

Ann Parker Parelius and Robert J. Parelius. *The Sociology of Education*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1978, 392 pp. and index.

The first two chapters of *The Sociology of Education* are an attempt by Parelius and Parelius to explain the historical evolution of the Sociology of Education. The first chapter compares and contrasts the two prominent perspectives currently used by scholars in the sociology of education: consensus and conflict theory. In chapter two the authors attempt to show the functions and uses of the educational system through historical and cross-cultural comparisons of China, Russia and the African nations.

The next four chapters all deal with relatively recent events in the history of education within Western societies: Industrialization, Bureaucratization (two chapters), and Professionalization. Industrialization is seen by the authors as shifting the work place from rural to urban areas. Education, the authors argue, took on new responsibilities in an attempt to cope with the rapidly changing society. The major emphasis here is that changes in the economy will dictate corresponding changes in the educational system.

The authors use two separate chapters to deal with bureaucratization. The first chapter deals with the school as a bureaucratic organization. The second chapter emphasizes the role that the school plays in what the authors call "people processing." Five essential steps in people-processing are analyzed: recruiting and selecting; evaluating, labeling, and classifying; teaching the student role; monitoring; and terminating and certifying.

Next the authors trace the continuing progression of professionalization from the highly regulated and heavily structured "Latin schools" of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1647 to the present educational institutions. Expertise is seen as the factor controlling whether or not an occupation is to be recognized as a profession.

In an attempt to deal with the sources, centers and dynamics of power in the educational system the authors focus, in the next chapter, on three distinct approaches: Marxian Power Theory

(conflict theory); Elite Power Theory; Pluralist Power Theory (consensus theory). The authors conclude that power is becoming more and more concentrated in a small number of social roles (high level administrator, federal judge, etc.).

The emphasis of Chapter 8 is upon how society functions to establish a hierarchy of social roles within the general population, with the wealthy at the top and the poor at the bottom. The Pareliuses point out that societies function to maintain the social order: "there is virtually a straight line relationship between socioeconomic status and educational success" (p. 323). In other words, education is one of the major tools that society uses in the unequal distribution of wealth, power, status and all other resources in general.

In Chapter 9, which deals with "School, Community, and Diversity," the authors attempt to deal with both the complexity and variability of school-community relations by examining just four of the wide variety of different communities that exist: small towns, black inner-city ghettos, white ethnic conclaves, and affluent suburbs.

The last chapter deals with the critics of the present educational institutions and their proposals for educational utopias. Open classrooms, free schools, voucher plans, credit for competency, and lifelong education are among the proposed alternatives to the current institutions.

There are two major reasons why this book was more interesting than most other recent literature on the subject. First, the authors use cross-cultural comparisons in Chapter 2. In an attempt to draw conclusions about the function and use of educational institutions in the extremely different cultures of China, Russia and the African nations, the authors also create more interest for the subject they are discussing. At the same time they are making the material more readable.

Second, the authors use historical information in an attempt to explain or clarify current topics. The authors' use of an historical overview in Chapters 3 through 6 (in which the authors deal with Industrialization, Bureaucratization, and Professionalization) gives the reader a different perspective as to both the past and present conditions of the educational

institutions in this country. This added knowledge may even lead to new ideas as to the future of these same institutions.

There is one chapter that deserves special recognition: Chapter 8, "Education and Stratification." This chapter is unusually strong. The realization that there is a direct and extremely consistent correlation between a person's level of socioeconomic status and his/her educational attainment is an important one. As mentioned previously, the educational institution is one of the major tools used by society in the unequal distribution of wealth, power and status.

The main criticism I have of this book is that it employs an oversimplified explanation of the issues involved in the formation and change of self-concept, an extremely important aspect of the sociology of education. One of the obligations, in my mind, of a textbook is to provide as comprehensive an overview of the field as possible. This obligation is especially evident since this book is intended as a textbook on a subject area that has made important contributions to theory and research on self-concept and identity formation. It is obvious from the overall quality of this book that the Pareliuses have both the knowledge and the ability to do so. Yet they chose to treat an issue as crucial as self-concept development with relatively little emphasis or elaboration. While I feel that this is a definite drawback, it certainly does not destroy the value of this book.

The authors explain a great deal when they say "in choosing to include some ideas while omitting others, we have clearly made a statement about our own intellectual commitments." To me, this is an extremely refreshing change from the usual literature on this subject. Too much literature, particularly in the social sciences, is a victim of what I call the "Last-Word Syndrome." The only symptom of this pervasive literary disease is that upon reading a book the reader gets the general impression that the author is saying that his/her book is the only complete and totally correct authority on the subject. The Pareliuses consistently avoid this shortcoming.

Perhaps the best way to approach reading and understanding what the authors intend to convey in this book can be summed up in their own words:

We have all been students; . . . all of us are citizens, and many already voters. Our lives and our futures are inextricably entwined with education. We should do our best to understand it.

It may be within no single individual's grasp to completely understand, much less effectively deal with, the innumerable complexities of any educational institution. However it is not only possible, but virtually mandatory, that we at least better our own understanding of one of the major forces which shapes not only our lives but also the lives of everyone around us. This book is sure to be a significant step in that direction.

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