

In what ways does education effect social changes between one generation and the next?

It is the opinion of functionalist sociologist Emille Durkheim that , "Education is the acquisition of knowledge and the learning of skills. It often helps to shape beliefs and moral values." In the contemporary Uk it is more than a little apparent that education is arguably the main tool that helps to allow the transformation of social changes to be made from one generation to the next.

It has been suggested that the educational system highlight changes in society due to the fact that it is society which sets theses norms and values which are reproduced in the educational institution. Society attempts to reproduce common values, norms and beliefs through the form of education.

Yet as we are aware in a contemporary society, education has taken many different forms- from formal to non formal it is the belief that in today's changing society, regardless of ages, gender or ethnicity, regardless of social class there is a type of education which credits you with desirable skills for future employees.

Rising figures highlighting the amount of people opting to stay in higher education have shown that in this contemporary UK, higher education has become more easily accessible and a more desirable choice. According to statistics produced by the university and College Admissions Service (Ucas), the number of fulltime students accepted on to courses in 2008 rose by 10.4% – 43,197 more than the previous year – to a total of 456,627. This increasing figure clearly indicates that barriers which would have and did restrict previous generation's experiences of higher education have been limited if not entirely abolished. This in turn has had an underlying effect on the way society has been constructed.

Before the 19th century higher education was reserved for a select group of people that had to posses the desirable skills in order for them to obtain a place in higher education- they were white, middle class and of course male. If you did not fit this stereo typical module you were not given the chance to excel or indeed experience higher education. With little education you were restricted and limited as regards to what social class you belonged to. During this period there was only two universities in England (Oxford and Cambridge) and four in Scotland. These elite universities as previously mentioned were aimed and produced for men. During this period we can see the domination of men in the top jobs, clearly showing the link between education and social class.

Feminist sociologist Anne Oakley claims that the unfair dismissal of women regarding education has led to their lowerly status in society, suggestion due to media interpretation and primary socialisation women are restricted and repressed in the home expected to complete the triple shift and the dual burden whilst experiencing the dark side of the family life.

However, during the 20th century a change in higher education is noted. Social barriers are slowly removed causing higher education to become more accessible to a wider range of people with an increased number of universities opening- higher education has become more easily causable and a more desirable choice in the contemporary UK, currently 130 universities are open to individuals regardless of age, ethnicity and gender.

As a direct influence of this, a change in the social structure is being provoked. Previously we have seen males dominating the top of the stratification system due to the fact that they had been given the tools and excel in higher education. Yet as women have had the same schooling process of males we are seeing women excel in schooling- yet this is not shown in the labour market. Although women are possessing skills that are desirable to future employees that are still not making top jobs- hitting the glass ceiling effects. This could show that education does not effect social change- even though women are given equal

opportunities in the classroom and come out with desirable skills and attributes they are still failing to compete in the higher ranks of the labour market.

The other main factor has been curriculum choice. Here, girls chose particular subjects (languages, arts) and left others unchosen (notoriously science and engineering). Some early work (e.g. Samuel's two pieces in Whyld 1983) identified a male bias in science syllabi, with science applied mainly to 'male' examples (which often assume a good deal of experience in 'tinkering' with metal wood and hand tools, says Samuel personal computers are seen as boys toys. As a result, substantial efforts were made in some schools to attract girls into science subjects the usual formula included (a) a high-powered but conventionally attractive female science teacher, pictures and drawings of female scientists and so on (b) 'girl-friendly' examples (the thermodynamics of cooking, perhaps, or the mixing of liquids illustrated by using not petrol and water but vinegar and French dressing in another of Samuels examples)) (c) some policy to positively advantage girls in the actual classroom -- e.g. taking care to stop the boys pushing to the front to take charge of the scientific apparatus or computer.

The ideal of what the child should become, for Durkheim, arises from the common beliefs of society's members, even though individuals or groups of them may have different beliefs. To an extent, Durkheim says, there is a set of underlying beliefs common enough among all stratum of society to allow their manifestation, though sometimes the manifestation takes a slightly altered form to suit the nature of the institutions.

Because the system of education arises from the common beliefs of society's members, it is a product of collective, not individual, thought. Thus, a system of education, being a product of the collectivity, necessarily embodies those values that are expressed by the conscious collective. As a society's collective values change, the educational system reflects these changes. Durkheim points out this tendency as he comments on the relationship between education, religion, and society's ideal view of a human being: "Our conception of the goal has become secularised; consequently the means employed themselves must change. Otherwise, the system would be teaching values inconsistent with society, possibly leading to its own demise. "What point is there," Durkheim asks, "in imagining a kind of education that would be fatal for the society that put it into practice?"

