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This book is much better for their thoughtful comments and critical insights.

Our thanks to the Association for School, College & University Staffing, Inc. (ASCUS) for their permission to use salary and teacher demand tables from their 1993 Report: Teacher Supply and Demand in the United States. Our students are always interested in these data.

We thank the Honolulu County Committee on the Status of Women for permission to use their wonderfully helpful "Do's and Don'ts of Non-Sexist Language."

We thank Naomi Silverman, the editor of the first edition of this book, who began as our editor and became a close and valued friend.

We appreciate the work of Arianne Weber, associate editor of the third edition of *The Ways Schools Work*, for her help and support throughout the process.

We owe special thanks to our students as well as the collaborating teachers and administrators who contributed to the book through their stories and discussions. Their lively criticism has helped to make this third edition much clearer. In particular we thank Theresa Apodaca, Bonnie Cadotte, Caehn Creasey, Pilar Ferreira, Anna Gildersleeve, Angela Johnson, Lisa McCoy, Rocklan McNeil, Elizabeth Meyer, Andrea O'Connor, Leanne Ross, Duren Thompson, Jennifer Walker, Robert Whittfield, and Tracy Wood.

Finally, we wish to thank Paul deMarras and Sergiu Luca for their continuing and cherished support of our work.

From: Kathleen Bennett deMarras + Margaret D LeCompte
The Way Schools Work: A Sociological Analysis of Education, 3rd ed.
 New York, NY: Longman, 1999

Chapter 1

Theory and Its Influences on the Purposes of Schooling

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INTRODUCTION

This book looks at schools and schooling from the perspective of the sociologist. Sociologists study the structure of society and the roles people play within it. Sociologists and psychologists think differently about schools in that psychologists tend to be interested in individuals while sociologists are interested in groups. Educational psychologists, then, are concerned with what goes on *inside* the minds of individual learners, while educational sociologists are interested in everything that happens *outside* of the minds of individual learners, including how learners interact with others and the characteristics of the settings in which they interact. Because most educational research has been done by psychologists, we believe that the sociological viewpoint in this book will give you a rather new perspective on schools.

Sociologists distinguish between *schooling* and *education*. The term **education** broadly refers to the process of learning over the span of one's entire life. Education begins at birth and continues in a wide variety of both formal and informal settings. Again, whereas psychologists study the psychological processes individuals undergo in learning and cognition, sociologists are more interested in the social or group aspects of learning.

Schooling is the learning that takes place in formal institutions whose specific function is the **socialization** of specific groups within society. Schooling is another name for socialization in schools, or the informal learning that groups of people, usually children, acquire about behavior in these schools. Sociologists who study schooling are interested in the characteristics of the people and institutions that make up educational systems, and particularly the dynamics of their interaction and operation.

As is the case with all social science disciplines, several different and competing theories exist within the sociology of education. While all sociologists share an interest in the same general phenomena, they use different theoretical lenses to interpret these phenomena. This chapter explores how sociologists with different theoretical perspectives explain the purposes of schooling. Keep in mind that these theories have evolved over time, growing from or in reaction to previous theories. They may share many concepts and methods. Some theories attempt to explain the way society works while others take these same explanations, use them to critique the current social order, and offer ways to transform the society. The principal questions addressed in this chapter are the following:

What is the theory?

What are the purposes of schooling?

How does the theory relate to these purposes?

As you read this chapter, ask yourself which personal theories you use to explain the purposes of schooling.

The chapter begins with discussions of several key concepts, including the term *theory*, which will be used throughout the book. We then examine the various **theoretical frameworks** that have informed the sociology of education, showing how

these frameworks alter interpretations of the purposes and impact of schooling. One of the primary theoretical issues addressed in the sociology of education is how society's ways of life, values, beliefs, and norms or standards for appropriate behavior are passed on from one generation to the next. Sociologists look at this process in two ways: as *social transmission* or as *social transformation*. Our discussion of transmission theories addresses **functionalism** and **conflict theory**.

Theories of transmission are concerned with description of the structural aspects of society (Parsons 1951, 1959; Weber 1947) and with how existing social structures facilitate the general functioning of society. For example, a sociologist might examine the social system within a school to understand how the values and behaviors of the society are transmitted and would find that American values such as neatness, efficient use of time, and obeying authority are emphasized in the daily routines of the classroom (LeCompte 1978b).

We then introduce **interpretive theories**, including *phenomenology*, *symbolic interactionism*, and *ethnomethodology*. These theories form a bridge to *theories of transformation*, which we discuss next. In the discussion of transformation theories we focus on **critical theories** and *feminist, postmodern, and poststructural* approaches. The central concern of these theories is the *transformation*, rather than reproduction, of the values, beliefs, and structures of society (Burtonwood 1986). They also differ in how they view the role of individuals. While social transmission theories treat individuals as passive, transformation theories view individuals as having the capacity to become "empowered" (Ellsworth 1989). Rather than accepting the world as it is, they become agents for social action to improve their situation.

While many of these perspectives overlap, and many borrow heavily from each other, the primary difference between transmission and transformation theories lies in whether they concern *reproduction* or *production* of culture (Weiler 1988). Reproduction, or transmission, is concerned with how social structures are copied from generation to generation, regardless of external forces such as the activities or desires of groups or individuals. By contrast, theories of production, or transformation, give individuals' activities and desires an important role in the creation of culture. Theories of production describe the ways in which

both individuals and classes assert their own experience and contest or resist the ideological and material forces imposed upon them in a variety of settings. Their analyses focus on the ways in which both teachers and students in schools produce meaning and culture through their own resistance and their own individual and collective consciousness. (Weiler 1988, p. 11)

WHAT IS THEORY?

In very simplistic terms, a **theory** is a world view, a way we organize and explain the world we live in. Theories are not necessarily impractical or complex. In fact, all human beings use theoretical thought every day.

