



Edited by  
**Jeanne H. Ballantine**  
**Joan Z. Spade**

**FIFTH EDITION**

and  
**Society**  
A Sociological Approach  
to Education



# SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY

## *A Sociological Approach to Education*

Fifth Edition

Editors

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# **SCHOOLS AND SOCIETY**

Fifth Edition

*To the next generation, our grandchildren, Cosette, Chloe, Joseph,  
Daniel, Corinne, Hannah, Caleb, Kai, and Ayla Brynn*

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# PREFACE

The challenge we struggled with as we selected material for this book was how to present sociology of education to students in a way that contains both a synopsis and a balanced picture of a complex field. As a result, we created this text to provide students with an overview of the scope, perspectives, and issues in the sociology of education. We drew on our many years of experience in researching, publishing, and teaching sociology of education. Our goal was to involve students by presenting well-rounded and provocative summaries of major areas in the field. Individual readings include a combination of classical foundations in the field, noted contemporary authors, and current issues most often discussed by instructors. The most frequently taught topics, according to 2004 survey data, are stratification, the social context of education, schools as organizations, and diversity in education (American Sociological Association, 2004). Issues related to these topics are addressed throughout the book.

*Schools and Society* is designed to appeal to both graduate and upper-level undergraduate students. The text is divided into 11 chapters that begin with introductions outlining issues in the topic area and summarizing how the readings that follow fit into the topic areas. The readings, written by leading scholars, are presented within a systematic framework that provides an overview of the field. These readings introduce major theoretical perspectives and include classic studies, current issues, and applications of knowledge to particular educational problems. Although this book is not about educational policy per se, many of the readings have practical and policy implications for education.

To accomplish the goal of presenting a comprehensive and theoretically balanced overview of the field, we selected readings that

1. illustrate major concepts, theoretical perspectives, and the complexity of education, including how to study it and how it has been studied;
2. blend classic studies with newer, sometimes controversial topics;
3. apply to students who are likely to take the course in various majors—sociology, education, and others;
4. exhibit writing at a level of sophistication appropriate to students in advanced undergraduate or graduate courses;
5. concentrate on materials drawn from a wide range of sources, including books, journals, scientific studies and reports, and commentaries; and
6. use the open systems approach to provide a framework for an overview of the field and analysis of a disparate group of topics.

The readings selected were tested for readability and interest level with graduate and undergraduate students. Those readings included were seen as useful and important contributions to understanding the field. Changes were made in both selections and the introductions to the readings as a result of students' comments. Each chapter begins with an introduction to show the interrelationships between the various issues in education. Each reading is preceded by introductory remarks and questions to guide students to key aspects of the article and to tie it to other articles.

## NEW TO THIS EDITION

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The fifth edition of *Schools and Society* introduces 20 new readings, plus revisions of 5 readings original to this book. Several of the new readings tap important issues in education today, including a piece on future approaches to education given changes in technology and another reading on international testing, both in Chapter 11. Chapters were reorganized to better portray the new materials in each section of the book, and some readings from the previous edition were moved to new chapters to reflect the new organizational structure. This reader can be used alone, with a text, or with other readings or monographs. The readings included are appropriate for a variety of courses focusing on the study of education, such as sociology of education, social foundations of education, social contexts of education, and the like. This book may be used in departments of sociology, education, social sciences, or others as appropriate.

## REFERENCE

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American Sociological Association. (2004). *Teaching sociology of education*. Washington, DC: Teaching Resources Center.

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## ABOUT THE EDITORS

The editors, Jeanne Ballantine and Joan Spade, have known each other for many years through their involvement in the American Sociological Association (ASA) and Sociology of Education Section activities. This project started when Joan asked if Jeanne planned to update her reader. Thus, a collaboration began more than 12 years ago, with the two meeting in hotel rooms at conferences and visiting each other to develop and conceptualize this anthology. This collaboration continues with the publication of the fifth edition.

