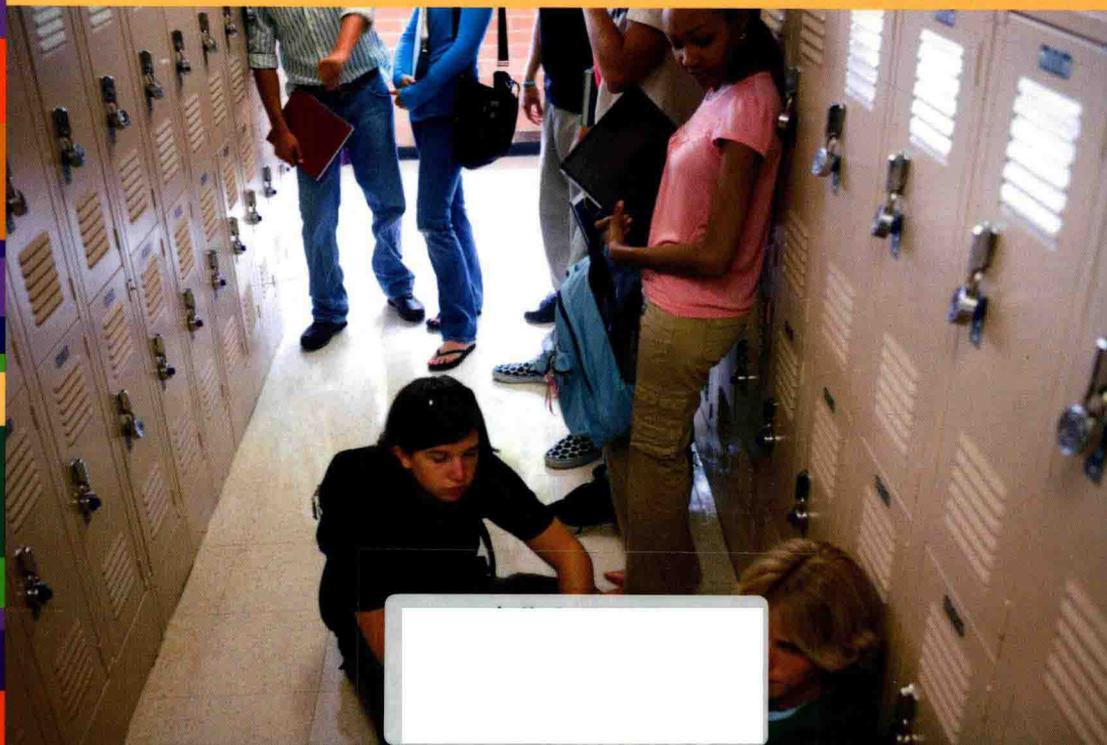


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EDITION

The
Structure
of
Schooling

READINGS IN THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION



RICHARD ARUM ■ IRENEE R. BEATTIE ■ KARLY FORD



The Structure of Schooling

Readings in the Sociology of Education

Third Edition

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The Structure of Schooling Mythology in the Sociology of Education

Third Edition

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PREFACE

For the updated third edition of *The Structure of Schooling*, we have selected writings that are illustrative of the fundamental ideas and insights developed by past and current academic research in the sociology of education. In the past several years, sociological research on education has developed in multiple directions that are reflected in the new readings we have selected for this edition. We include various new studies of higher education, drawing on the discipline's growing attention to this sector. Further, our readings now include reports of cutting edge research on adolescent use of social media and communications technologies. New work on immigration status, gendered sexuality, and bullying has also been included in this new edition. We incorporate additional research using an intersectional approach to the study of educational inequality. This edition also reflects trends in sociological research on schools in the past decade, when scholars have refocused attention on the discipline's earlier interest in identifying the relationship between schools and communities and between schools and student behavior. This research has progressed in several directions: (a) advances in understanding the significance of the school community—for example, the development and application of the concept of social capital; (b) renewed attention to the effects of racial segregation and resource inequality on student outcomes; (c) a redefinition of what constitutes a school community with

particular attention paid to specification of the institutional, as opposed to demographic, characteristics of the environment; and (d) a broader investigation of both relevant school-level practices and significant individual-level outcomes associated with variation in schooling, including student behavior, delinquency, and crime. Readings reflecting newer trends in sociological scholarship continue to be anchored by more classic theoretical and empirical works that shape current debates in the field. We have replaced or reedited several of these selections in this new edition to improve clarity.

