

Student's Name

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Date

There are two contrasting theories concerning the role of the educational system in the American society. The first is the traditional view, stating that education provides a source of social mobility in society (Farley, 2012). This theory states that through education, individuals have the opportunity to move up in society, depending on their ability and motivation. In addition, it states that the educational system is efficient in allocating individuals to professions, after acquiring training. This way, the education system provides employers with qualified personnel, while simultaneously offering individuals opportunities to scale up in society by awarding them on the basis of achieved characteristics.

The second theory on the other hand (dubbed Conflict Theory), states that education reflects and reinforces the social inequality in society (Farley, 2012). It holds the view that education operates in a way that does not offer upward mobility for the poor. It further states that education cannot bring about equality in a society where social and economic systems are based on inequality. Theorists aligned to this theory argue that the educational system serves to reinforce and preserve already existing inequalities in society: that, as is true of all institutions, education serves the interests of the dominant/advantaged elite that reap the most of society's benefits (Marxist theory).

Numerous studies have given merit to the conflict theory, showing that predominantly middle class schools emphasize on different values in contrast to predominantly working class/poor schools. Schools with students from lower classes stress on obedience and conformity, while schools with students from the middle class emphasize on students exercising control over their situations, learning to work independently and with minimal supervision. Thus, children from middle and upper class schools are channeled towards managerial and professional employment, while those from poor schools are channeled towards manual, clerical, or blue-

collar employment. Therefore, education reinforces social inequality, which in turn reinforces racial inequalities.

Educational sociologists have identified inequalities in school funding as one of the factors contributing greatly to educational inequality. Historically, schools with a majority of black, Hispanic, or American Indian students have generally been underfunded, compared to schools with a majority of white students. Since more money is spent in middle and upper class schools, the quality of education is presumptively better. About half of a school's revenue comes from state aid, and local property tax covers most of the rest. Taking into account social and economic inequalities, the whites live in wealthier neighborhoods than the blacks, Hispanic and American Indian populations. Consequently, owing to the fact that property in wealthier communities is of higher value and brings in more revenue through said taxation, schools in these communities receive more funding. State school funding barely offsets these inequalities. Some school districts are greatly underfunded to the point of lacking basic necessities, such as going for months without receiving textbooks.

In addition to inequalities and inequities between school districts, both the former and the latter are witnessed within school districts. Studies have shown that school boards allocate more money to some schools, at the expense of others. The finding of a 1970 study in Detroit was that predominantly white schools spent 14% more per pupil than predominantly black schools.

Cultural, background and behavioral factors are all associated with learning in American schools. These factors are interpreted in sync with the two theories on the role of education in the American society. The traditional view identifies poor beliefs and dysfunctional attitudes among the poor and minorities as the problem (Cultural Deprivation). The conflict view

sees the educational institution as the problem, expecting poor performance from minorities and treating them in ways ensuring that this expectation is met (Cultural Bias).

The term cultural deprivation may have fallen out of favor, but its general explanation still receives support. Research carried out by Coleman revealed that minority, poor and working school children entered school at a disadvantage. Most of their parents do not encourage education as they do not see the importance of book learning. This attitude is then transferred to the children. Moreover, lack of reading material at home was found to relate directly to poor performance. Underachieving students were found to enter school with skills, attitudes and backgrounds that do not conform to the school system's expectations, and with lack of learning preparedness. The cultural bias viewpoint is that schools demand certain values and attitudes, and punish those who do not conform to them. Minority students are hence held back by their back by their background and cultural differences, hence become underachievers.

Reflecting on the discussion above, America's cultural diversity cannot be ignored. However, society norms put immigrants and minorities at a disadvantage, often unintentionally. These inequalities can be addressed in a number of approaches: realizing that the problem does not lie with the education system, cultural assimilation, compensatory education, desegregation through busing, multiculturalism, cultural immersion, and finally the interactionist approach, that stresses on effective and quality teaching for both majority and minorities. The interactionist approach also stresses on the teachers' belief that their students, no matter their race, are capable of success.

Assuming I will be a teacher in a predominantly minority school, I would greatly emphasize on their change of attitude towards hard work and success, for their own good. I would also encourage them to embrace who they are, and understand that it cannot be used

against them. Finally, I would make my class a pleasant place. It would be orderly and relatively quiet, to provide an enabling learning environment.

My students would be required to engage in a community anti-racism project to “unteach racism”, in line with Helen Fox’s anti-racist tools. The project would engage them in an anti-racist social experience, interacting with other individuals from different ethnic groups, allowing them to embrace group identity. They would then have to write a paper on the project they undertook.

References

Farley, J. E. (2012). *Majority-minority relations*. Boston: Prentice Hall

Fox, H. (2009). "When race breaks out: Conversations about race and racism in college classrooms". New York: Peter Lang