

INTRODUCTION

At present, concentration of industry and division of labor have practically eliminated household and neighborhood occupations—at least for educational purposes. But it is useless to bemoan the departure of the good old days of children’s modesty, reverence, and implicit obedience, if we expect merely by bemoaning and by exhortation to bring them back. It is radical conditions which have changed, and only an equally radical change in education suffices.

—John Dewey, 1899 (1964, p. 299)

At the close of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, proponents of educational reform, such as John Dewey, recognized the social nature of the significant challenges facing US schools. As economic production shifted to points far distant from local farms, shops, and homes, families no longer were capable of training and socializing their children for productive roles in society. Once children could no longer implicitly learn adult roles through daily involvement in family economic activities, “the good old days of children’s modesty, reverence, and implicit obedience” (Dewey, 1964, p. 8) were forever lost. Schools were expanded or established to assume pedagogical tasks that had formerly been carried out by families. With the simultaneous advancement of technology and employment outside of the home, parents no longer had the time or the knowledge necessary to educate their children for productive adult roles in society.

A century later, one can recognize both how schools have changed to meet the needs of society and how societal transformations continue to

shift responsibilities from families to schools. When Dewey wrote, only about 10 percent of individuals aged fourteen to seventeen attended high school. Today, virtually all children growing up in the United States enter high school and only about 10 percent of these individuals actually fail to complete their high school education. In addition, the length of the school year has dramatically expanded: elementary and secondary public schools today are in session for almost twice as many days per year as they were at the turn of the 19th century. Postsecondary education also has greatly expanded. Even in the 1940s, fewer than 10 percent of individuals attained a bachelor’s degree; by the end of the 20th century, almost a third of young adults were expected to obtain such credentials (*Digest of Educational Statistics*, 2008). Social scientists have referred to this tremendous growth in the role of formal education as an educational revolution.

Recent changes in family structure and labor force participation will likely continue or accelerate the trend of schools taking increased

2 • THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

responsibility for shaping the lives of youth. While at the beginning of the 20th century the employment of men outside the home was perceived as underlying an erosion of the family's ability to socialize children, today concern often focuses on how children are affected by the decline of two-parent families and the increasing labor force participation of mothers (see Hochschild, 1997; McLanahan & Sandefur, 1994). Patriarchal assumptions can underlie how these socioeconomic changes are understood and addressed, but the role of formal schooling in society is likely to expand even further.

As schools in the 20th century became an increasingly core societal institution, sociologists directed continuous, concerted effort toward understanding both their structure and their effects on individuals. Over the past century, sociologists who developed the theoretical framework for the discipline as a whole (e.g., Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, Talcott Parsons, Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and John Meyer) also directly focused and wrote on the role of education in society. Because schools were complex institutions, sociological theorizing was multidimensional and multilayered.

Sociology of education as a field developed a focus on two separate levels of analysis. At a macro level, sociologists worked to identify how various social forces (such as politics, economics, and culture) created variation in schools as organizations. At a more micro level, researchers sought to identify how variation in school practices led to differences in individual-level student outcomes. In addition to these distinct levels of analysis, researchers further developed separate foci on various aspects of the functioning of education in society. While some researchers focused on economic aspects of education (e.g., how economic forces shaped school practices and how schools determined individual productivity and earnings), others focused on related issues of socialization, allocation, and legitimation. When approaching research in the sociology of education, these distinctions are useful to keep in mind.

The organizational structure of the book reflects the multidimensional, multilayered analysis that characterizes the sociology of education

field as a whole. We begin by providing selections of major contributions that trace the theoretical development of the sociology of education. We then include work identifying how stratification of schooling creates inequality in access to education within schools, between schools, and by ascriptive characteristics and individual identities (such as class, race, ethnicity, citizenship, gender, and sexuality). We provide research demonstrating how schools are settings for the formation of peer subcultures and relations that often promote outcomes at odds with conventional social behavior and school achievement. This is true for colleges to the same extent as secondary schools. We also present research focused on the role of digital technology in the lives and educational trajectories of youth. We highlight how schools affect a range of life-course outcomes: not just cognitive attainment but also adolescent behavior, delinquency, and adult labor market success. In addition, we show how schools are affected not just by neighborhood context, but by their organizational environment (e.g., the influence of private school competition, unionization, professionalization, politics of school reform).