The informal explanations we use to guide our daily life as well as hunches we have about why things work as they do are *tacit* or lay theories. They derive from our own cultural background, academic training, life experiences, and individual personality traits. (LeCompte and Preissle 1993, p. 121)

We use theories about the weather to decide if we should take an umbrella to work, and “folk theories of success” (Ogbu 1987) to guide our career paths. Humans also have created theories to explain the operation of the natural universe, such as theories stating the relationship between energy and mass, or between moisture and the growth rates of plants. Similarly, we have developed theories to explain how the social world works, such as why job satisfaction and job performance are related and why people seem to develop conservative social attitudes as they grow older. We even develop theories about education, such as why higher occupational status usually is associated with higher levels of educational attainment, or why some ethnic minorities do poorly in school.

Social scientists generally use theoretical models or perspectives to organize their thought and inquiry. These models are “loosely interrelated sets of assumptions, concepts, and propositions that constitute a view of the world” (Goetz and LeCompte 1984, p. 37) or some significant part of it. Garbarino (1983) describes theory as a “statement of the principles presumably regulating observed processes, or one that accounts for causes or relationships between phenomena” (p. 5).

As we shall see, theory in both the natural and social sciences evolves because it is affected by historical and cultural developments. In general, theories change because we need more workable or accurate explanations for what we believe to be true. For example, science was guided for centuries by religious and philosophical theories that the sun revolved around the earth, and so all scientific inquiry was organized to support that belief. In time, however, as data amassed demonstrating that the earth revolved around the sun, support grew for a heliocentric view of our planetary system.

Social and cultural beliefs have similarly influenced theories about education. Throughout history people have observed that individuals who have higher levels of education tend to have higher social status, and a number of theories have been developed to explain this observation. At first people believed simply that the wealthy were smarter and capable of more education. Then, belief in the redemptory effect of education led them to believe that education would improve the human condition and help eliminate poverty, disease, and antisocial or immoral behavior. Schools, then, could make people better, if not actually wealthier. This belief justified the institution of schools for the poor, compensatory education programs, and a variety of social service practices. Later developments in social theory have changed our beliefs about the role and purpose of education. Now theorists believe that educational experiences, rather than leading to elimination of poverty and social differences, actually reinforce differences.

We all have acquired rather unscientific “pet theories” that we use to explain what goes on in the social world, including the schools. The poor performance of

girls in mathematics is explained by a pet theory stating that math simply is more difficult for girls than for boys. Education students may refuse to earn a Master’s degree on the theory that school districts would not hire beginning teachers with a Master’s degree because their salaries would be higher. Others who want to student teach only in a white, upper-middle-class district theorize that districts won’t hire teachers who had student-taught on an American Indian reservation or in the inner city.

Obviously some theories are more valid than others, but all of them help us to organize and understand our world and to predict our future actions. Many govern what we think about our educational experiences. At this point you might stop to consider some theories of your own. What theories do you use to answer the following questions?

- Why are some students or some teachers more successful in school than others?
- Why is teaching generally so little respected as a profession?
- Why is the public so dissatisfied with the public schools today?
- What leads some groups of students to be more successful in school than others?

We now begin a discussion of the three general categories of sociological theories that organize how sociologists think about schooling: social transmission theories, interpretive theories, and theories of transformation.

SOCIAL TRANSMISSION THEORIES

Functionalism

Functionalism, which has been the prevailing theoretical framework in the social sciences throughout the twentieth century, argues that society operates as does the human body: Like living organisms, all societies possess basic functions which they must carry out to survive. Like living organisms, they evolve structures to carry out the functions.

For example, the human body is composed of many interdependent organs, each of which carries out a vital function. Every organ must be healthy and all must work together to maintain the health of the entire body. If any organ malfunctions, the entire body may die. Similarly, societies, in order to survive, develop specialized structures to carry out vital functions as they reproduce themselves, recruit or produce new members, distribute goods and services, and allocate power.

One of the most important functions is that of transmission. In the traditional functionalist view of social transmission, each elder generation passes on to each succeeding generation the rules, customs, and appropriate behaviors for operating in the society. They do so through the principal socializing institutions or transmitters of the culture, such as families, churches, and schools. By participating in these institutions, individuals accept their roles within the *social structure* of society. Functionalists identify not only the various functions within a society, but also the

connections between the components of a societal system and the relations between different systems. For example, functionalists assert that if one socializing institution is not fulfilling its function, another will take over its role to maintain the equilibrium of the society. In today's society, functionalists would argue that as more families have both parents working, schools have taken over many of the functions formerly performed by the family.

Functional analysis has become an inescapable part of the training and worldview of all social scientists. Although they may not accept all the tenets of traditional functional social theory, all social scientists use its categories as basic analytic tools to describe social systems. However, functionalism has been criticized, both because it rejects conflict and change as viable and often valuable social processes, and because its proponents have asserted that it is the only approach that produces "objective," unbiased, or truly "scientific" findings. Functionalists may do this because their training has never presented alternative perspectives, and also because they are so steeped in the functional analysis approach that it appears to be the truth rather than merely one way of looking at the world. However, other theories are available, some of them variations of functionalism, and these may provide more adequate and/or critical explanations.

An important variant of functionalism is **structural functionalism**. Structuralists assume that human systems have an underlying but unobservable coherence based upon formal rules, signs, and arrangements. Structuralists seek to understand human phenomena, such as systems of meaning, language, and culture, by identifying these underlying structures and making inferences about underlying social structure based upon patterns observed in human life.

Central to structural functionalism is the conviction that the structures in a social system must maintain an equilibrium with each other in order for societal health to be sustained. Conflict, like an illness, is an aberration which the healthy system avoids and seeks to resolve as quickly as possible. Any change takes place only gradually in healthy systems, because it constitutes a disruption of normalcy. Revolutions and other forms of rapid change are signs of illness. Many structural functionalists came to believe that any social structure found in a system *must* have some function and probably serves some crucial need, even if that need is not immediately apparent. Some social scientists have used this argument to oppose change in general, especially in traditional societies, on the grounds that even practices that seem morally offensive, such as the cremation of Hindu widows upon the death of their spouses, must have utility within the given culture. They hold that to remove such structures might cause harm to the system and should, like surgery to the human body, be undertaken only with great care and in extreme circumstances. However, critics of functionalism contend that it ignores the notion—integral to conflict theories—that conflict and contradictions are inherent in a social system and, in fact, stimulate its adaptation to new conditions.