**Jeanne H. Ballantine** is professor emerita of sociology at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio. She received an MA from Columbia University and a PhD from Indiana University, with a specialty in sociology of education. She has been teaching and writing for more than 35 years and has written or coauthored several texts, including *Sociology of Education: A Systematic Analysis*, *Teaching Sociology of Education*, *Sociological Footprints*, and *Our Social World: Introduction to Sociology*. She has also taught and published in other areas, including gender, global social issues, and teaching of sociology, and has been an active member of sociology of education organizations, including the ASA Section on Sociology of Education, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), and the International Sociological Association (ISA) Research Committee on Sociology of Education. She has won numerous awards, including the ASA Distinguished Contributions to Teaching Award.

**Joan Z. Spade** is professor emerita of sociology at The College at Brockport, State University of New York, in Brockport, New York. She received her MA from the University of Rochester and her PhD from the University of Buffalo. She has been teaching and writing in the field for more than 30 years, including a semester teaching in Budapest, Hungary, as a Fulbright Scholar; she is coeditor of *Implementing Educational Reform: Sociological Perspectives on Educational Policy* and coauthor of articles in sociology of education on stratification and grouping practices in education. She publishes in other areas, including gender and family, and is coeditor with Catherine G. Valentine of *The Kaleidoscope of Gender: Prisms, Patterns, and Possibilities*. She is a member of the ASA, including the ASA Section on Sociology of Education, the Eastern Sociological Society, and Sociologists for Women in Society.



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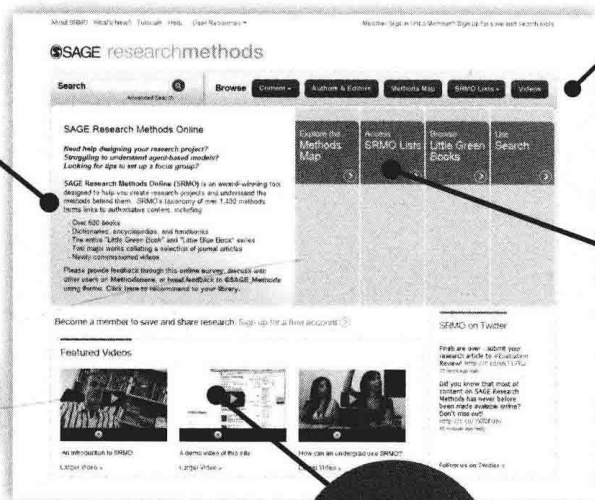
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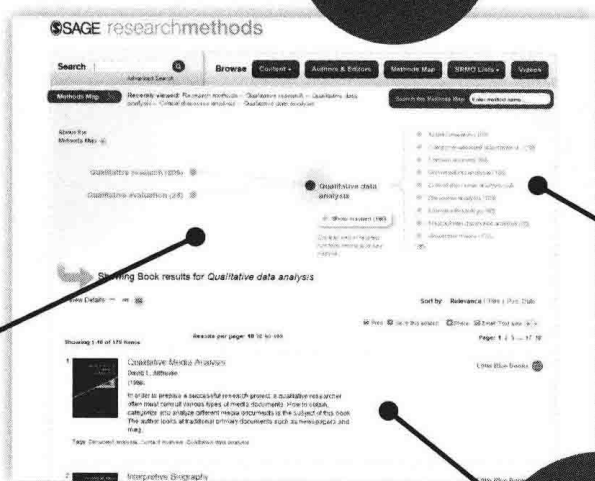
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# INTRODUCTION

**S**chooling is ubiquitous in the world, making education a major institution in societies. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine any developed or developing society without a system of schools, from preschool to graduate level. Sociologists who study education examine schools from a variety of perspectives. The readings in this book introduce the primary sociological perspectives on educational systems and survey major issues in the field. The following illustrates some topics and questions addressed by sociologists of education:

What theories and research methods do sociologists of education use to obtain information? (Chapters 1 and 2)

What external social pressures and organizations affect the way we teach our children? (Chapter 3)