. Education socialises young people for adult roles. According to Talcott Parson's Functionalism individuals interact with each other through the medium of social structures. They accept common standards of evaluation, which are moral standards or 'norms'. Sociological processes maintain these structures, and ensure stability through adherence to the norms. This is called a 'structuralist-functionalist' approach to social systems analysis. Parsons analyses the functions of society into: 1. Adaptation - the provision of physical necessities - the economic system; 2. Goal attainment - the establishment of the goals of society as a whole - the political system; 3. Pattern maintenance and tension management - serves to motivate individuals and resolve conflicts - kinship, family & marriage; 4. Integration - socialisation of individuals to accept the norms and control them if they don't - schools, churches, media, police and judicial system. Therefore, Parsons sees education as serving a part in the function of integration. Through education individuals are socialised to conform. Education also supports the economic "imperative" of society by: 1. Inculcating certain technical skills and requirements; 2. Separating out potential workers for different points of entry to the labour market. Regarding the integration "imperative" schooling specifically causes children to internalise social values and norms at a level which the family alone cannot achieve. In America elementary school education teaches American youth the value of fair competition. "It includes, above all, recognition that it is fair to give differential rewards for different levels of achievement, so long as there has been fair access to opportunity.." Functionalists maintain that there is a high degree of equality of opportunity within the education system Functionalism stresses the link between education and the

economy. A malfunctioning educational system would be one in which individuals are not assigned the most appropriate role, and will hence lead to inefficiency. This could be taken as an argument against elitism in education and in favour of a comprehensive system. Davies and Moore follow Parsons claiming that "Education is the proving ground for ability and hence the selective agency for placing people in different statuses according to their capacities." Thus modern functionalists tend to assume that the education system is a meritocracy. Functionalists believe that the demands of industrial society for a skilled workforce are met by the educational system. In criticism of functionalism: 1. Functionalism does not appear to offer a satisfactory account of conflict within educational systems. The goals and purposes of education are not generally agreed by professionals and employees within it. 2. It fails to deal adequately with the content of the curriculum and teacher-pupil interaction in the classroom. 3. It treats individuals as if they were the "puppets" of society. "Nothing more than the product of the societal norms and values which they internalise through their experiences of socialisation in the home, school, workplace etc." 4. Functionalists, especially of the Talcott Parsons type, tend to idealise existing society and ignore facts that are critical of their own views. Seeking to argue that society is a meritocracy based on equality of opportunity, functionalists tend to be wilfully blind to the very real differences of educational experience between members of different classes. They seek to paint a rosy picture in which the functions of individuals in society are all assigned to them by the educational system, rather than by class, in the sense of "cultural determination and the influence of socialization."¹ For Durkheim, education becomes a constraint, Steven Lukes explains, "when certain socially given ideas and values are internalized by individuals who thereby acquire certain beliefs, wants and feelings and act in certain ways."² Lukes quotes Durkheim as saying that education is thus "a continuous effort to impose on the child ways of seeing, feeling and acting at which he would not have arrived spontaneously."

Yet, various social groups or strata may have different beliefs. The parts of the educational system that are geared toward a particular group will reflect that social group's values more than those of the other groups. The ideals common to all the groups, however, will most strongly be reflected because, Durkheim believes, "society can survive only if there exists among its members a sufficient degree of homogeneity; education perpetuates and reinforces this homogeneity by fixing in the mind of the child, from the beginning, the essential similarities that social life demands."⁶

If the values of a society change in a subtle manner, they may become manifest in the educational system in a more readily perceptible manner. For instance, if the norms of a society shift toward placing a greater emphasis on merit, the educational system may reflect the change by instituting a system of examinations to determine a student's place in the social organization of society. Similarly, obvious changes in society's values, on the other hand, may become manifest in the education system only in subtle ways.

4 Changes over Time

The major changes that occur over time tend to leave an imprint on the educational system. If, for example, during a certain era, society had made social status contingent upon birthright, the educational system would likely reflect this, perhaps by admitting only those from the higher social levels into the prestigious educational institutions. Later, society may come to value merit, with each person gaining access to the higher-level or prestigious institutions through examination rather than birthright. Yet the imprint, the residue, of the aristocratic system is likely to still exist in the educational system in some subordinate manner or marginal form. Perhaps there was, for example, a useful aspect of the old system that has been retained by the new.

Systematically tracing the imprints left by such changes in the educational system reveal underlying shifts in society's organization and values. Indeed, Durkheim would say, the aspects of the old educational system retained by the new one are those that are still representative of society's values, although perhaps only marginally. The past has contributed, as Durkheim points out, to the formation of the principles that guide education. The principles that guide education, in turn, reflect the values of society. Thus, Durkheim

believed, "studying the history of education, relating educational change to wider cultural, social and economic changes, would enable one to anticipate the future and understand the present."