Functionalism and the Purposes of Schooling. Functionalists view educational systems as one of the *structures* which carry out the *function* of transmission of attitudes, values, skills, and norms from one generation to another. Sociologists such as Robert Dreeben (1968), Emile Durkheim (1969), Robert Merton (1967), and

Talcott Parsons (1951, 1959) have described this process. According to functionalists, educational systems perpetuate the "accepted" culture. The concept of "accepted culture" implies that there is a consensus on which values, attitudes, and behaviors should be transmitted. When conflict over values does occur, adjustments are made to regain consensus and keep the system balanced. For example, in mid-twentieth-century America, conflict arose over whether school curricula should portray America as a white-dominated society in which immigrants were expected to assimilate, or a multicultural society in which differences were celebrated. The past several decades have witnessed a variety of adaptations in curricula, a reflection of attempts to arrive at a new consensus.

Functionalists believe that schooling serves to reinforce the existing social and political order. Because they assume there is consensus on how power is used and to whom it is allocated, they therefore view the social system as benign and accept existing class structures as appropriate. Because their perspective constitutes the current conventional wisdom about schools, the descriptions on the next few pages will seem quite familiar. We will soon examine other theories, however, and will see how interpretations of the purposes of schooling change when looked at through different theoretical lenses. Regardless of their particular orientation, though, theorists do not necessarily disagree with the functional description of how schools are organized; what they disagree on are the functions schools are said to have in society. They also differ in what they believe to be the desired goals or purposes for schooling. The purposes attributed to schools fall into four general categories: intellectual, political, economic, and social. The following sections describe how these purposes are interpreted by functional theorists of education.

Divide your class into four or five groups. Have each group choose a different category of people to interview to determine what they consider to be the primary purposes of public schooling. Categories might include parents, students, teachers, administrators, community professionals, religious leaders, blue- and pink-collar workers, and others. Compare your findings in a class discussion.

Intellectual Purposes. The three primary intellectual purposes of schooling are the following:

1. Acquisition of cognitive skills (reading, mathematics, etc.)
2. Acquisition of substantive knowledge
3. Acquisition of inquiry skills (evaluation, synthesis, etc.)

If you were to ask a parent, student, or teacher why children attend school, the most common response would be "to learn." They would mean, to acquire the knowledge and skills enumerated above. In 1988 the U.S. Secretary of Education stated, "American parents want their schools to do one thing above all others: teach their children to read, write, and speak well" (E. W. Bennett 1988). Businesses and industry also view schools as institutions whose job it is to impart both cognitive

skills and a body of substantive knowledge in the natural and social sciences. Recent outcry over high school students' lack of knowledge (E. W. Bennett 1988; Bloom 1987; Finn and Ravitch 1987; Hirsch 1987) has been over alleged inattention to this purpose of education. As will be discussed in Chapter 6, neoconservatives have begun a campaign to limit the function of schools to imparting skills and knowledge through a "core curriculum" that provides the same traditional liberal arts education to all students.

Political Purposes. Schools also are viewed as places that must produce future citizens and workers. To that end, they serve four major political purposes:

1. To educate future citizens for appropriate participation in the given political order
2. To promote patriotism by teaching myths, history, and stories about the country, its leaders, and government
3. To promote the assimilation of immigrants
4. To ensure order, public civility, and conformity to laws

Functionalists believe that schooling facilitates knowledge about and integration into the political system. It is a means by which common social and political values are transmitted to young people and others, like immigrants, who initially may not share them. This goal has been one of the most important of modern public schooling (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development 1989; Durkheim 1969; National Commission on Excellence in Education 1983; Spring 1988a).

Early American leaders believed that republican forms of government were required to educate citizens so they could participate wisely in the political system—vote, run for public office, and make informed decisions about government. Hence they believed publicly financed schools should be provided for all—at least for all white males.

One of the earliest plans for free elementary education to both males and females was introduced to the Virginia legislature in 1779 by Thomas Jefferson. In his "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" Jefferson proposed that public elementary schools be established in each county so that all children would receive three years of reading, writing, and computation. The most talented boys would then go on for free education in regional grammar schools. A final selection of the most talented boy from all the schools would then attend the College of William and Mary at public expense.

Jefferson's plan, unlike those in the New England and other colonies, envisioned an *articulated system* of schools from elementary school to college. An articulated system links requirements from each lower level to prerequisites in each higher one; students must master preceding levels before passing on to the next. Jefferson's plan sought to elevate a few males from the lower classes to the ranks of potential leaders. However, the plan did not explicitly teach citizenship. It emphasized a classical curriculum of Greek, Roman, English, and American history, rather than government or civics. Jefferson believed that literacy and a free press were sufficient for making wise political decisions.

Jefferson's plan provided no equal opportunities for women or minorities, and it was never enacted. However, it did formalize the idea that schools were critical to the development of leadership in a democracy. This type of thinking continues to inform the way many people view schools today.

Horace Mann, often called the father of American education, believed that schools not only should produce leaders but also should train citizens. Foreshadowing John Dewey and others, Mann felt that a national political consensus could be developed through the teaching of common values and beliefs in public schools. During Mann's tenure as Secretary of the Massachusetts Board of Education (1837–1848), political tension, mass immigration, and class conflict were causing great concern. Mann was active in school reform; as editor of the *Common School Journal*, he advocated the establishment of publicly supported elementary schools, open to children of all socioeconomic classes, to provide basic literacy and to instill social and political values for a unified American identity. Such a Common School would be the key to reforming society and creating a more stable union. His plan was supported by leaders of the dominant culture—industrialists, church leaders, and the business community—who felt that instilling respect for a common order would build a productive and complacent work force.