We have also consciously chosen material that is both accessible and engaging. Rather than relying excessively on the reproduction of articles published in the discipline's top research journals (e.g., *Sociology of Education*, *American Sociological Review*, and *American Journal of Sociology*), we have worked to incorporate more accessible readings—largely free of regression coefficients, but reflective of general mainstream sociological concerns. We thus have purposely avoided a heavy reliance on academic research written primarily for other specialists rather than for broader classroom and public audiences. When possible, we also have attempted to include contributions from prominent authors in the field, as well as promising new scholars. In choice of subject matter, we have followed a broad, inclusive strategy. Instead of focusing only narrowly on

XII • THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

educational achievement outcomes, we present research on a larger set of topics.

In preparing this book, we are grateful for the assistance of SAGE Editor Jeff Lasser, Editorial Assistant Nick Pachelli, our Permissions

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CONTENTS

About the Editors	x
Preface	xi
Introduction	1
I. THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES	11
A. STATUS ATTAINMENT AND SOCIAL MOBILITY	
1. The “Rationalization” of Education and Training <i>Max Weber</i>	14
2. Social and Cultural Mobility <i>Pitirim Sorokin</i>	17
3. Sponsored and Contest Mobility and the School System <i>Ralph H. Turner</i>	21
4. Status Attainment Processes <i>Archibald O. Haller and Alejandro Portes</i>	33
B. HUMAN CAPITAL, CULTURAL CAPITAL, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL	
5. Human Capital <i>Gary S. Becker</i>	42
6. Cultural Capital: Allusions, Gaps, and Glissandos in Recent Theoretical Developments <i>Michèle Lamont and Annette Lareau</i>	44
7. Schools, Families, and Communities <i>James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer</i>	60
C. CHANGING THEORIES OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS	
8. The First Element of Morality: The Spirit of Discipline <i>Émile Durkheim</i>	69

9. The School and the Community	77
<i>Willard Waller</i>	
10. Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification	84
<i>Randall Collins</i>	
11. The Long Shadow of Work	101
<i>Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, and Peter Meyer</i>	
Part I Discussion Questions	116
II. STRATIFICATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN SCHOOLS	117
12. Privilege	120
<i>Shamus Khan</i>	
13. Equality of Educational Opportunity: The Coleman Report	136
<i>James Coleman, Ernest Campbell, Carol Hobson, James McPartland, Alexander Mood, Frederic Weinfeld, and Robert York</i>	
14. The Effects of High Schools on Their Students	153
<i>Christopher S. Jencks and Marsha D. Brown</i>	
15. E Pluribus . . . Separation: Deepening Double Segregation for More Students	181
<i>Gary Orfield, John Kucsera, and Genevieve Siegel-Hawley</i>	
16. The Nature of Schooling	223
<i>Doris R. Entwisle, Karl L. Alexander, and Linda Olson</i>	
17. Desegregation Without Integration: Tracking, Black Students, and Acting White After Brown	234
<i>Karolyn Tyson</i>	
18. The Distribution of Knowledge	259
<i>Jeannie Oakes</i>	
Part II Discussion Questions	268
III. CLASS, RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY	269
A. CLASS	
19. Persisting Barriers: Changes in Educational Opportunities in Thirteen Countries	274
<i>Hans-Peter Blossfeld and Yossi Shavit</i>	
20. The Widening Income Achievement Gap	288
<i>Sean F. Reardon</i>	
21. More Inclusion Than Diversion: Expansion, Differentiation, and Market Structure in Higher Education	295
<i>Richard Arum, Adam Gamoran, and Yossi Shavit</i>	

