Sociology of Education

Achievement or Ascription?
• 1. Paradigms
9 Key Reasons
EDUCATION?: R Brym (1998)

1. Education is an **objective measure** of class standing in Canada is **education**.

2. Education **helps to sustain our belief** in an achievement oriented society.
3. **School** is an important part of our lives in a modern **post-industrial society**.

- fragmented, chaotic diverse
4. Post secondary **education is expensive**. Books, tuition, parking, food-most held part-time jobs.
5. **Education is an indicator of success** - Education does impact on social status—not direct correlation.
Education’s Link to the Workforce.

6. Sociologists are interested in education’s link to workforce…

• Mass education means healthy economy and workers.
Social betterment

7. There is a connection between education and social betterment.
   • Educated people have less trouble with the law.
   • They are better able to cope with recessions,
   • Educated people have fewer alcohol and drug abuse problems.
Education Provides Employment

8. Education is Canada’s largest single industry

- Teachers, teaching assistant, researchers
- Administrators,
- Custodial people,
- Social workers
Meritocracy

9. The education system is based on the ideology of meritocracy.

- The word "meritocracy" is now also often used to describe a type of society where wealth, position, and social status are in part assigned through competition.
Universalism over parochialism

• **ACHIEVEMENT OVER ASCRIPTION**

• **Meritocracy** = Demonstrated talent and competence, not ascribed status or nepotism.

• People are placed in **positions** of trust, responsibility & social prestige - earned, not inherited or ascribed.
Credentialism

• Is it achieved or ascribed?
Achievement or ‘ASCRIPITON’?

- Education serves to reinforce class differences.
- A study by Maxwell and Maxwell in Ishwaran (1979) shows how Upper class children remained in the Upper Class through the private school system.
- (Culture of elites) vs. (Culture of poverty)
Achievement or ‘ASCRPTION’?

3. However, studies (conflict approach) indicate that education serves to reinforce class differences.

4. A study by Maxwell and Maxwell in Ishwaran (1979) shows how Upper class children remained in the Upper Class through the private school system.

5. (Culture of elites) vs. (Culture of poverty)
Mobility

1. A national mobility study done in 1973 showed that having a low SES predicts 8.1 years of education whereas a high SES predicts 16.1 years.

2. More education = higher income, higher status.
• •
Functionals vs. Marxists on Education

1. Functionalist aspire to the culture of poverty argument.
   Oscar Lewis, John Porter, Davis and Moore, Talcot Parsons….‘Blame the victims’

2. Marxists hold that social inequality (education) is ideological and structural.
   Blame the system.
See Durkheim on Moral Education.

1. *Education and Sociology* (1922);

1. Sociology and Philosophy (1924);

1. **Moral Education** (1925)
Marxist Conflict (Illich, 1971)

a. See Ivan Illich `Deschooling’
b. Educational processes are hegemonic
c. Education is about political economy
d. Education serves the status quo.
e. Open concept classroom vs. back to basics education is ideological.
BARRIERS/HEGEMONY

THE `BEST SCHOOLS”

1. produces friendship networks
2. promote exclusiveness
3. acculturates individuals into the lifestyle
Parents of the Upper class

• The Upper class is maintained through culture—see M. Weber ‘Class, Status, Party’ (1926)

• Bowles (1971)-class differences are maintained by the ability of the upper classes to control school finance.
Working Class reproduction

- Illustrates how the British school system reproduces an underclass.
School as **BUREAUCRACY** - Weberian approach

- **A BUREAUCRACY HAS THE FOLLOWING CHARACTERISTICS:**
  
  a. - Formally **constructed** aims and objectives
  b. - Formal rationality and **symbols**
  c. - Hierarchy of **specialized offices**
  d. - **Impersonal** relations
School produces
THE IRON CAGE

- **Specialization** leads to a compartmentalization of knowledge-
- Schools **compartmental** places of exchange-
- I.e. the Math teacher does not deal with the English teacher.
Standardization & Repression

1. **Repression** - individual unique qualities are not encouraged - both students and teachers weed out non-conformity and difference

2. **Standardization** - testing
Studies Show that..

1. IQ Test is misleading

2. Knowledge and mental ability are not the same..

3. IQ test measures ability to be a better worker, to fit in,

4. IQ does not measure questioning, free thinking..
School: Freedom of Thought?

School bureaucracies are inflexible, discourage change.

Students are passive recipients of knowledge.

School is about Formal rationality not substantive rationality.
HALL-DENNIS ERA.

• The **streaming process: fact or fiction?**

Education Reform 1995

• The goal of this serious reform of Ontario education was "to develop a system that is focused on the students, dedicated to excellence, and accountable to the public it serves"

• 1990s -Mike Harris introduced -Back to Basics, the three R’s.
This body was responsible for a comprehensive review of the province's educational system - the first review since the Hall-Dennis Report of 1968.
Paradigms: CONFLICT

• **CONFLICT THEORY**
  1. Education as a capitalist tool-
  2. Education has a *hidden curriculum* that
  3. Education encourages social acceptance and conformity
  4. Education serves as an instrument of bourgeois hegemony
Streaming

• In education, the practice of dividing pupils for all classes according to an estimate of their overall ability,

• With arrangements for ‘promotion’ and ‘demotion’ at the end of each academic year.
Cultural Bias in Intelligence Testing

• It is extremely difficult to develop a test that **measures** of innate intelligence without introducing cultural bias.
• This has been **virtually impossible** to achieve.
Education is ideological

- **IQ TESTS** in US were used to `stream` Black and Hispanic students for decades
- Told their achievements would be limited
- **Racism** is embedded in the education system.
MERITOCRACY is an Illusion

• **Education is supposed** to transcend ascribed statuses of race, sex, or inherited wealth.