At the end of the nineteenth century the influx of immigrants from southern and eastern Europe prompted educators' efforts to assimilate newcomers. "Americanization" programs were established to teach language, customs, and laws. Especially after World War I, schools were used not only to Americanize immigrants but also to stimulate patriotism in all children. Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance and singing patriotic songs in school were viewed as training for later allegiance and service to the nation (Durkheim 1969; Spring 1988a). Participation in student government and competitive sports was encouraged in order to develop school spirit, which later would be transferred to the country.

Current curricular trends differ little from those described above. High schools require Civics and Economics, with special emphasis on the "free enterprise system"; children still learn political history and myths, and they still recite the Pledge of Allegiance; and political education and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes are required for recent immigrants.

Economic Purposes. Schooling serves two major economic purposes:

1. To prepare students for later work roles
2. To select and train the labor force

Functionalists believe that schools prepare students for the work force in part by teaching attitudes, technical skills, and social behavior appropriate to the work place, such as cooperation, conformity to authority, punctuality, gender-appropriate attitudes, neatness, task orientation, care of property, and allegiance to the team (Bossert 1979; Carroll 1975; Dreeben 1968; Jackson 1968; LeCompte 1978b). Schools also act as "sorting machines" (Spring 1976), categorizing students by academic ability and then pointing them toward appropriate career goals. In this way,

schools create a meritocracy, a hierarchical social structure organized by ability, and they distribute individuals to fill the diverse roles required by a complex industrial work force. Such a meritocracy assumes that no major external impediments stand in the way of success for able, hard-working individuals (Young 1971).

Schools' stratification of students and creation of an ability-based hierarchical ranking serves to link occupational to social class differences in society. As the United States industrialized near the turn of the century, the concept of "human capital" and "manpower planning" came to dominate educational thinking (G. Becker 1964; Blaug 1970). The human capital school of thought, which originated in the late 1950s, calculates the rate of return from "investing" in schooling; it is measured by lifetime earnings minus the costs of education, including "opportunity costs," or the amount of money *not* earned while in school (Miles 1977; Schultz 1961). Humans are viewed as economic resources, and their laboring ability is likened to physical capital such as money, coal, steel, or electrical power. Just as physical capital can grow by being invested wisely, the value of human capital can be increased by "investing in" or acquiring more education.

Human capital theorists thus view young people as commodities in the labor market and view schools as the means of increasing the capacity of these resources by increasing their skill and knowledge. By supporting public education, industrialists invested in human resources just as they invested in physical capital and other kinds of resources. They also trained selected students for the work force. Industrial growth was believed to be intimately linked to a nation's ability to increase its supply of skilled human capital. School-business partnerships such as the "Adopt a School" program, whereby local businesses invest in schools, are a current example of the belief in human capital. This belief has been one of the strongest catalysts to the growth of educational systems in developing countries.

Social Purposes. Schools serve three major social purposes:

1. To promote a sense of social and moral responsibility
2. To serve as sites for the solution or amelioration of social problems
3. To supplement the efforts of other institutions of socialization, such as the family and the church

In traditional societies the family, the churches, and the community transmitted social and moral values to youth for the maintenance of culture. As nations became more complex, children did not always follow the paths of their parents. More complex skills were needed for work, and schools were called upon more and more to assist in the training and socialization of children. Since the nineteenth century, schools have been viewed also as the primary institution for solution of social problems. In fact, in the 1890s the sociologist Edward Ross argued that the school had *replaced* the church and family as the primary instiller of social values, and he described education as an inexpensive alternative to the police (Ross 1901).

In the twentieth century, social goals have become a very real and vital component of schooling. Schools have been called upon to solve such problems as juvenile

delinquency, poverty, child abuse, drug addiction, teenage pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, and lack of highway safety. Social services have been incorporated into schools on the grounds that well-fed, rested, and healthy children learn more readily and are less likely to drop out. They also are supported by the belief that children are more easily influenced in reform movements than are adults. Service programs also facilitate American egalitarian notions of equal opportunity and fair play.

This discussion of the purposes of schooling is a backdrop for exploring the various theoretical frameworks that have informed the sociology of education, particularly in the United States in the twentieth century. It is important to keep in mind that people interpret the purposes of schooling in accordance with specific theories about how schools relate to society. We have begun with the functionalist view, because it is the one with which people are most familiar. We now move to other views which, in our view, more closely correspond to the way schools and society actually are linked.

What do you think are the primary purposes of public schooling? How do these compare with the purposes of schooling discussed in this chapter?

Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists such as Karl Marx, Lewis Coser, Max Weber, Georg Simmel, and Ralf Dahrendorf accepted the general description of societal workings developed by functionalists, but they believed that functional analysis, with its emphasis on social equilibrium and maintenance of existing patterns, was inadequate to explain the dynamism of social systems. Conflict theorists focused on the tensions in societies, suggesting that they, rather than equilibrium, characterize social organization and that such tensions derive from the clash of irreconcilable claims to power among various groups in society. These theorists address questions not raised by functionalists, such as:

1. What are the sources and the consequences of conflict in social systems?
2. How do conflicting groups organize and mobilize?
3. What are the sources of inequality in society?
4. How do societies change themselves?

Conflict theory, especially as developed by Marxists and neo-Marxists, states that the organization of a society is determined by its economic organization, and in particular by patterns of ownership of property. Inequality of property or of resource distribution, then, is the major source of conflict in societies. Insofar as schools are intimately linked to future economic opportunities, they too are institutions in which social conflict is played out.