22. Learning to Labor	318
<i>Paul Willis</i>	
23. Invisible Inequality: Social Class and Childrearing in Black Families and White Families	336
<i>Annette Lareau</i>	
24. Exceptions to the Rule: Upwardly Mobile White and Mexican American High School Girls	356
<i>Julie Bettie</i>	
B. RACE AND ETHNICITY	
25. Black Students' School Success: Coping With the "Burden of 'Acting White'"	366
<i>Signithia Fordham and John U. Ogbu</i>	
26. It's Not "a Black Thing": Understanding the Burden of Acting White and Other Dilemmas of High Achievement	373
<i>Karolyn Tyson, Domini R. Castellino, and William Darity, Jr.</i>	
27. Straddling Boundaries: Identity, Culture, and School	387
<i>Prudence L. Carter</i>	
28. Digital Divide: Navigating the Digital Edge	405
<i>S. Craig Watkins</i>	
29. Race in the Schoolyard: Negotiating the Color Line in Classrooms and Communities	419
<i>Amanda Lewis</i>	
30. Shades of White: White Kids and Racial Identity in High Schools	437
<i>Pamela Perry</i>	
31. The New Second Generation: Segmented Assimilation and Its Variants	454
<i>Alejandro Portes and Min Zhou</i>	
C. GENDER AND SEXUALITY	
32. Boys and Girls Together . . . But Mostly Apart	462
<i>Barrie Thorne</i>	
33. Teaching and "Women's Work": A Comparative and Historical Analysis	470
<i>Michael Apple</i>	
34. Rewriting Race and Gender High School Lessons: Second-Generation Dominicans in New York City	481
<i>Nancy López</i>	
35. Gender, Race, and Justifications for Group Exclusion: Urban Black Students Bussed to Affluent Suburban Schools	490
<i>Simone Ispa-Landa</i>	
36. Notes on a Sociology of Bullying: Young Men's Homophobia	

as Gender Socialization <i>C. J. Pascoe</i>	509
Part III Discussion Questions	520
IV. STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND ADOLESCENT SUBCULTURE	521
37. The Adolescent Culture <i>James Coleman</i>	523
38. Hanging Out, Messing Around, and Geeking Out: Findings From the Digital Youth Project <i>Mimi Ito, Heather Horst, Matteo Bittanti, Danah Boyd, Becky Herr-Stephenson, Patricia G. Lange, C. J. Pascoe, and Laura Robinson</i>	536
39. Resistance as a Social Drama: A Study of Change-Oriented Encounters <i>Daniel A. McFarland</i>	567
40. Adolescent Masculinity, Homophobia, and Violence: Random School Shootings, 1982–2001 <i>Michael S. Kimmel and Matthew Mahler</i>	582
41. The (Mis)Education of Monica and Karen <i>Laura Hamilton and Elizabeth A. Armstrong</i>	598
42. College Life Through the Eyes of Students <i>Mary Grigsby</i>	604
Part IV Discussion Questions	620
V. THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT	621
A. THE CULTURAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENVIRONMENT	
43. Do Employers Really Need More Educated Youth? <i>James E. Rosenbaum and Amy Binder</i>	624
44. The Effects of Education as an Institution <i>John W. Meyer</i>	634
45. Community Colleges and the American Social Order <i>Stephen Brint and Jerome Karabel</i>	650
46. Judging School Discipline: A Crisis of Moral Authority <i>Richard Arum</i>	660
47. Creating a Class: College Admissions and the Education of Elites <i>Mitchell Stevens</i>	686

48. Becoming Right: How Campuses Shape Young Conservatives	694
<i>Amy Binder and Kate Wood</i>	
49. Learning to Be Illegal: Undocumented Youth and Shifting Legal Contexts in the Transition to Adulthood	709
<i>Roberto G. Gonzales</i>	
B. EDUCATION POLICY AND SCHOOL REFORM	
50. English-Only Triumphs, But the Costs Are High	728
<i>Alejandro Portes</i>	
51. School Choice or Schools' Choice?: Managing in an Era of Accountability	733
<i>Jennifer L. Jennings</i>	
52. The State of Undergraduate Learning	756
<i>Josipa Roksa and Richard Arum</i>	
53. Education Research That Matters: Influence, Scientific Rigor, and Policy Making	763
<i>Pamela Barnhouse Walters and Annette Lareau</i>	
Part V Discussion Questions	782

INTRODUCTION

At present, concentration of industry and division of labor have practically eliminated household and neighborhood occupations—at least for educational purposes. But it is useless to bemoan the departure of the good old days of children’s modesty, reverence, and implicit obedience, if we expect merely by bemoaning and by exhortation to bring them back. It is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices.

