

Education essay

f) Using material from Item B and elsewhere assess the functionalist explanation of the role of education in modern society.

As item b states functionalists such as Durkheim believe that education performs two important functions one is that education prepares people for society and equipments them with skills and knowledge. Also education installs a sense of being part of a large group with a shared culture, history ,identity and value consensus (an agreement between society's members about what values are important).

This function is so that all society members share a common outlook and can all co operate to meet society's needs. Functionalists also say that schools continue the process of socialisation. Also they believe in meritocracy which is social system in which rewards and occupational positions are allocated justly on the basis of merit, rather than ascriptive factors such as class, gender, ethnic group or wealth. Parsons (a functionalist sociologist) argues that schools perform the function of selecting and allocating pupils to their future work roles, schools assess individuals aptitudes and abilities and help to match them to a job they are best suited to .Parsons also said that education provides a bridge between the family and society. This bridge is needed because the family and society operate on different principles .Children learn a new way of living in order to cope with living in the wider world. In the family children are judges by particularistic standards also the child's status is ascribed.

However many sociologists argue that meritocracy does not exist as some people have better opportunities in life and are more likely to succeed, for example a middle class parent who doesn't have to work and can stay at home with the children can devote more time to their children's intellectual development. Also not everyone can afford to send their children to private schools which do very well academically and also some parents are more supportive than others.

Marxists believe that the functions of education are that the ruling class uses education to transmit its ideology to the rest of the population. They also believe that the ideology persuades the working class to accept its position. They think that the ruling class is then able to maintain its power and privilege and perpetuate the class structure. They criticise the functionalists for believing that everyone can move up the social classes if they work hard. Marxists see school as related to work, through hidden curriculum children are taught to not have high expectations .The hidden curriculum in a top public school is different children are more likely to be taught

to expect to have a high status job in which they will have to exercise authority over others, this means some are disadvantaged. Marxists argue that education reproduces the next generation of workers for capitalism.

Dennis Wrong an interactionist argues that functionalists have an over socialised view of people as puppets of society and that functionalists wrong imply that pupils passively accept all they are taught and never reject the schools values.

Functionalist view is also criticised because the education system doesn't always produce what employers and the economy need and that who you know is still more important than what you know in some cases. Also we live in a multicultural country and do we really have just one set of values and a shared culture?

Positive criticism of the functionalist view are that it identifies education as an important social structure and acknowledges the vital role of secondary socialisation.

In conclusion the functionalist view on the functions of education are useful because it identifies the needs of modern industrial societies to have an appropriately skilled workforce produced by the education system however their view is very deterministic