Conflict theory has led to a rethinking of the relationship between schools, social class structure, and patterns of economic opportunity. Blau and Duncan (1967) first determined that the educational attainment of American males is a good predictor of their ultimate socioeconomic status. They further noted that the educational and socioeconomic status of sons tended to be the same as that of their fathers, indicating that status seemed to be inherited rather than transcended. Thus

the system of class status seemed much more rigid than the egalitarian ideology of America purported. While interpretations differ as to whether it is the individual or the system that dictates one's ultimate destiny, the process of schooling clearly was linked to the structure of inequality as much as to opportunities, because of schooling's close ties to placement in the labor market. We now move to a discussion of reproduction—a concept which conflict theorists use to explain how schools stratify—or divide up—opportunity.

Reproduction Theory. The notion of reproduction represents the dark side of functional theories of transmission. Rather than viewing schooling as promoting democracy, social mobility, and equality, conflict theorists conceptualize schools as reproducing both the ideologies of the dominant social groups and the hierarchy of the class structure. In other words, schools serve as tools to keep wealth and power in the hands of the white middle- and upper-class groups.

According to these theorists (Boudon 1974; Bowles and Gintis 1976; Carnoy 1972; Carnoy and Levin 1985; Persell 1977), schools reproduce status in several ways. First, they exclusively use the formal language and hold expectations for behavior characteristic of the dominant culture. This disadvantages the lower classes who often do not speak the formal language, and who engage in different behavior patterns (Bernstein 1977; Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). They also privilege the values and cultural knowledge of the upper classes.

Second, schools tend to magnify class differences by sorting individuals into occupational niches, not so much by their ability as by their social class origins. Thus children from middle- or upper-class families are thought to be more able and so are pushed toward professional or other desirable careers. Similarly, lower-class and minority children are viewed as less able and are placed in vocational curricula with lower job expectations. Children also are encouraged toward fulfillment of traditional gender roles.

Third, the status quo is reinforced by the fact that dominant groups control the major social and political institutions and they ensure that their power is never threatened. Giroux (1983a) summarizes this process of reproduction in schools:

First, schools provided different classes and social groups with the knowledge and skills they needed to occupy their respective places in a labor force stratified by class, race and gender. Second, schools were seen as reproductive in the cultural sense, functioning in part to distribute and legitimate forms of knowledge, values, language and modes of style that constitute the dominant culture and its interests. Third, schools were viewed as part of a state apparatus that produced and legitimated the economic and ideological imperatives that underlie the state's political power. (1983a, p. 258)

Conflict Theory and the Purposes of Schooling. The purposes seen by conflict theorists differ very little from those of functionalists. However, rather than accepting the status quo as natural, conflict theorists abhor the inequalities perpetuated by reproduction. Adherents to the concept of reproduction feel that public schooling operates so that the dominant class can maintain its place in a stratified

society. Schools maintain class structure by preparing its members for stratified work roles, giving rewards for use of dominant language, and imposing middle-class behavioral expectations upon most aspects of school life.

Conflict theorists employ three models to explain how schools promote inequality and perpetuate class distinction—economic reproduction, cultural reproduction, and hegemonic state reproduction. Each model can be used both at the macrolevel, or schooling in the larger societal context, and at the microlevel, the more individual level of classroom and school practice. That is, some conflict theorists use large-scale quantitative analyses to study the relationship between reproduction and schooling, while others study interaction in small-scale settings such as classrooms to see how reproduction actually occurs.

Economic Reproduction. The economic reproductive model, which evolved from the work of Bowles and Gintis (1976), focuses on system blame, placing responsibility for social inequality on the schools. They link the failure of schools to reduce poverty and disadvantage to inequities in the economic structure of capitalist society (Carnoy 1972). This view, informed by traditional Marxism, states that power is in the hands of those who control wealth and capital and who maintain traditional class, ethnic, and gender inequalities. Stratification of work roles by race, class, and gender leaves women, blacks, Latinos, American Indians, and other minorities at a disadvantage. The schools facilitate this stratification through their sorting and testing processes. Students are inculcated with skills, values, and attitudes considered appropriate for their later roles in the occupational hierarchy.

Correspondence refers to how society's economic organization are mirrored in its institutions and vice versa. Thus if schools, hospitals, and churches are organized in the same way as factories, this is because the factory is the dominant form of economic organization in industrial society. Conversely, if schools are organized the way apprenticeships and workshops are, this is so because craftsmanship and skilled trades dominate the economic sectors. (See Chapter 2 for a discussion of correspondence between schools and factories.) Bowles and Gintis summarize the correspondence principle, which is central to their argument:

The educational system helps integrate youth into the economic system, we believe, through a structural correspondence between its social relations and those of production. The structure of social relations in education not only inures the student to the discipline of the work place, but develops the types of personal demeanor, modes of self-presentation, self-image, and social class identification which are the crucial ingredients of job adequacy (1976, p. 131).

Correspondence also refers to other aspects of societal organization being reflected in institutions such as schools. For example, schools tend to mirror the inequalities in society at large so that children learn, through both a hidden curriculum and an explicit curriculum, the skills and attitudes that will correspond to their later work roles. Jackson (1968) used the term **hidden curriculum** to describe implicit messages to convey "appropriate" values, beliefs, and behaviors to children. For example,

by encouraging children to keep busy, complete their work neatly, come to school on time, wait quietly, and the like, schools teach behaviors needed in the labor market.

The hidden curriculum conveys different messages to children of different social class, ethnicity, and gender. Lower- and working-class children are socialized to accept authority, to be punctual, to wait, and to be compliant, while middle-class children learn to assume roles of responsibility, authoritative modes of self-presentation, and independent work habits. Teachers anticipate that middle-class children will need highly developed verbal skills but that lower-class children will not. Research in primary classrooms has confirmed that middle-class children are treated differently than are lower-class children. For example, during "sharing time," when children are encouraged to talk about themselves, teachers tend to give middle-class children feedback to enhance their self-presentation skills, while teachers of lower-class children tend to accept their students' presentation without correction or elaboration (Bernstein 1970; Labov 1972; Rist 1970).

