

# THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

A SYSTEMATIC ANALYSIS

SECOND EDITION



JEANNE H. BALLANTINE

# THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

## *A Systematic Analysis*

Second Edition

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# PREFACE

This book attempts to capture the scope and usefulness of the sociology of education. It emphasizes the diversity of theoretical approaches and issues in the field and the application of this knowledge to the understanding of education. Education is changing rapidly; it is no easy task to present the excitement of a dynamic field with diverse and disparate topics. To present the material to students in a meaningful way, a unifying framework—an open systems approach—is used. It is meant to provide coherent structure, not to detract from the theory and empirical content of sociology of education.

After teaching sociology of education to many undergraduate and graduate students and using a variety of materials, I was concerned that the materials available, though excellent in quality, were not reaching my undergraduate students who were from sociology, education, and other majors. The level of many texts was too advanced, the themes of some books made their coverage or approach limited, or the books presented research in such depth they were boring or beyond the grasp of undergraduates. During my work with the Project on Teaching Undergraduate Sociology, I focused on presentation of materials to undergraduates, and I have attempted to translate these ideas to the present text. The book is best suited for sociology of education and social foundations of education courses.

Several goals guided the writing:

1. To make the book comprehensible and useful to students. Realizing that most students are interested in how the field can help them deal with issues they will face, emphasis is placed on usefulness of findings. Choices had to be made concerning which studies and topics to cover. Those chosen should have high interest for students and help them as they interface with school systems.

2. To present material in a coherent framework. The instructor has leeway within the open systems approach to add topics, drop sections of the text, rearrange order of topics without losing the continuity and integration present in this framework.

3. To present diverse theoretical approaches in sociology of education. Several valuable perspectives exist today; the book gives examples throughout of theories as they approach issues in the field.

4. To include as major sections several topics which have not been singled out by many authors but which are important current or emerging topics and of interest to students. Separate chapters have been devoted to higher education, informal education ["climate" and the "hidden curriculum"], the school's environment, and educational movements and alternatives.

5. To indicate how change takes place and what role sociologists play. With the increasing emphasis on applied sociology, more courses are including information on applied aspects of topics covered. This is the focus of the final chapter but is covered throughout.

6. To stimulate students to become involved with educational systems where they can put to use the knowledge available in textbooks. This text can be used to stimulate discussion and allow other topics of interest to be introduced into the course in a logical way. Useful features of the book to enhance the teaching effectiveness include projects at the end of each chapter, the coverage of issues, and the instructor's manual complete with film list, classroom teaching techniques and aids, and test questions.

The book does not attempt to use one theoretical approach to the exclusion of others. Rather it focuses on the value of several approaches and their different emphases in dealing with the same issue. Because the book is meant as an overview, it surveys the field rather than providing comprehensive coverage of few topics. This allows instructors flexibility to expand where desired.

The second edition provides an update of issues and data, as well as revisions in theories where new trends or developments have occurred.

Thanks go to many people: for suggestions on early drafts to Peggy Hazen, Paul Klohr, Alan McEvoy, Reece McGee, Matthew Melko, Darryl Poole, Ted Wagenaar, and colleagues at Bulmershe College of Higher Education in England. For a review of the manuscript, to Ronald M. Pavalko, the University of Wisconsin at Parkside; Ruth Wallace, George Washington University; Elizabeth Useem, University of Massachusetts in Boston; George F. Stine, Millersville State College; and David Nastir, California State University. For helping on research to Mary French and to Harden Ballantine, Ed.D., for section on alternatives in education. For providing the materials and atmosphere for producing the end product to Antioch University Library, University of Reading (England) Library, University of London and Bodelian libraries.

A special thanks to the supportive group at Prentice-Hall, from Susan Willig, Editor-in-Chief, to Mary Araneo and Pat Walsh who provided expert editorial assistance.

Finally, interest in this field is constantly stimulated by the diverse and ever-changing experiences of my children as they pass through the stages of schooling and share their experiences, and by Hardy whose knowledge and creative ideas in the field of education gave original impetus and continuing support and encouragement to this work.

Jeanne H. Ballantine  
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# Chapter One

## SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

### *A Unique Perspective on Schools*

Education begins the day we are born, and ends the day we die. Found in every society, it comes in many forms, ranging from the “school of hard knocks” or learning by experience to formal institutional learning, from industrial to nonindustrial communities, from rural to urban settings, and from age group to age group.

Remember your first day in the formal school setting? You had anticipated that day for many years. You met the teacher who would serve as a surrogate “parent” for the year, and children you would get to know whether you liked them or not. Education was a given, a compulsory part of growing up. Going to college was “what people do after high school.” But for many people in the world, education is a privilege available only to a select group. One-quarter of primary-age children in the world are not even in school.

Sociologists are interested in learning experiences of all types, formal and informal. This fits into their broader focus on group life. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to acquaint you with the unique perspective of the sociology of education: the questions it addresses, the theoretical approaches it uses, the methods employed to study educational systems, and the open systems approach used in this book.

#### THE FIELD OF SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Educational issues face us constantly as students, parents, and members of a community. Consider the following examples.

*When should a child start to school?* Some argue that children should be removed from a total home environment at an early age and exposed to other children, stimulation, and ideas. Others feel that removing children from the home deprives them of a secure early childhood environment and even weakens the family. It is an emotional issue that reaches around the world. What are results of early childhood educational policies?

*Should minimum competency in key subjects such as reading and math be required for high school graduation?* In many countries and some cities and states in the United States students are required to take reading exams in order to enter high school and be graduated from it. Some educators argue that required competency tests will force teachers to teach for the tests; others state that schools should be held responsible for the academic competence of students who move through the system, and tests are one way to accomplish this. What are some implications of requiring tests?