—John Dewey, 1899 (1964, p. 299)

At the close of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, proponents of educational reform, such as John Dewey, recognized the social nature of the significant challenges facing US schools. As economic production shifted to points far distant from local farms, shops, and homes, families no longer were capable of training and socializing their children for productive roles in society. Once children could no longer implicitly learn adult roles through daily involvement in family economic activities, “the good old days of children’s modesty, reverence, and implicit obedience” (Dewey, 1964, p. 8) were forever lost. Schools were expanded or established to assume pedagogical tasks that had formerly been carried out by families. With the simultaneous advancement of technology and employment outside of the home, parents no longer had the time or the knowledge necessary to educate their children for productive adult roles in society.

A century later, one can recognize both how schools have changed to meet the needs of society and how societal transformations continue to

shift responsibilities from families to schools. When Dewey wrote, only about 10 percent of individuals aged fourteen to seventeen attended high school. Today, virtually all children growing up in the United States enter high school and only about 10 percent of these individuals actually fail to complete their high school education. In addition, the length of the school year has dramatically expanded: elementary and secondary public schools today are in session for almost twice as many days per year as they were at the turn of the 19th century. Postsecondary education also has greatly expanded. Even in the 1940s, fewer than 10 percent of individuals attained a bachelor’s degree; by the end of the 20th century, almost a third of young adults were expected to obtain such credentials (*Digest of Educational Statistics*, 2008). Social scientists have referred to this tremendous growth in the role of formal education as an educational revolution.

Recent changes in family structure and labor force participation will likely continue or accelerate the trend of schools taking increased

2 • THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

responsibility for shaping the lives of youth. While at the beginning of the 20th century the employment of men outside the home was perceived as underlying an erosion of the family's ability to socialize children, today concern often focuses on how children are affected by the decline of two-parent families and the increasing labor force participation of mothers (see Hochschild, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Patriarchal assumptions can underlie how these socioeconomic changes are understood and addressed, but the role of formal schooling in society is likely to expand even further.

As schools in the 20th century became an increasingly core societal institution, sociologists directed continuous, concerted effort toward understanding both their structure and their effects on individuals. Over the past century, sociologists who developed the theoretical framework for the discipline as a whole (e.g., Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and John Meyer) also directly focused and wrote on the role of education in society. Because schools were complex institutions, sociological theorizing was multidimensional and multilayered.

Sociology of education as a field developed a focus on two separate levels of analysis. At a macro level, sociologists worked to identify how various social forces (such as politics, economics, and culture) created variation in schools as organizations. At a more micro level, researchers sought to identify how variation in school practices led to differences in individual-level student outcomes. In addition to these distinct levels of analysis, researchers further developed separate foci on various aspects of the functioning of education in society. While some researchers focused on economic aspects of education (e.g., how economic forces shaped school practices and how schools determined individual productivity and earnings), others focused on related issues of socialization, allocation, and legitimation. When approaching research in the sociology of education, these distinctions are useful to keep in mind.

The organizational structure of the book reflects the multidimensional, multilayered analysis that characterizes the sociology of education

field as a whole. We begin by providing selections of major contributions that trace the theoretical development of the sociology of education. We then include work identifying how stratification of schooling creates inequality in access to education within schools, between schools, and by ascriptive characteristics and individual identities (such as class, race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, and sexuality). We provide research demonstrating how schools are settings for the formation of peer subcultures and relations that often promote outcomes at odds with conventional social behavior and school achievement. This is true for colleges to the same extent as secondary schools. We also present research focused on the role of digital technology in the lives and educational trajectories of youth. We highlight how schools affect a range of life-course outcomes: not just cognitive attainment but also adolescent behavior, delinquency, and adult labor market success. In addition, we show how schools are affected not just by neighborhood context, but by their organizational environment (e.g., the influence of private school competition, unionization, professionalization, politics of school reform).

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The volume starts with a section presenting theoretical and historical perspectives on education. We begin the book with readings highlighting the development of a status attainment perspective, with the explicit intent of emphasizing this approach. As a paradigm, status attainment has been extraordinarily influential in shaping recent sociological research on the structure of education.