Schools also reinforce gender differences. Studies show that males are called on more frequently, asked questions requiring higher-order thinking, given more criticism (both positive and negative), given more leadership responsibility, and generally provided with more teacher attention than are females (Sadker and Sadker 1985). The hidden message is that males are more capable and important than females. Researchers also have documented at the microlevel the connection between how social relationships in schools are organized and the implicit message about authority, work, and social roles and the values of the capitalist society (Borman 1987; Jackson 1968; LeCompte 1978b; Metz 1978).

In summary, the economic reproduction model provides insights into the relationships between social class, structural inequality in schooling, and reproduction of the social division of labor. It explains how initial class differences are reinforced by the structure of the school, so that students from lower-class backgrounds are relegated to lower-level jobs while middle- and upper-class students are rewarded with more desirable positions. However, this model has been criticized for its mechanistic, one-sided assumption that structure alone determines outcomes. Economic reproduction theory allows no room for individuals to act in behalf of their own destiny. It fails to explain resistance to authority, or the dynamics of relationships among students, teachers, and school staff. It is radically pessimistic, offering little hope for social change or alternative practices (Giroux 1983a, p. 266). This theory has also been criticized for omitting forms of domination based upon ethnicity or gender.

Cultural Reproduction. Cultural reproduction goes beyond transmission of the class structure alone. It examines how class-based differences are expressed in the political nature of curriculum content as well as in cultural and linguistic practices embedded in the formal curriculum. Curricular content tends to glorify the acts, practices, and activities of the upper classes while ignoring or denigrating those of the lower or working classes. For example, corporations and their leaders are held up as models while unions and their leaders are given scant praise or described as threats to American economic stability.

Bernstein's *Class, Codes and Control* (1977) analyzes the reproduction of inequality on both the macrolevel and microlevel. His studies, encompassing both

the structures of and interactions in society, demonstrate that social inequalities begin in class-based differences in family structures and linguistic codes, differences that are in turn reinforced by the schools.

According to Bernstein, the structure of society causes each class to develop a different family role system, each with its own mode of communication, which evolves as individuals participate in the shared assumptions and expectations of their class. Working-class life is organized around a family structure limited to traditional roles and positional authority based on age, class, and gender. It generates what Bernstein calls a "restricted" or "particularistic" code or meaning system, in which speakers use a shorthand communication, assuming that their meanings are shared with and understood by the listener. This code is described as "restricted" because it does not require a great deal of context to be understood by members of the immediate community. Its practitioners can "fill in the blanks" of missing context to make meanings explicit.

By contrast, the family structure of the middle-class is more open and flexible. It tends to rely on individual personality characteristics and personal relationships rather than on traditional, stereotypic roles. Because roles are negotiable, members of the middle class do not assume that meanings will be shared by listeners; hence they use what Bernstein calls an elaborated or universalistic language code to facilitate verbal communication. Such a code includes a wide variety of context clues and explicit description; shared understandings are not required to understand meanings. Differences between working-class and middle-class communication styles are illustrated by "Who Broke the Window" and "How to Behave on a Bus" (see pp. 16 and 17). Note the lack of context clues and greater degree of directness and immediacy in the working-class dialogue. Working-class codes rely on shared knowledge for understanding and on the authority of the mother to obtain compliance, while the middle-class mother requires elaboration and tries to obtain her child's compliance by means of rational dialogue.

Bernstein suggests that the elaborated or universalistic language patterns of the middle-class predominate in schools. Middle-class children are better able to participate in school socialization processes because their language is similar to the language of schools. Since working-class students have less competence in the language of the school (or in Bernstein's words, have limited access to the elaborated codes of the socializing agencies), they often fail to understand exactly what is expected of them. They therefore respond inappropriately, perform more poorly, and reap fewer rewards for their efforts. Their poor academic performance leads them into preparation for vocational and blue-collar employment, whereas middle- and upper-class students are prepared for skilled and professional careers. In this way the class structure is maintained.

Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron (1977) elaborated on Bernstein's notion of linguistic codes. Expanding on existing studies of class reproduction, they developed the concept of **cultural capital** to explain the function of schooling in the transmission of cultural and economic wealth. Cultural capital includes not merely language and social roles but also the general cultural background, knowledge, and skills passed from one generation to the next. Cultural capital differs according to social class: Some has a higher "exchange rate" than others. High culture—that concerned with the arts, literature, and languages as well as communication skills, cooperative

work patterns, creative endeavor, and what might be called "middle-class manners and behavior"—characterizes the middle and upper classes and is the most highly valued. This type of cultural capital forms the basis of the overt and the hidden curriculum in schools. Bourdieu suggests that schools assume that primary socialization—in the home—gives students the middle class "readiness skills" they need for school success. He attributes the inevitable failure of most compensatory education programs to the fact that schools are not, and cannot be, substitutes for a middle- and upper-class dominant culture upbringing (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1977).

All children go to school to add to their store of cultural capital, but working-class children find that their stock is undervalued. In fact, the capital they do have handicaps them. Since the schools embody the cultural capital of the middle and upper classes, children from lower social backgrounds who are not familiar with the codes will have more difficulty understanding the schooling process. The influence of cultural capital is especially pronounced in the first years of schooling, when their understanding and use of language is a major component in teachers' assessments of them. For example, students who respond in single words or short phrases rather than in complete statements will be perceived as less intellectually competent than their peers who speak standard English. They also will be judged less able if they do not make direct eye contact with teachers or if they use dialects such as Appalachian English, Black English (Labov 1972), American Indian English (Leap 1993; Spolsky and Irvine 1992), or the "village English" of Native Alaskan communities. These are the students who will be placed in reading groups for the "less capable" (K. P. Bennett 1986, 1991).

How to Behave on a Bus

Working-Class Code:

MOTHER: "Hold onto the strap when the bus starts."

CHILD: "Why?"

MOTHER: "Because I said so!"

CHILD: "Why?"

MOTHER: "Sit down and do as you're told!"