*How should education be funded?* Many countries have centralized funding and decision making. However, across the United States taxpayers are defeating school levies and some schools are being forced to curtail programs because there is no money. Is this a protest against the job schools are doing? Is it a demand for the development of other funding sources? Is it a bid for more community control?

*What type of teachers and classroom environments provide the best learning experience for children?* Educators debate lecture versus experiential learning, and discussion versus individualized instruction. Studies of effective teaching strategies can help educators carry out their roles.

Sociological research knowledge sheds light on these and other issues, and thus helps teachers, citizens, and policymakers with the decision-making process. The first step in understanding the institution of education is to discuss its meaning and lay the theoretical groundwork.

### **What Sociologists Study**

Sociologists study people in group situations. Within this broad framework are many specialties; these can be divided into studies of institutions in society, studies of processes, and studies of other group-related situations. The *structure* of society is represented by the five major institutions which constitute subject areas in sociology: family, religion, education, politics, and economics. Formal, complex organizations such as schools are part of the institutional structure of society. *Processes*, which are the action part of society, bring the structure alive.

Through the process of socialization people learn roles expected of them: the process of stratification determines where people fit into the social structure and their resultant life-style; change is an ever-present process which is constantly affecting our lives. All of us are being educated, both formally in a school setting and informally by our family, peers, media, and other influences on our lives. Not all children in the world receive formal school education, but they are trained in some way for adult roles they will hold.

The institution of education interacts and is interdependent with each of the other institutions listed above. For instance, the family's attitudes toward education will affect the child's response in school. Other examples throughout the book will make this apparent, as will the open systems model diagram (Figure 1-2).

### Why Study Sociology of Education?

There are several answers to this question. Someday you may be a professional in the field of education or in a related field; you will be a taxpayer, if you aren't already; you may be a parent with children in the school system; right now you are a student involved in higher or continuing education. If you are a sociology major, you are studying education as one of the major institutions of society; if you are an education major, sociology can give you a new perspective on your field. You may be at college in pursuit of knowledge; and it may be that this course is required, you need the credit, the teacher is supposed to be good, or it fits into your schedule. Let's consider these reasons further.

*Teachers and other professionals.* In 1982, of all college graduates, 101,063, or 10.6 percent, were graduated in the field of education, and many hold teaching positions. Many other college graduates will teach in their respective academic fields or become involved with policy matters in the schools. Professionals in such fields as social work and business have regular contact with schools when dealing with clients and employees.

*Taxpayers.* Taxpayers finance schools. Almost 100 percent of the bills for physical plants, materials, salaries, and other essentials came from tax monies. Approximately 44.6 percent of these funds are from local taxes, 48.3 percent from state, and 7.1 percent from federal taxes on a national basis in the United States.<sup>1</sup> (Of course, there are variations within and between states.) Sociology helps taxpayers know about the school system.

*Parents.* Forty percent of our population are in the primary parenting years of 18 to 44;<sup>2</sup> the average size of families in 1984 was 2.7 members, meaning that the average family has one child.<sup>3</sup> According to the Gallup polls on adult attitudes toward education, adults expect schools to teach basic skills, discipline children, and instill values and a sense of responsibility. The concerns of the American public regarding schools have shown a high level of consistency from year to year (Table 1-1).<sup>4</sup> It is interesting to note that the integration/segregation/busing category does not appear as

<sup>1</sup>*The Condition of Education: A Statistical Report* (Washington, DC: U.S. Dept. of Education, 1985), p. 36.

<sup>2</sup>*Projections of the Total Population by Sex and Age: 1985 to 2000* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1986).

<sup>3</sup>*Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1980* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1980), Table 62, p. 45.

<sup>4</sup>Gallup, Alec M., and David L. Clark, "The 19th Annual Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes toward the Public Schools," *Phi Delta Kappan*, September 1987, p. 28.



TABLE 1-1 Concerns Regarding Schools

1975	1981	1987
1. Lack of discipline	1. Lack of discipline	1. Use of drugs
2. Integration/segregation/busing	2. Use of drugs	2. Lack of discipline
3. Lack of proper financial support	3. Poor curriculum/poor standards.	3. Lack of proper financial support
4. Difficulty of getting "good" teachers	4. Lack of proper financial support	4. Difficulty in getting good teachers
5. Size of school/classes	5. Difficulty of getting "good" teachers <sup>a</sup>	5. Poor curriculum/poor standards
	6. Integration/busing <sup>a</sup>	6. Large schools/overcrowding

<sup>a</sup>Items 5 and 6 were tied.

a major concern in the 1987 listing. Parents need to make decisions related to children's education; understanding of school systems can be gained from a study of the sociology of education.

**Students.** College attracts a wide variety of students with numerous motivations and goals for their educational experience. Understanding your own and others' goals will help you get the most from your educational experience.

For sociology majors, sociology of education provides a unique look at the social variables which affect the education systems and illustrates the interdependence among the major institutions in society. For education majors, new insights can be gained by looking into the dynamic interaction both within the institution and between the institution of education and others in society. These insights should give education majors greater ability to deal with complex organizational and interpersonal issues which confront teachers and administrators.

**Other reasons.** Knowledge for the sake of knowledge—learning what is there to learn—is another reason to study sociology of education. Other prime motivators for taking such a course may be busy schedules, the goal of "getting through college," and such practical considerations as class time, required courses and necessary credits.

### Kinds of Questions Asked by Sociologists of Education

This topic is best dealt with by looking through the whole book, but the following sampling of questions which have been considered by researchers in the field will give an idea of the wide range of possible subject matter:

1. How does the physical setup and program of an educational organization affect such variables as learning, communication between faculty and students, and the subject areas taught?
2. How effective are different teaching techniques, styles of learning, and classroom organizations in teaching students of various types and ability levels?