• **BUT in Reality- Education** is embedded with:
  
  • 1. **Ascriptive barriers** (see conflict theory)
  
  • 2. **Cultural processes** (see symbolic interaction)
Ascriptive Barriers in education

- 1. Gender - Women vs Men
- 2. Race - Native, Black vs. White
- 3. Region - Geography – world
- 4. Family - Class background
- 5. Socialization - agents
Cultural Processes

1. **Subtle** day to activities
2. Subtle selection and promotion
3. Subtle display of favour and disfavour
4. Subtle ways of ensuring normative conduct.
Conflict Theory: education is ideological

1. Education is a political construct
2. Education is linked to the system and those in power.
3. Education is Ideological plays a significant role in determining the goals of education and the results:
Education is about control by elites

- Deschooling Society-
  1. Ivan Illich (1971) - a radical Marxist - went as far as arguing for the deschooling of society.
  2. Illich maintained that the current economic structure that creates the necessity for hierarchy of organization and discipline.
Education is a capitalistic tool

• 3. Education meets the needs of capitalists—schools by virtue of their procedures and organization.

• Education creates citizenry that are uncritical of the status quo and a workforce submissive to authority.
Ivan Illich (1971)

- Illich contends that schools:
  A. teach only dominant values
  B. provide only socially approved knowledge and skills
Historical materialism

• C.

• People in the past by contrast were considerably more self-subsistent in a variety of domains such as entertainment, moral and social values etc.
Credentialism is ideological

- **D.** He argues that a de-schooled society would allow people to gain control over their own lives thereby improving the quality of social life.
A De-schooled society

• E. His de-schooled society would include ordinary citizenry rotating with experts in training young people. More flexibility in job assignment.
De-professionalized.

- Education should become de-institutionalized and de-professionalized
- Currently they have given up their independence to experts who tell us how to think and how to behave through their credentials.
- Professionals with credentials control society in the interest of elites
The Hidden Curriculum
A Conflict and Interactionist term

Characteristics of Schools:

a. Reproduce class differences
b. Rules
c. Behavioural control
d. Oppression
e. Acceptance
Hidden curriculum

• *Hidden curriculum*, can be defined as:
  • “the outcomes or by-products of schools or of non-school settings, particularly those states which are *learned but not openly intended*.”
**Hidden curriculum**

- **Found in any setting:**
  - traditional,
  - recreational
  - social activities,
- **May teach unintended lessons:**
  - experiences beyond the formal setting
SI and Conflict

• A variety of definitions have been developed around the notion of `hidden curriculum’ based on the broad range of perspectives of those who study this phenomenon.
Symbolic Interactionism on Education

1. A *micro* sociological evaluation of school situations

2. Symbols, signs and language
   - Ie. Kindergarten as Bootcamp
Symbolic Interactionism

I.e. The Development of Self Control in the Eastern Cree Lifecycle”

The School As Process

See Berger and Luckman 1971.

- The social **construction and creation** of social reality:
  a. classroom
  b. blackboard
  c. chalk
  d. books
  e. pencils
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QUESTIONING Authority?

• QUESTIONING- only within limits
• Not beyond `the system`
• Too much rebellion, leads to discipline
Kindergarten as Boot Camp: 1977, Harry Gracey

a. The School is a preparatory system:

b. The school is the child’s first secondary agent of socialization

c. In schools, children grow beyond family and develop emotionally, physically and academically
Symbols, signs language: of a classroom

• In 1977, Harry Gracey in Introductory Sociology (Wrong and Gracey)

• BOOTCAMP=Wilbur Wright Kindergarten
Wilbur Wright School,

• Kindergarten as **induction into `the system’** through:
  a. drills
  b. routines
  c. rigidity
  d. regular compliance
1977, Harry Gracey

- Gracey’s observations:
- **SCHOOL IS:**
  1. Bureaucratic
  2. Like an assembly-line
  3. Equivalent to a factory system
  4. Filled with common signals, and expected responses….
Education’s Function

• **Hidden Curriculum** – the principle goals of public education are the following:
  
a. Universalistic values
b. Standardized curriculum
c. To generate a fair criteria for performance
Prepares Individual to:

a. **Accept** existing ideology  
b. **Recognize** common symbols  
c. **Generate** uniformity of experience  
d. To **conform** to societies rules and norms
Summary: Education and Sociology

1. Education can be a social stable institution maintain the status quo. (structural functional)

2. Education is also a reflection of unequal class relations (conflict)

3. Education has a hidden curriculum that play out in the day to day lives of students (interactionist)