Middle-Class Code:

MOTHER: "Hold onto the strap when the bus starts."

CHILD: "Why?"

MOTHER: "Because when the bus starts, you might fall down."

CHILD: "Why?"

MOTHER: "The bus jerks when it starts, and you might trip."

CHILD: "Why?"

MOTHER: "Sit down and do as you're told!"

Who Broke the Window?

Working Class Speech Code:

MOTHER: Who broke Mrs. Smith's window?

CHILD: Him and her and me were playing and we threw it over there and she tried to catch it. She and he missed and it went over there and we heard a crash. She came out and said it went through her window.

Middle Class Speech Code:

MOTHER: Who broke Mrs. Smith's window?

CHILD: Jerry and Sally and I were playing catch and we threw the ball over by the fence and Sally tried to catch it. She and Jerry both missed and the ball went over the fence into Mrs. Smith's yard. We heard a crash. Mrs. Smith came out and said our ball went through her living room window.

By contrast, students whose cultural and linguistic competence is congruent with school expectations will be considered academically superior. Schools reinforce the competencies already acquired by middle-class children, and since academic success tends to be associated with job success later on, this reinforcement in turn reinforces the existing class structure. A further factor is academic tracking and ability grouping. Schools tend to provide different academic programs—college preparatory, vocational, or remedial—to students based upon the kind of cultural and linguistic practices in which children engage. Lower-class and immigrant children are assigned to vocational and remedial tracks, and obtain correspondingly low status jobs.

Hegemonic State Reproduction. A third model of reproduction is concerned with the complex role of governmental intervention in the educational system. The term **hegemony** refers to a social consensus created by dominant groups who control socializing institutions such as the media, schools, churches, and the political system; these institutions prevent alternative views from gaining an audience or establishing their legitimacy (McLaren 1989). The school is one of these agencies. Hegemony is created, at least in part, because schools reflect the ideologies advocated by the very state agencies that regulate the schooling process. For example, if state officials have mandated that sex education, AIDS education, drug education, driver education, or gun safety be taught in schools, districts must comply with those regulations.

Researchers in the hegemonic tradition argue that economic and cultural models of reproduction fail to consider how powerful the political intervention of the state is in enforcing policies that direct the reproductive functions of education. These researchers often refer to control by "the state," using "state" globally, without distinguishing among three kinds of "state" control in the United States—local, state, and national. Though these structures of power do not always coincide, Marxists would argue that all are products of a similar dominant culture and that the term

"state" refers not to a political entity but to a general power structure. Giroux (1983a, 1983b) argues that hegemony is reflected not only in the formal curriculum, but also in school routines and social relationships and in the way knowledge is structured. The hegemonic model explains two functions which the state carries out in regard to schooling. The first involves the role of state and federal agencies in the actual production of knowledge taught in schools. The second involves state regulation of schools through certification requirements, length of compulsory schooling, and curriculum requirements.

The Role of the State in the Production of Knowledge At the national and state levels, government research reflects the interests of the party currently in power. According to hegemonic theorists, the state affects the production of knowledge by determining which types of research should be funded by the government. Spring elaborates:

... the National Institute of Education's main concern is the control of education by channeling of research interest into particular fields, which is accomplished by making available government funds for certain areas of research. The NIE, by designating priority areas for research, creates a potential situation wherein the production of knowledge about education is guided, by the means of attracting researchers into desired areas with offers of monetary support. (1985, p. 196)

One of the earliest examples of federal involvement in educational research and the production of knowledge came in the 1950s following the Russian launching of Sputnik. Because federal officials believed that America was losing ground in the race to space, they encouraged talented students to study science and math. The National Science Foundation channeled funds into math and science curriculum-writing groups and, later, into summer institutes to train teachers in the use of new science and math materials. The National Defense Education Act also provided funds for college scholarships in science and mathematics, for new science and math equipment, and for purchase of curricular materials by local schools systems.

The work of Anyon (1983, 1988), Apple (1979), Giroux (1983a, 1983b), Spring (1988b), and others illustrates the extent to which the production of knowledge is linked to the political sphere. A more detailed discussion of this process is presented in Chapter 6, where we examine the school curriculum.

The Role of the State in the Regulation of Education Political influence is evident in state control of teacher certification and assessment, compulsory education laws, curriculum mandates, and mandatory testing. The trend is toward more and more involvement by the states in the schooling process. For example, teachers in Tennessee, Texas, Georgia, and many other states are currently required to teach prescribed sets of "basic skills" on which the students regularly are examined for mastery by standardized tests. Where they are mandated, these basic skills constitute the major portion of the curriculum taught by elementary teachers.

The regulatory function also is performed by state-mandated exit examinations in reading, mathematics, and written composition, which are required for graduation from high school. Many states also require pre-service teachers to pass a National Teachers Examination for certification. Some states are considering ongoing competency testing to ensure that experienced teachers maintain their skills. As we write this text, the federal government has become increasingly active in calling for the establishment of national curricular standards in major content areas. We shall describe in Chapters 2 and 4 how many of these policies directly affect students, parents, teachers, and schools but are outside of their control (Giroux 1983a, 1983b; Spring 1985).

Hegemonic state reproduction theory, then, directs attention to the autonomy of national and state governments in exerting pressure on schooling. Its critics argue that while this theory attempts to explain macrolevel structural issues, it fails to consider the microlevel, or daily life in classrooms. It neglects the social relations among teachers, students, and school staff and how these interactions help them accept, accommodate to, or resist the role of the state in the classroom.