THEORETICAL AND HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVES

The volume starts with a section presenting theoretical and historical perspectives on education. We begin the book with readings highlighting the development of a status attainment perspective, with the explicit intent of emphasizing this approach. As a paradigm, status attainment has been extraordinarily influential in shaping recent sociological research on the structure of education.

Status Attainment and Social Mobility

Status attainment has its roots in Max Weber's conceptualization of status groups. Status groups are formed on the basis of various distinctions, such as occupation, class, and ethnicity. Weber argued that the education system had a dual character in modern societies: It could be used to

increase meritocratic selection of individuals for privileged occupations but could also be used as a closure strategy to maintain a status group's monopoly over scarce resources. Building on Weber's work, Pitirim Sorokin suggested that schools played a fundamental role in society, not simply training individuals for employment but more importantly working to *sort, sieve, and select* those who would be granted access to more desirable occupations. To the extent that schools facilitate the movement of talented individuals from lower social origins to privileged occupations, a society was considered *open* rather than *closed*. When individuals from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds attain privileged occupational positions with associated higher social rewards (such as status, prestige, and income), social mobility has occurred. Both Weber and Sorokin understood that schools played a critical role in either blocking or facilitating social mobility.

In subsequent years, sociologists often applied Weber and Sorokin's ideas by comparing how societies differed in their rates of social mobility. Researchers such as Ralph Turner used cross-national comparisons to explore the possibility that developed capitalist countries had differences in their educational systems that led to variation in social mobility. In spite of much research, these scholars found only small differences in rates of social mobility among developed capitalist countries. In the context of these findings, Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan began research that would change the focus of social mobility research. Sociologists began to explore the determinants or causes of social mobility, rather than simply quantifying rates of mobility.

Blau and Duncan's work statistically confirmed Weber and Sorokin's theoretical propositions about the role of education in society. Blau and Duncan's research clearly established the central, critical role education played in individual occupational attainment. In modern society, the occupations that individuals held as adults were primarily determined by how far they had earlier gone in school. Blau and Duncan also established, however, that social origins remained critical in facilitating or hindering an individual's

educational achievement. Social background influenced occupational attainment largely through its effects on prior educational achievement. Schools thus worked to reproduce the structure of social inequality: Children from affluent families tended to do better than children from poor families in terms of educational achievement. Schools also, however, allowed vertical social mobility by *sorting and sieving*, thus facilitating higher than average attainments for individuals from lower status groups who showed merit and ability in school performance. If individuals from socioeconomically disadvantaged groups did well in school, social mobility and occupational rewards would follow; the educational deck, however, was stacked against them. Following Blau and Duncan's research, sociologists quickly identified factors other than social origins that influenced an individual's educational attainment. Scholarship demonstrated that individual expectations and aspirations, as well as the influence of significant others (e.g., parents, teachers, and peers), affect individuals' educational achievement.

HUMAN, CULTURAL, AND SOCIAL CAPITAL

While the status attainment paradigm has been extraordinarily influential in the sociology of education, this approach is not the only source for the development of concepts applied to the study of education. Contemporary research on schooling has also been strongly influenced by thinking about educational processes in terms of human capital, cultural capital, and social capital.

Economists in the early 1960s developed the concept of *human capital*. Theodore Schultz, Gary Becker, and others argued that one could invest in the human capital of individuals just as one invested financial capital in a firm. Individuals invested in a business because they expected their investments to yield dividends or returns. Economists argued that one made similar investments in individuals. The acquisition of education led individuals to increase their knowledge and skills; greater knowledge and skills led to increased labor productivity, which was subsequently

4 • THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

rewarded by employers. Individuals who pursued further education incurred significant costs (in terms of tuition and forgone earnings), but they would later more than recoup their investment. Becker demonstrated, through a series of calculations, that during the time he was writing, returns on investing in high school education were approximately 28 percent and returns on investing in college education were around 15 percent. People were choosing to obtain more and more education in part because these returns were quite large and considerably greater than what one would expect from a more traditional financial investment. However, recent sociological research has demonstrated that the effect of income returns on college enrollment decisions of adolescents varies by race/ethnicity, gender, and social class; only white men from lower socioeconomic origins follow the pattern predicted by the theory (Beattie, 2002). The human capital approach was nonetheless important for explaining the rationale behind why individuals and governments were willing to invest increasing resources in education.