Status Attainment and Social Mobility

Status attainment has its roots in Max Weber's conceptualization of status groups. Status groups are formed on the basis of various distinctions, such as occupation, class, and ethnicity. Weber argued that the education system had a dual character in modern societies: It could be used to

increase meritocratic selection of individuals for privileged occupations but could also be used as a closure strategy to maintain a status group's monopoly over scarce resources. Building on Weber's work, Pitirim Sorokin suggested that schools played a fundamental role in society, not simply training individuals for employment but more importantly working to *sort, sieve, and select* those who would be granted access to more desirable occupations. To the extent that schools facilitate the movement of talented individuals from lower social origins to privileged occupations, a society was considered *open* rather than *closed*. When individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds attain privileged occupational positions with associated higher social rewards (such as status, prestige, and income), social mobility has occurred. Both Weber and Sorokin understood that schools played a critical role in either blocking or facilitating social mobility.

In subsequent years, sociologists often applied Weber and Sorokin's ideas by comparing how societies differed in their rates of social mobility. Researchers such as Ralph Turner used cross-national comparisons to explore the possibility that developed capitalist countries had differences in their educational systems that led to variation in social mobility. In spite of much research, these scholars found only small differences in rates of social mobility among developed capitalist countries. In the context of these findings, Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan began research that would change the focus of social mobility research. Sociologists began to explore the determinants or causes of social mobility, rather than simply quantifying rates of mobility.

Blau and Duncan's work statistically confirmed Weber and Sorokin's theoretical propositions about the role of education in society. Blau and Duncan's research clearly established the central, critical role education played in individual occupational attainment. In modern society, the occupations that individuals held as adults were primarily determined by how far they had earlier gone in school. Blau and Duncan also established, however, that social origins remained critical in facilitating or hindering an individual's

educational achievement. Social background influenced occupational attainment largely through its effects on prior educational achievement. Schools thus worked to reproduce the structure of social inequality: Children from affluent families tended to do better than children from poor families in terms of educational achievement. Schools also, however, allowed vertical social mobility by *sorting and sieving*, thus facilitating higher than average attainments for individuals from lower status groups who showed merit and ability in school performance. If individuals from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups did well in school, social mobility and occupational rewards would follow; the educational deck, however, was stacked against them. Following Blau and Duncan's research, sociologists quickly identified factors other than social origins that influenced an individual's educational attainment. Scholarship demonstrated that individual expectations and aspirations, as well as the influence of significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, and peers), affect individuals' educational achievement.

HUMAN, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

While the status attainment paradigm has been extraordinarily influential in the sociology of education, this approach is not the only source for the development of concepts applied to the study of education. Contemporary research on schooling has also been strongly influenced by thinking about educational processes in terms of human capital, cultural capital, and social capital.

Economists in the early 1960s developed the concept of *human capital*. Theodore Schultz, Gary Becker, and others argued that one could invest in the human capital of individuals just as one invested financial capital in a firm. Individuals invested in a business because they expected their investments to yield dividends or returns. Economists argued that one made similar investments in individuals. The acquisition of education led individuals to increase their knowledge and skills; greater knowledge and skills led to increased labor productivity, which was subsequently

4 • THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

rewarded by employers. Individuals who pursued further education incurred significant costs (in terms of tuition and forgone earnings), but they would later more than recoup their investment. Becker demonstrated, through a series of calculations, that during the time he was writing, returns on investing in high school education were approximately 28 percent and returns on investing in college education were around 15 percent. People were choosing to obtain more and more education in part because these returns were quite large and considerably greater than what one would expect from a more traditional financial investment. However, recent sociological research has demonstrated that the effect of income returns on college enrollment decisions of adolescents varies by race/ethnicity, gender, and social class; only white men from lower socioeconomic origins follow the pattern predicted by the theory (Beattie, 2002). The human capital approach was nonetheless important for explaining the rationale behind why individuals and governments were willing to invest increasing resources in education.

Many sociologists have adopted the concept of human capital to understand how education improves individuals' labor market experiences. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, sociologists supplemented the notion of human capital by developing two related concepts that are distinctly sociological: cultural capital and social capital.

In the early 1970s, Pierre Bourdieu began elaborating the concept of *cultural capital*. Bourdieu argued that individuals in society were stratified in such a way that they possessed different levels and types of cultural capital. Individuals from privileged classes were trained from birth to possess cultural dispositions, attitudes, and styles that set them apart from ordinary members of society. Privileged members of society made cultural distinctions that other members of society accepted. These distinctions defined elite forms of culture as superior and other forms of culture as less worthy. Individuals possessed greater cultural capital if they were raised to appreciate upper class cultural forms

such as opera, classical music, and good manners. Bourdieu argued that individuals whose behavior reflected greater accumulations of cultural capital were rewarded by both school personnel and employers, who deemed these individuals more worthy and deserving. Differences in cultural capital thus led to inequality in educational achievement and related occupational attainment.