In what ways do the informal relationships and expectations in schools affect student learning and experiences in school? (Chapter 4)

What are roles and responsibilities of school administrators, teachers, and students? (Chapter 5)

How is the knowledge that we teach our children constructed and selected for our schools? (Chapter 6)

How do students' race, social class, and gender affect their school experiences and reflect systems of inequality in society? (Chapters 7 and 8)

How is higher education organized, and how has that system evolved? (Chapter 9)

How does the educational system in the United States compare to those in other countries? (Chapter 10)

What factors bring about changes in societies' schools and schooling? (Chapter 11)

We address these and many other questions by providing an overview of major theoretical perspectives in Chapter 1 and end by considering change and reform of educational institutions in Chapter 11. Throughout this book, readings look at how schools work, how they affect students and society, and how they might work differently. We look at the current condition of education and consider educational change and policy issues, all of which help us to understand the complex matrix of relationships and activities within schools. We hope this knowledge about educational issues will help you make more effective decisions as students, parents, taxpayers, and perhaps educators. After reading this book, you should have gained some understanding of the fields of sociology and education, what both

fields contribute to the study of educational systems, and some specific educational issues of concern to sociologists and education professionals.

### WHAT CAN SOCIOLOGISTS TELL US ABOUT EDUCATION?

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Sociological analyses of education give us a deeper understanding of the form and purpose of education in a society and the interactions of people within educational organizations. Sociologists study structures and organizations of social systems, including education, family, religion, economics, politics, and health. Social institutions, such as education, constitute the major structural components of any society. Sociologists of education focus on the institution of education and the structure, processes, and interaction patterns within it. They also consider the surrounding context of the educational system including other institutions that influence the education our children receive. These aspects of education vary greatly across societies. In some societies, children learn their proper roles primarily by observing elders and imitating or modeling adult behavior. In other societies, children attend formal schools from a young age and learn the skills and knowledge needed for survival within the school and societal context.

Education and other institutions are interdependent in a society. Change in one brings change in others. For instance, a family's attitudes toward education will affect the child's school experience, as you will read in this book. Therefore, the sociological analysis of education is different from the approach taken by many people in society because sociologists begin by looking at the larger picture of society and the role that education plays in society rather than on individuals in that system. As a result, change in education is more likely to be based in structural rather than personal factors.

### THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM

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The analysis of educational systems falls into two main areas: process and structure. At whatever level of analysis we study the educational system of a society, processes are at work. These are the action parts of the system, bringing the structure alive. Examples of processes include teaching, learning, communication, and decision making, as well as those formal and informal activities that socialize students into their places in school and later life roles. These are the dynamic parts of the educational system.

However, we cannot ignore the structure of a system, including the hierarchy or roles people play—administrators, teachers, staff, parents, and, of course, students—as well as the organization of learning—classroom and school layout, types of schools, and structure of curriculum. Nor can we ignore the school's environment, which consists of groups, organizations, other institutions, and even the global society outside the school, all of which influence school functioning. For instance, politicians and other powerful people in society may put pressure on schools to select particular books (Chapter 6), communities may provide unequal academic opportunities to different groups of students (Chapter 7), and the federal and state political and economic structures shape policies and resources available to schools (Chapters 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, and 11). In short, no school exists in a vacuum. This open systems perspective is the uniting theme in this book.