Many sociologists have adopted the concept of human capital to understand how education improves individuals' labor market experiences. In the 1970s and 1980s, however, sociologists supplemented the notion of human capital by developing two related concepts that are distinctly sociological: cultural capital and social capital.

In the early 1970s, Pierre Bourdieu began elaborating the concept of *cultural capital*. Bourdieu argued that individuals in society were stratified in such a way that they possessed different levels and types of cultural capital. Individuals from privileged classes were trained from birth to possess cultural dispositions, attitudes, and styles that set them apart from ordinary members of society. Privileged members of society made cultural distinctions that other members of society accepted. These distinctions defined elite forms of culture as superior and other forms of culture as less worthy. Individuals possessed greater cultural capital if they were raised to appreciate upper class cultural forms

such as opera, classical music, and good manners. Bourdieu argued that individuals whose behavior reflected greater accumulations of cultural capital were rewarded by both school personnel and employers, who deemed these individuals more worthy and deserving. Differences in cultural capital thus led to inequality in educational achievement and related occupational attainment.

In the early 1980s, James Coleman developed the concept of *social capital*. Coleman argued that a focus on human and cultural capital obscured the fact that one of the greatest resources individuals have is their social relationships. Coleman elaborated a concept of social capital to articulate the differences in the character of social relationships that individuals possessed. While there are many relevant dimensions of social relationships that affect individuals (e.g., the frequency, duration, and character of social interactions), Coleman focused on one key aspect of social relationships in his work on education: intergenerational closure. Communities around schools varied, according to Coleman, by the extent to which the parents of children were in contact with youth and with each other. Communities had greater closure when adults in the community had social relationships that allowed them to develop shared norms and values, to monitor children's behavior, and to enforce proper sets of behavior. When communities around schools did not have intergenerational closure, student behavior was less successfully aligned with adult goals.

ALTERNATIVE THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Many of the concepts underlying contemporary research on education are encompassed in status attainment research and the trinity of human, cultural, and social capitals. However, the theoretical insights from these areas are still an incomplete theoretical toolkit for the analysis of education.

Émile Durkheim, for example, provides essential theoretical insights on the structure of

education that are not reflected either in status attainment research or in the concepts of human, cultural, and social capital. Durkheim, like Weber, is a theorist who laid the groundwork for modern sociology. Unlike Weber, however, Durkheim focused much greater attention on noneconomic aspects of education. For Durkheim, the key function of the education system was to socialize and integrate individuals into a larger society. According to Durkheim (1965), humans confronted society as an entity “superior to themselves, and upon whom they depend” (p. 237). Schools functioned as one of the most critical socializing instruments of society in fulfilling their task of impressing upon youth that social institutions possessed moral authority and that individual satisfaction was possible only when one willingly submitted to their rule. Schools worked to integrate individuals in society by encouraging students to define their own individual will and interests in terms of the larger needs and interests of society: that is, to internalize external social goals. During the middle of the century, Talcott Parsons (1959) further developed Durkheim’s functionalist explanation for the role of education and society.

An alternative functionalist account for the structure of education emerged in the early 1970s. While sharing a similar logic to Durkheim’s earlier work, these theorists adopted a more critical neo-Marxist perspective. Samuel Bowles, Herbert Gintis, Randall Collins, and others argued that schools functioned to integrate individuals into an unjust capitalist society; because society was inequitable, the school’s role in socializing individuals to accept their place in the social structure was unjust. Bowles and Gintis advanced a social reproduction theory: Schools worked to integrate individuals into an inequitable system while simultaneously legitimizing that inequality. Similarly, Randall Collins argued that schools produced social inequality by providing individuals not simply with unequal access to skills and training but with credentials and certificates that were rewarded in the labor market. In recent decades, writers such as Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux (1985)

have further elaborated this critical neo-Marxist view of education.

Other theoretical perspectives that have developed outside of educational research have been subsequently imported and applied to the study of schooling. Educational researchers have, for example, applied concepts derived from theoretical approaches as diverse as symbolic interactionism, deconstructionism, and feminism. We have included research based on some of these approaches in the readings (see Amanda Lewis, C. J. Pascoe, and Barrie Thorne), but space limitations prevent full discussion and presentation of these alternative theoretical paradigms in this book.

