The Function and Nature of Schooling

Radical Educations

'We shall one day learn to supersede politics by education.'

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Aims of the session

- To critically debate the concept of schooling within modern society
- To develop an appreciation of the work of key radical educational thinkers
- To determine how power structures are expressed in educational contexts

A quote

'Most of the people of the world live and die without ever achieving membership in a community larger than the family or tribe. Except in Europe and America, the concerting of behaviour in political associations and corporate organizations is a rare and recent thing.'

Banfield, E.C. (1967) The Moral Basis of a Backward Society'

Some features about school
(adapted from Dreeben (1968)

- Schools are found in industrial societies and in industrialised sectors of society which are otherwise non-industrialised

'A much more restricted view of the word 'education' limits its use to those processes of teaching and learning carried on at specific times, in particular places outside the home, for definite periods, by persons especially prepared or trained for the task. This assigns to education the meaning of schooling' Herskovits (1949)

continued...

- Schools as a transitional phase
- Schools as part of a wider network of social institutions
- Therefore schools can be seen as a link not only between life phases but private and public realm
- School is am organisational embodiment of a major social institution whose prime function is to bring about developmental changes in individuals...it is an agent of socialization

- Schools are inappropriate places for compensating disadvantaged individuals.
- New technologies are also not the answer
- Poorer children will '*fall behind as long as they depend on the school for the advancement of learning.*'
- Schooling creates demand for new schooling
- Escalation of schooling is '*destructive*'
- Two kinds of learning – skills based and creative use of skills once the skills have been mastered

Structural characteristics of family & school

1. Boundary and size of social settings
2. Duration of social relationships
3. Relative number of adults and non-adults
4. Age differences
5. Characteristics of adults
6. Non-adult visibility

Patterns of conduct and behaviour

- Expressing affection
- Activities - lack of normative measures within family
- Sanctions – difficult at primary age

'Every pupil is regarded as an individual who is an important member of the 'family'... This fundamental principle of respecting each individual and placing the individual's needs at the centre forms the basis of the school's ethos, values and success as a good school. We are confident that our individual pupils will be proud to be members of this family.' YG Gwyr

Normative Outcomes of School

- Dissemination of knowledge
- Specific standards for behaviour – norms
- Experiences that schools can produce normative changes.
- Public life extends beyond employment
- Independence
- Achievement
- Universality
- Specificity

Citizenship

- Usefulness of schools to other social institutions

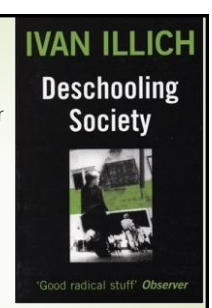
Ways of considering schooling

1. Distinguishing pupils according to academic achievement
2. Curricular objectives linked to employment
3. Links to social mobility

Illich, I. (1970) 'Deschooling Society'

- View of education as a panacea in the 1960s
- Schools are full of contradictions – they misrepresent what they do
- '*age-specific, teacher-related processes requiring full time attendance at an obligatory curriculum.*'
- We become habituated to the belief that learning occurs because of teaching '*service in the place of value*'
- Not just schools however

Some thoughts...



- Universities have lost their purpose – they are no longer the intellectually rigorous institutions they once were
- School teaches us to need universities. Why?
- Schools teach '*the need to be taught*'
- We have become institutionalised. Birth and death

Education and social policy

- Use of education as a tool of social policy
- *'Wherever we peer into the first tiny springs of the national life, how this true panacea for all the ills of the body politic bubbles forth – education, education, education'* Wiebe (1967)
- Progressive liberalism vs. laissez-faire

Education as a panacea

- The role of the 'democratic' school
- The role of the 'technocratic-meritocratic' school

Key questions

1. Compatibility of various functions schools are supposed to perform
2. Power of schooling to perform these functions

Democratic Education

- Integrative function of school
- Egalitarian function of school

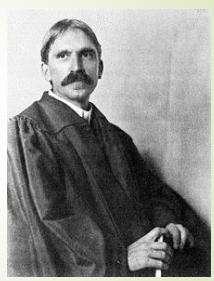
'It is the office of the school environment...to see to it that each individual gets an opportunity to escape from the limitations of the social group in which he was born, and to come into living contact with a broader environment.' Dewey (1966)

- Developmental function of school
- *Question*: What does our personal fulfilment depend on?

'The criterion for the value of school education is the extent in which it creates a desire for continued growth and supplies the means for making the desire effective in fact...The educational process has no end beyond itself; it is its own end.' Dewey (1966)

John Dewey (1859-1952)

- Personal development is economically productive
- Free and universal school system essential
- Therefore three functions not only compatible but supportive



Technocratic-Meritocratic School

- Economy viewed as a technical system where work performance is based on technical competence
- Therefore inequality of income, power and status is a reflection is unequal distribution of skills
- Equality of opportunity is provided according to ability of those entering school

- Significance of poverty in 1960s America
- Unequal opportunity in acquiring skills was isolated as the source of the problem
- Failure of education policies to improve position of minority groups and alleviate poverty. Nature vs. Nurture?

- Mass education and industrial development

'The capitalist and his agents are looking for the greatest amount of labor or the largest income in money from their investments, and they do not promote a dunce to a station where he will destroy raw material or slaken industry because of his name or birth or family connections. The obscurest and humblest person has an open and fair field for competition.' (Horace Mann 1942)

- Modern technocratic-meritocratic perspective– social class is irrelevant
- Ability + achievement = ???
- Argument remains from this perspective that free and universal education will be enhanced by economic expansion and vice versa

Education and work

- Dehumanizing conditions of work
- Early commentators positive about the effects of education on human potential
- Contemporary liberals argue that educational environments could be improved by supplying the right 'experts'
- The view of progressive educationalists

Education and Inequality

'Universal education is the power, which is destined to overthrow every species of hierarchy. It is destined to remove all artificial inequality and leave the natural inequalities to find their true level. With the artificial inequalities of caste, rank, title, blood, birth, race, colour, sex, etc., will fall nearly all the oppression, abuse, prejudice, enmity, and injustice, that humanity is now subject to.'
Lester Frank Ward, *Education* c. 1872

- 19th century school reformers understood potential problems of factory life
- Widespread education alleviates social distress without the redistribution of wealth and power
- Educational reformers – equality of opportunity and social control
- Educational reform and capitalism
- Jefferson1779 – two track education system for the labouring and the learned
- Social control and social justice

Education and Personal Development

'The unkindly spirit of the teacher is strikingly apparent; the pupils, being completely subjugated to her will, are silent and motionless, the spiritual atmosphere of the classroom is damp and chilly.'
(Joseph Mayer Rice 1890's)

'The grim joyless places most American schools are, how oppressive and petty are the rules by which they are governed, how intellectually sterile and aesthetically barren the atmosphere, what an appalling lack of civility obtains on the part of the teachers and principals, what contempt they unconsciously display for children as children.

Charles Silberman *Crisis in the Classroom* (1971)

Changing views

- Over the years regimentation has persisted but view of children has relaxed
- Perception of the role of the family
- Discipline in the classroom
- Grading in the classroom
- 20th century time of business values and authority and privilege

References/Further Reading

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