### THE OPEN SYSTEMS PERSPECTIVE

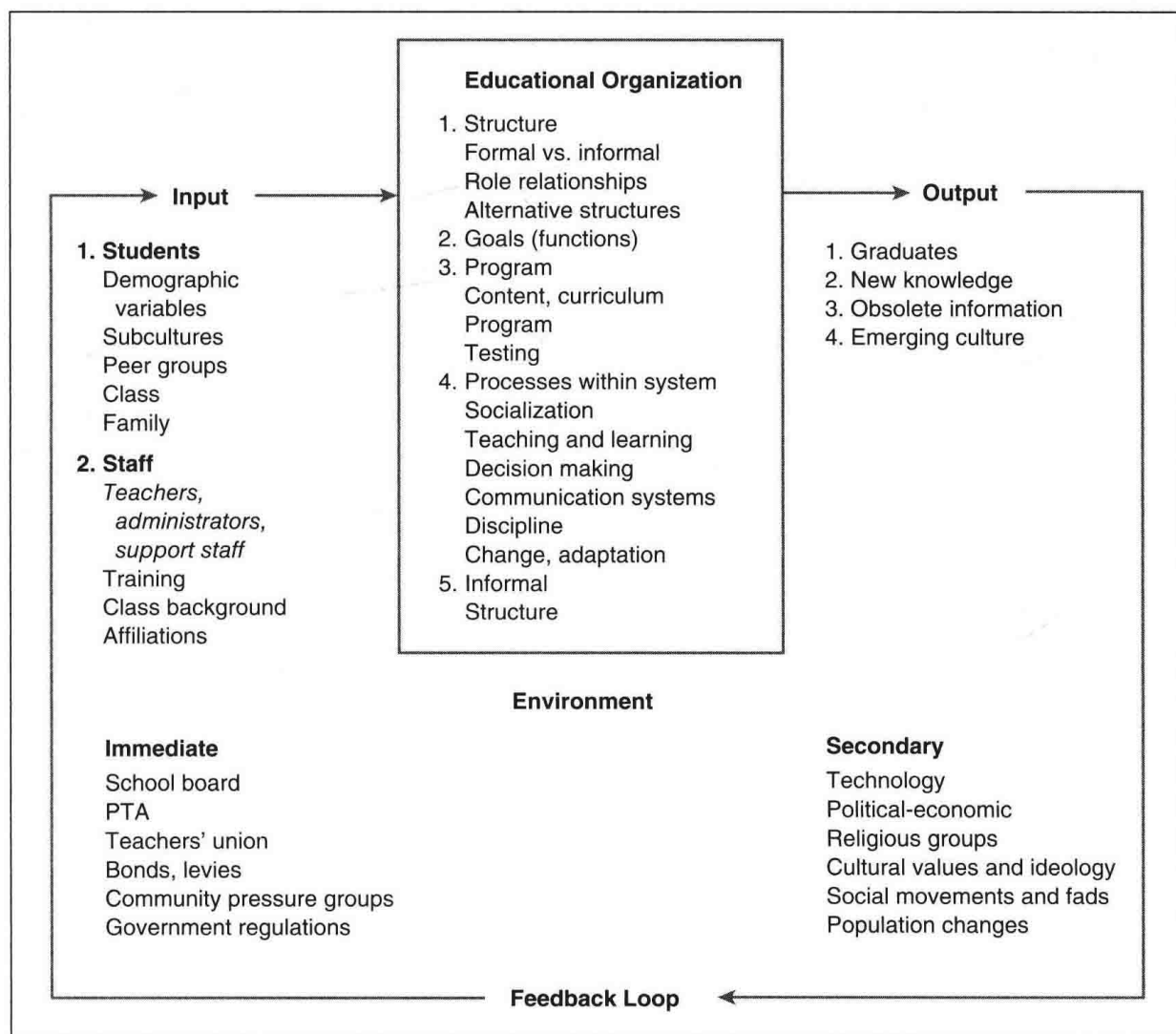
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The open systems perspective looks at the educational system as a whole, integrated, dynamic entity. Unfortunately, most research studies focus on only parts of the whole system, and most theoretical



perspectives have biases or limitations by focusing on one part. An open systems perspective is not a panacea for all the problems we face when trying to get the total picture, but this perspective can help us conceptualize a whole system and understand how the small pieces fit together into a working unity. The open systems perspective provides a useful way of visualizing many elements in the system; it helps to order observations and data and represents a generalized picture of complex interacting elements and sets of relationships. The perspective modeled in Figure I.1 refers to no one particular organization or theoretical perspective, but rather to the common characteristics of many educational settings.

**Figure I.1** Open Systems Approach to Education



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