Our book does, however, focus attention on one additional theoretical perspective: neo-institutionalism. Beginning with the work of John Meyer in the late 1970s, researchers increasingly focused attention on institutional factors affecting the structure of schooling. Meyer argued that schools faced institutional pressures that structured educational practices. The organizational environment around schools provided a context that led schools to accept institutional norms, values, and practices as taken-for-granted assumptions. Institutional isomorphism led schools in a common organizational environment to adopt similar sets of organizational practices that often had little to do with meeting the educational needs of students.

STRATIFICATION WITHIN AND BETWEEN SCHOOLS

The theoretical approaches identified above have informed research designed to explicate the structure of stratification within and between schools. Sociologists argue that the education system is stratified in the sense that student assignment to different schools and different classrooms determines the character and the quality of education that they receive. Implicit in the concept of stratification within and between schools is the notion of inequality—that is, Weber’s insight that status groups use schools to gain privileged access to scarce resources.

6 • THE STRUCTURE OF SCHOOLING

One fundamental way that schools are stratified in the United States is by sector. Some students come from families and communities that provide opportunities to enroll in private schools. Today, approximately 10 percent of elementary and secondary students attend private schools. In the past, Catholic schools dominated this private school market; in more recent years, as many Catholics have become more affluent and moved to the suburbs, the role of Catholic schools has declined. In the South, fundamentalist private schools, as well as homeschooling, have replaced the influence of Catholic schools (Stevens, 2001). As courts forced Southern public schools to integrate racially, private fundamentalist schools became an increasingly attractive haven for white flight. From a sociological perspective, it is worth emphasizing that students attending private schools are exposed to different educational experiences. Private schools can often provide greater educational resources (Khan, Reading 12), differing levels of trust relationships (Bryk and Schneider, 2002), more effective disciplinary climates (Arum, Reading 46), and alternative curriculum emphasis and instructional strategies. Private schools have fewer disciplinary problems than public schools, not only because they tend to have greater social capital (Coleman and Hoffer, Reading 7), but more importantly, because they have a greater ability than public schools to expel (or threaten to remove) disruptive students without the threat of legal challenge.

US schools are also profoundly stratified in terms of race and social class. More than four decades after *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954), many African American students still attend schools with few, if any, white students (Orfield, Kucsera, and Siegel-Hawley, Reading 15). In the Northeast and Midwest, close to half of all African American students attend schools where more than 90 percent of their fellow students are nonwhite. In many of America's largest cities, segregation of nonwhite students is even more pronounced. In New York City, for example, 74 percent of African American and 68 percent of Latino students attend schools that are more than 90 percent nonwhite; in Los Angeles,

70 percent of African Americans and 69 percent of Latinos currently attend such profoundly racially segregated schools (Orfield & Monfort, 1988). Racially segregated schools generate a structure of inequality in educational resources along multiple dimensions. Racial segregation of schools is related to inequality in access to academically oriented peer climates (Coleman et al., Reading 13) and school environments characterized by productive parental involvement (Lareau, Reading 23). Variation in schools along these dimensions creates increased obstacles to educational achievement for individuals whose early educational experiences are in settings that are less conducive to learning.

Sociologists of education, however, argue that stratification exists not only between schools: Inequality is structured by stratification of students into different curricular tracks within schools. This educational practice, known as *tracking*, can have effects on student educational outcomes greater than differences produced by inequality between schools. Students in the same school often have very different life trajectories due to exposure to college preparatory, general, or vocational curricula. Students placed in academic tracks take honors classes and other advanced coursework have higher rates of growth in standardized test performance, and they are subsequently more likely to attend and succeed in college. Students taking vocational coursework in high school, although less likely to attend college, are more likely to have positive early labor market experiences than they would otherwise. Unfortunately, in US high schools, many students are exposed to neither college preparatory nor vocational coursework; instead, students often take a general curriculum, which fails to prepare them for success in either college or the labor force.

CLASS, RACE, ETHNICITY, GENDER, AND SEXUALITY

As a result of the variation in backgrounds that students bring to classrooms, schools often serve to reproduce preexisting social inequality. In addition, as a result of variation between schools,

tracking within schools, and differences within classrooms, schools also can serve to generate or increase inequality in society. To identify the role of schools in either reproducing or deepening social inequality, sociologists have examined the trajectories of categorically defined groups of individuals. Class, race, and gender—because of their salience in affecting life-course outcomes—have often been the focus of attention.