In the early 1980s, James Coleman developed the concept of *social capital*. Coleman argued that a focus on human and cultural capital obscured the fact that one of the greatest resources individuals have is their social relationships. Coleman elaborated a concept of social capital to articulate the differences in the character of social relationships that individuals possessed. While there are many relevant dimensions of social relationships that affect individuals (e.g., the frequency, duration, and character of social interactions), Coleman focused on one key aspect of social relationships in his work on education: intergenerational closure. Communities around schools varied, according to Coleman, by the extent to which the parents of children were in contact with youth and with each other. Communities had greater closure when adults in the community had social relationships that allowed them to develop shared norms and values, to monitor children's behavior, and to enforce proper sets of behavior. When communities around schools did not have intergenerational closure, student behavior was less successfully aligned with adult goals.

ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Many of the concepts underlying contemporary research on education are encompassed in status attainment research and the trinity of human, cultural, and social capitals. However, the theoretical insights from these areas are still an incomplete theoretical toolkit for the analysis of education.

Émile Durkheim, for example, provides essential theoretical insights on the structure of

education that are not reflected either in status attainment research or in the concepts of human, cultural, and social capital. Durkheim, like Weber, is a theorist who laid the groundwork for modern sociology. Unlike Weber, however, Durkheim focused much greater attention on noneconomic aspects of education. For Durkheim, the key function of the education system was to socialize and integrate individuals into a larger society. According to Durkheim (1965), humans confronted society as an entity “superior to themselves, and upon whom they depend” (p. 237). Schools functioned as one of the most critical socializing instruments of society in fulfilling their task of impressing upon youth that social institutions possessed moral authority and that individual satisfaction was possible only when one willingly submitted to their rule. Schools worked to integrate individuals in society by encouraging students to define their own individual will and interests in terms of the larger needs and interests of society: that is, to internalize external social goals. During the middle of the century, Talcott Parsons (1959) further developed Durkheim’s functionalist explanation for the role of education and society.

An alternative functionalist account for the structure of education emerged in the early 1970s. While sharing a similar logic to Durkheim’s earlier work, these theorists adopted a more critical neo-Marxist perspective. Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, Randall Collins, and others argued that schools functioned to integrate individuals into an unjust capitalist society; because society was inequitable, the school’s role in socializing individuals to accept their place in the social structure was unjust. Bowles and Gintis advanced a social reproduction theory: Schools worked to integrate individuals into an inequitable system while simultaneously legitimizing that inequality. Similarly, Randall Collins argued that schools produced social inequality by providing individuals not simply with unequal access to skills and training but with credentials and certificates that were rewarded in the labor market. In recent decades, writers such as Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux (1985)

have further elaborated this critical neo-Marxist view of education.

Other theoretical perspectives that have developed outside of educational research have been subsequently imported and applied to the study of schooling. Educational researchers have, for example, applied concepts derived from theoretical approaches as diverse as symbolic interactionism, deconstructionism, and feminism. We have included research based on some of these approaches in the readings (see Amanda Lewis, C. J. Pascoe, and Barrie Thorne), but space limitations prevent full discussion and presentation of these alternative theoretical paradigms in this book.

Our book does, however, focus attention on one additional theoretical perspective: neo-institutionalism. Beginning with the work of John Meyer in the late 1970s, researchers increasingly focused attention on institutional factors affecting the structure of schooling. Meyer argued that schools faced institutional pressures that structured educational practices. The organizational environment around schools provided a context that led schools to accept institutional norms, values, and practices as taken-for-granted assumptions. Institutional isomorphism led schools in a common organizational environment to adopt similar sets of organizational practices that often had little to do with meeting the educational needs of students.

STRATIFICATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN SCHOOLS

The theoretical approaches identified above have informed research designed to explicate the structure of stratification within and between schools. Sociologists argue that the education system is stratified in the sense that student assignment to different schools and different classrooms determines the character and the quality of education that they receive. Implicit in the concept of stratification within and between schools is the notion of inequality—that is, Weber’s insight that status groups use schools to gain privileged access to scarce resources.