher reactions on certain types of students, producing certain typical outcomes. The labeling perspective appears particularly well-suited for this expansion of both research and theoretical development on teacher expectations by offering the basis for analysis at either a specific or a more general level. With the former, for example, there are areas of investigation related to (1) types of students perceived by teachers as prone to success or failure; (2) the kinds of reactions, based on their expectations, teachers have to different students; and (3) the effects of specific teacher reactions on specific student outcomes. At a more general level, fruitful lines of inquiry might include (1) the outcomes in the post-school world of having received a negative vs. a positive label within the school; (2) the influences of factors such as social class and race on the categories of expectations teachers hold; (3) how and why labels do emerge in schools as well as the phenomenological and structural meanings that are attached to them; and (4) whether there are means by which to modify or minimize the effects of school labeling processes on students.

Labeling theory provides a conceptual framework by which to understand the processes of transforming attitudes into behavior and the outcomes of having done so. To be able to detail the dynamics and influences within schools by which some children come to see themselves as successful and act as though they were, and to detail how others come to see themselves as failures and act accordingly, provides in the final analysis an opportunity to intervene so as to expand the numbers of winners and diminish the numbers of losers. For that reason above all others, labeling theory merits our attention.

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Projects for Further Exploration

1. Using the basic ideas of the theoretical perspectives discussed in this chapter, consider two theoretical perspectives that you could use to help understand a specific situation that influenced your schooling. What are the strengths and weaknesses of each approach in explaining this situation?

2. Go to your library (or library's databases for searching journals) and find the most recent issue of *Sociology of Education*. Look at one or two articles in this journal, glancing through the first part of each article, and see if you can figure out which theoretical approach the authors used in their research.

3. Look around your current classroom and see if you can recognize any outward evidence of the theoretical arguments presented in this chapter. For example, are students all from the same social class background? If so, why? Is the curriculum structured for particular purposes in terms of maintaining social stability or the power structure in society? Discuss this with others in your class to see if you came up with similar examples and explanations.