Status attainment research has demonstrated that talented and motivated individuals within socially disadvantaged groups can use schools to achieve upward social mobility. Schools do work to promote limited meritocratic selection of individuals within groups. Status attainment research, however, also demonstrates that schools reproduce and intensify the consequences of socially disadvantaged group membership. This distinction is essential to understanding how schools affect social inequality. In modern societies, individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds can use schools as vehicles for upward social mobility; disadvantaged groups as a whole, however, face increased barriers and obstacles in their efforts to obtain school success.

The effects of social class background on educational achievement have long been a focus of sociological concern. Sociologists have identified persistent patterns of the effects of social class on educational achievement: In virtually all developed capitalist societies, with but a few social-democratic exceptions, disadvantaged social class background remains a significant obstacle to educational attainment (Blossfeld and Shavit, Reading 19). As the completion of secondary school has become increasingly prevalent and higher education access has expanded, increased analytic attention has focused on the latter (Arum, Gamoran and Shavit, Reading 21). In addition, researchers such as Paul Willis, Julie Bettie, and Annette Lareau have documented the pervasive effects of class background on a wide range of student and school experiences. Class background not only limits the resources individuals have available to pursue continued education but also affects how students and parents interact with school personnel and how individuals articulate, communicate, and produce understandings

about the role of schools in their lives. Class background also is associated with the schools students attend, and this sorting of individuals has significant effects on educational inequality (Reardon, Reading 20).

Racial and ethnic differences are also associated with variation in educational achievement. While some researchers have advanced genetic and cultural explanations for these differences (e.g., Herrnstein & Murray, 1994; Fordham & Ogbu, Reading 25), empirical sociological research has largely discredited these approaches. Genetic and cultural explanations for racial differences in educational achievement have been rejected in that they fail to account for the historical pattern of racial differences in educational attainment. Structural factors, such as racial segregation of schools, resource inequality, and social class background, provide more credible explanations for racial differences in educational attainment. For example, while African Americans as a whole continue to score lower than whites on standardized tests and have lower rates of college and graduate degree attainment, these gaps are closing. Today, in spite of significant disadvantages in class background, African Americans are almost as likely as whites to finish high school. In addition, African American students have higher educational aspirations than white students. These findings suggest that African Americans often do better than expected—not worse, as many cultural and genetic theorists predict—on many educational indicators. Asian American students also outperform white students on many measures of educational achievement. Latino and Native American students, however, continue to have significantly low rates of educational attainment relative to other racial and ethnic groups. Latinos, who often face language barriers in US schools, are almost three times more likely than whites to drop out of high school.

Gender has also structured patterns of historical differences in individual experiences within the educational system (Tyack & Hansot, 1992). Male students tend to receive greater attention from their teachers than do female students, which can take the form of both increased praise

and greater sanctions. Boys are more often scolded and labeled bad, but they are also more often evaluated as brilliant. These social-psychological dynamics, in addition to structural factors such as gender differences in labor market opportunities, underlie variation in the pattern of male and female educational achievement. On average, contemporary American women have slightly higher levels of educational achievement than men: They are more likely to finish high school and complete college (Buchmann, DiPrete, & McDaniel, 2008). Such gender differences favoring women are particularly pronounced among socioeconomically disadvantaged populations (López, Reading 34). Men, however, are more highly concentrated on both ends of the educational attainment distribution—that is, while men are more likely to drop out of high school, they are also more likely to receive graduate and professional degrees. Men are also more likely to receive postsecondary training in relatively lucrative fields such as engineering and computer science.

Researchers have also highlighted how schools are settings where gender socialization and employment discrimination occur. Schools often function to socialize boys and girls into acceptance of traditional gender roles (Thorne, Reading 32; López, Reading 34; Pascoe, Reading 36). Children often learn these roles as part of a school's "hidden curriculum"—that is, the taken-for-granted assumptions of the school's institutional culture. For example, elementary and preschool teachers today are overwhelmingly female, and occupations in which women are concentrated tend to have lower pay, less prestige, and little professional autonomy (Apple, Reading 33). Students implicitly learn these lessons through direct observation of social life within schools.