Conflict Theory and the Purposes of Schooling. In summary, the three models for reproduction provide a structural view of the relationship between the work place and the schools, a view of the relationship between the dominant cultural and linguistic codes of the schools and those of the students, and an explanation of the effects of government on school policies and practices. While conflict theorists generally agree with the functionalists' delineation of school purposes, they do not see these purposes as operating benignly and to the advantage of individuals. The consensus of functionalists is viewed by conflict theorists as hegemonically imposed, not shared. Stratification of opportunity is assumed to be social class-biased, not meritocratic. Finally, civic education is interpreted to be preparation for conformity to a political order imposed by dominant groups, rather than for participation in a democratic social order. In conflict theorists' view, the repressive economic, sociocultural, and political power of dominant groups reigns supreme and the system is to blame for students' failure to succeed and for the schools' failure to ameliorate social problems. In this view, the hegemonic power of the state leads the individuals to accept official explanations for their failure and therefore to place the blame on themselves.

Critics say that these theories are overly deterministic and one-sided. Some functional and conflict theorists have been criticized for their overreliance on quantitative research methods, for their unidimensional focus on social class and oppression based on ethnicity and gender (Clements and Eisenhart 1988; Delamont 1989; Ellsworth 1988), for the lack of empirical data in their analyses and for their disregard of the power of individual human agency (Giroux 1983). Giroux explains that conflict theorists have "over-emphasized the idea of domination in their analysis and have failed to provide any major insights into how teachers, students and other human agents come together within specific historical and social contexts in order to both make and reproduce the conditions of their existence" (1983a, p. 259). Giroux argues that by avoiding a focus on human activity within social relationships, reproduction theorists offer little hope for change

While they have offered a different and often useful way of looking at schools as social and cultural transmitters, their view is a pessimistic one, giving no consideration to how individuals could interact to ameliorate or alter the constraints of the system.

Summary

Several themes emerge from our discussion of transmission theories. Both functionalists and conflict theorists address the macro or structural aspects of schooling and its role in cultural transmission. The major differences between the two theories are in their interpretation of transmission. Functionalists believe in the existence of an underlying benign *consensus* on social beliefs and values and do not question its assumptions. Conflict theorists are critical of this assumption, arguing that what appears to be a consensus actually is a set of social attitudes and values which are characteristic of dominant cultural and social groups. They are concerned primarily with how schools serve the interests of dominant groups by replicating the existing social class structure and maintaining the division of labor necessary for a society stratified by class, ethnicity, and gender.

INTERPRETIVE THEORIES

Sociologists within the interpretive paradigm refer to themselves as phenomenologists (Giorgio 1985; Husserl 1931, 1970; Moustakas 1994; Van Manen 1990), symbolic interactionists (Blumer 1969), or ethnomethodologists (Cicourel 1964; Garfinkel 1967). Interpretivists believe that human beings respond to each other and to their surroundings not so much on the basis of any objective or inherent meanings but on the basis of meanings assigned to people and settings by the people in them. Interaction and the assignment of meaning are affected by people's past experiences and beliefs, their current experiences in the given setting, and what they come to believe as interaction unfolds. This process is called the *social construction of meaning*; it forms a common focus linking interpretive theorists. To interpretivists, reality is not fixed but is, at least insofar as it dictates human behavior and belief, negotiated in an immediate setting and depends upon the context. Thus, what you and I believe to be true or real depends on how we view it—based on our values, personality, and past experiences. Such a fuzzy notion of reality might at first seem disconcerting. However, consider how teenagers can be neat, helpful, well-behaved, and mature in *other people's* houses while remaining slovenly, slothful, irresponsible, and rude at home. Or how a perfectly well-disciplined class of students runs amok in the presence of a substitute or how a kindergartner who has a bad first day of school can be forever labeled by teachers as "trouble." The construction of meaning is precisely why parents often transfer a child to a different school if the child has gained a reputation for being difficult or a poor student. A chance to construct a new reality and new meanings often is all that is needed to transform a situation.

Interpretive Studies as a Major Shift in Research Methods

Interpretive researchers believe that the best way to understand human behavior is to examine real-world situations using qualitative or descriptive rather than experimental methods of inquiry. Interpretive approaches are a major departure from the quantitative studies which dominated the social sciences in the 1960s and 1970s, and the experimental studies which still dominate educational research. *Quantitative studies* use data from tests, surveys, or the census. These methods are indirect measures of actual behavior, since they ask people to recall what they did or know or to characterize their beliefs and actions in accordance with predetermined options designed by a researcher. *Experimental studies* try to place all elements of the research under the control of the researcher; anything the researcher cannot control is treated as bias or a threat to the integrity of the study. Neither quantitative nor experimental research is adequate for examining complex, uncontrollable, and multifaceted phenomena such as behavior in schools. By contrast, interpretivists rely heavily upon direct observation and open-ended interviewing in natural settings, frequently becoming participants; their major focus is on the details and nuances of interactions among people (Bogdan 1972; Erickson 1984; Glesne and Peshkin 1992; G. Jacobs 1970; LeCompte and Preissle 1993; Spradley 1980).

Interpretive inquiry has expanded tremendously since the late 1960s and early 1970s. It has grown beyond the disciplines of sociology and anthropology, and now researchers from a variety of disciplines are trying to understand the complex processes of schooling. Their studies are variously described as naturalistic, qualitative, descriptive, and ethnographic. Anthropologists of education, cognitive anthropologists, sociolinguists, and qualitative sociologists have begun to use the methods of interpretive inquiry. Their methods include long-term participant observation in classrooms, analyses of curricula, descriptions of methods and strategies used by educators, and extensive open-ended interviewing of those involved in schooling processes.

Three principal strands of inquiry have influenced this kind of sociological research in education: phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology. A fourth perspective, which focuses on the construction of meaning and knowledge, and which has inspired much qualitative educational research, especially in curriculum and instruction, is *constructivism*. We do not address constructivism in this text because it draws its empirical underpinnings in education primarily from psychology and lacks a firm grounding in social structural analysis. As we discuss them, note how each has influenced the others and contributed to an overall perspective in the social sciences.

Phenomenology

The key concern of phenomenologists is meaning. Phenomenologists study the social meaning of knowledge and what possessing various kinds of knowledge signifies. Phenomenologists such as Schutz (1972) and Berger and Luckmann (1967) viewed