STUDENT BEHAVIOR AND ADOLESCENT SUBCULTURES

Since Durkheim's early writings on school discipline, sociologists have focused continued attention on how schools structure youth behavior. In recent decades, as adolescents increasingly attend

high schools that concentrate youth in settings segregated from general adult society, distinctive adolescent subcultures and behaviors have appeared. Adolescent behavior in schools often is explicitly rebellious and at times impervious to adult efforts to maintain social control. Researchers such as James Coleman worried that adolescents had formed subcultures that were in direct opposition to the academic goals promoted by the education system. Sociologists attempted to identify structural causes for this rebellious adolescent behavior. Stinchcombe (1966), Fordham and Ogbu (1986) [Reading 25], and others argued that there was a structural logic to youth rebellion. Adolescents were not simply acting out irrationally but were instead responding to the inequality or injustice inherent in their structural conditions.

Recent research suggests that regardless of the underlying causes of student misbehavior, dangerous and violent consequences often result. US schools today face not only disruptive behavior but violent behavior. Recent social surveys indicate that a third of students feel that "pushing, shoving, grabbing, or slapping" is a major problem in their schools. One out of five students reports that being "threatened with a knife or gun" is a major school problem; similarly, approximately the same number of high school students reports having carried a weapon on school property (*Digest of Educational Statistics*, 2008). Sociologists are currently struggling to understand the character and implications of these changes in adolescent behavior (McFarland, Reading 39; Kimmel & Mahler, Reading 40).

Student high school educational experiences serve as defining moments in an individual's life-course trajectory. Adolescence is a time when individuals struggle with issues of cognitive, social, and moral development. It is a period in the life course when individuals often begin the process of adult identity formation. Individuals grapple with resolving the question: Who am I? In contemporary society, adolescents' connection with peers and to interests are often mediated by new forms of media (Ito et al., Reading 38; Watkins, Reading 28).

It is thus not surprising that educational experiences have lasting effects on life-course outcomes.

High school settings and educational experiences determine whether youth develop delinquent behaviors (Wilson & Herrnstein, 1985); high school experiences are also associated with the likelihood of teenage pregnancy and the risk of subsequent adult incarceration (Arum & Beattie, 1999; Crane, 1991). Schools do more than simply provide skills for individuals; they shape attitudes and dispositions that have long-lasting independent effects on adult life-course outcomes. As transitions to adult roles in society have increasingly been delayed and an individual's twenties are now more often than not described by social scientists as a period of *emerging adulthood* (Arnett, 2004), increased attention has focused on how colleges structure student behavior in college and the implications of these peer environments on academic achievement (Hamilton & Armstrong, Reading 41; Grigsby, Reading 42; Roksa & Arum, Reading 52).

Sociological research on schools has focused considerable attention on the links between education and adult labor market position. In modern societies, how well an individual fares in the labor market determines not only an individual's access to economic goods and services, but just as important, his or her access to other related scarce social resources (such as authority, prestige, and status). While researchers have debated the specific skills and attitudes that are valued and rewarded by employers (Rosenbaum & Binder, Reading 43), research is unequivocal on one point: Educational achievement determines subsequent occupational attainment. How well an individual does in school is one of the best predictors of how well he or she will do as an adult in the labor market (Haller & Portes, Reading 4). Inequality in access to education, therefore, has clear and profound long-term consequences for an individual's future well being (Fischer et al., 1996).

THE ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT

While much of the sociology of education has focused on identifying how schools affect students, an equally interesting and productive line

of research has focused on how social factors structure school organization. Cultural explanations for variation in school practices are inherently appealing (see Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1992), but sociologists have attempted to move beyond these simplistic explanations to uncover the deeper underlying structural causes for school variation.

In the last two decades, neo-institutionalist approaches have dominated sociological efforts in this area. For example, researchers have examined the role of legal and political contexts for the lives of students in schools (Gonzales, Reading 49; Binder & Wood, Reading 48). Researchers have argued that schools are not efficiently organized for the production of student cognitive gains. Rather, school officials pursue their own ends, which often involve issues of institutional self-interest, expansion, and survival. Schools as organizations are not simply about producing educational outputs and meeting the needs of students; more important, as institutions, they work to ensure organizational growth and survival in uncertain environments (Arum, 1996).

The extent to which the organizational environment of public schools is hostile, unstable, and unpredictable is clear from even a cursory examination of recent educational policy debates. In spite of the fact that public schools are graduating more students with mastery of basic academic skills than at any time in US history, a sociology of school reform suggests that a variety of political forces has coalesced to challenge the very existence of a public education sector. Conservative politicians in recent decades have increasingly pushed for the full-scale dismantling of public education (Berliner & Biddle, 1996).

We find it ironic that public schools are being attacked at a time when society has grown increasingly dependent on their role in socializing and training youth. While critics of public schools often focus attention on the low test scores of disadvantaged students, they often ignore the structural factors underlying this poor performance. Policy makers spend endless hours discussing the merits of school restructuring, national standards, integrating curriculum, and

even privatization, but spend too few minutes pondering the effects of social background, racial segregation, resource inequality, gender segregation, and other structural factors responsible for inequality of educational opportunity. Policy makers would do well to remember John Dewey's (1964 [1899]) advice on the matter a century ago:

We are apt to look at the school from an individualistic standpoint, as something between teacher and pupil, or between teacher and parent. . . . Yet the range of outlook needs to be enlarged. What the best and wisest parent wants for his own child, that must the community want for all of its children. Any other ideal for our schools is narrow and unlovely; acted upon, it destroys our democracy. (p. 295)

Educational reform, which simultaneously improves our schools and strengthens our democracy, is only possible when reforms explicitly recognize and address the structural factors underlying educational inequality.

REFERENCES

- Arnett, J. J. (2004). *Emerging adulthood: The winding road from the late teens through the twenties*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Aronowitz, S., & Giroux, H. (1985). *Education under siege: The conservative, liberal and radical debate over schooling*. South Hadley, MA: Bergin and Garvey.
- Arum, R. (1996). Do private schools force public schools to compete? *American Sociological Review*, 61, 29–46.
- Arum, R., & Beattie, I. R. (1999). High school experience and the risk of incarceration. *Criminology*, 37(3), 515–540.
- Beattie, I. R. (2002). Are all “adolescent econometricians” created equal? Racial, class, and gender differences in college enrollment. *Sociology of Education*, 75, 19–39.
- Berliner, D., & Biddle, B. (1996). *The manufactured crisis: Myths, fraud, and the attack on America's public schools*. New York, NY: Addison-Wesley.
- Buchmann, C., DiPrete, D. A., & McDaniel, A. (2008). Gender inequalities in education. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 34, 319–337.
- Bryk, A., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York, NY: Russell Sage Foundation.
- Crane, S. (1991). The epidemic theory of ghettos and neighborhood effects on dropping out and teenage childbearing. *American Journal of Sociology*, 96, 1226–1259.
- Dewey, J. (1964). The school and society. In R. Archambault (Ed.), *John Dewey on education* (pp. 295–310). Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Digest of Educational Statistics*. (2008). Washington, DC: Government Printing Office.
- Durkheim, E. (1965). *The elementary forms of the religious life*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Fischer, C., Hout, M., Sanchez Jankowski, M., Lucas, S., Swidler, A., Voss, K., and Arum, R. (1996). *Inequality by design*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Fordham, S., & Ogbu, J. (1986). Black students' school success: Coping with the “burden of acting white.” *Urban Review*, 18(3), 176–206.
- Herrnstein, R., & Murray, C. (1994). *The bell curve: Intelligence and class structure in American life*. New York, NY: Free Press.
- Hochschild, A. (1997). *The time bind: When work becomes home and home becomes work*. New York, NY: Metropolitan Books.
- McLanahan, S., & Sandefur, G. (1994). *Growing up with a single parent*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Orfield, G., & Monfort, F. (1988). *Racial change and desegregation in large school districts: Trends through the 1986–1987 school year*. Alexandria, VA: National School Board Association.
- Parsons, T. (1959). The school class as a social system: Some of its functions in American society. *Harvard Educational Review*, 29, 297–318.
- Stevens, M. (2001). *Kingdom of children*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Stinchcombe, A. (1966). *Rebellion in a high school*. Chicago, IL: Quadrangle Books.
- Tobin, J. J., Wu, D. Y. H., & Davidson, D. H. (1992). *Preschool in three cultures: Japan, China, and the United States*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Tyack, D., & Hansot, E. (1992). *Learning together: A history of coeducation in American public schools*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Wilson, J. Q., & Herrnstein, R. (1985). *Crime and human nature: The definitive study of the causes of crime*. New York, NY: Touchstone.