

AMERICAN EDUCATION:
THE EQUAL OPPORTUNITY MYTH

by

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Much can be learned about American culture through examining the institution of education. Education is one of the socializing institutions along with the family and religion. As the other institutions fail to do their job, education is expected to fill the void. Education provides the link between home-family life and the job market. Besides being a socializing institution, education is believed by many Americans to be the great equalizer--a part of the American Dream-- where equality of opportunity still exists. Nevertheless, education still sorts and sifts students creating stratification layers which mimic those of society. Perhaps education is not a producer of American culture but a sustainer of American culture.

The purpose of education has been debated and explained in many different ways by both historians and sociologists. Ravitch explains that some historians see education as achieving excellence above all odds while others see mediocrity. Collins explains that sociologists have interpreted the purpose of education by both functional and conflict theories. Education has been explained as functional and as a provider of order in society, yet education can also be seen as a tool of the elite to keep people in the proper social class. Because the purpose of education cannot be agreed on, missions for the schools to follow are varied and conflicting as well. Schools have a hard time achieving excellence when society cannot decide

what excellence is. School improvement is needed, but this cannot take place until American society decides on the role of schools. Schools are not the innovators of society, but, rather, they are shaped by other structures of society.

Education in the United States and its schools are presently viewed as in a crisis situation. Schools are perceived to not be producing what society needs, because only a few students are achieving well. Yet, if schools were to produce more well educated students, they would expect to find good jobs, and society is only producing a few goods jobs. As American society is faced with more problems--teenage pregnancy, drugs, ... society adds expectations to schools as well as demands. Despite the increasing demands placed on education and schools, education is still believed to be the gateway to social mobility. I contend that this in fact is not true. Although some students are socially mobile, the majority are not because a capitalistic society needs poor and working class people to sustain the few people on top. Schools sift and sort kids developing a stratification ladder similar to that of society, which will insure that the stratification ladder of society will continue to exist. In fact, education is the primary means by which people are placed in the various levels of the structured inequity in American society.

This crisis situation or lack of learning is often blamed on the individual. Schools were quickly blamed for American business' inability to compete in the world market. The blame of schools was soon transferred to the individual usually the poor or working class student or their family. As Hodgson found, the social class of a student does play a large role in how well a student will achieve. Schools, however, do not create social class. Other structures of society do. I will argue that schools perpetuate social class. The crisis in American society cannot be improved through schools without changing the other structures of society as well. My contention is, therefore, that education in American society is filling the needs of the structure of society as it currently exists.

In this paper, I will look at the following four things; crisis in American schools, expectations and demands of schools, the role of schools, and alternative options for schools. There is a perceived crisis in American schools. This section will examine where this fear of crisis comes from. Expectations and demands of schools is an explanation of the varied roles schools have become expected to perform. The role of schools is stratifying students to fit and accept their place in the social stratification ladder of society. Alternative options gives alternative structures for schooling. Education is more than attending school.

Schools can be more than just maintainers of the status quo by allowing students to understand conflict and gain a critical perspective. Education can be a liberating force in the U.S., but then it would not fit the needs of society as it exists. In order for education to change, other structures of society must change as well. Critical education must include education in the largest sense not just the time a student spends in school. The meaning of student must also be expanded to include all members of society. Once people become critically educated, the focus of the crisis may change from the schools to society.

I. CRISIS IN AMERICAN SCHOOLS

Society depends on the effectiveness of its socialization institutions. In particular, the United States depends heavily on the institution of education to socialize its members. However, there is mounting criticism by critics of education in the U.S. today that schools are not doing their job and students, therefore, are not being educated as they should. For example, Paul Cooperman states,

Each generation of American's has outstripped its parents in education, in literacy, and in economic attainment. For the first time in the history of our country, the educational skills of one generation will not surpass, will not equal, will not even approach, those of their parents (A Nation at Risk, 1983; 10).

CRISIS AS REPORTED BY ACADEMICS AND THE MEDIA

The message that schools are not doing their job has been coming to the public from reports of academics, the mass media, and business. In 1983, a National Commission on

Excellence in Education in their report listed thirteen indicators of the short fallings of education:

- International comparisons of student achievement, completed a decade ago, reveal that on 19 academic tests American students were never first or second and, in comparison with other industrialized nations, were last seven times.
- Some 23 million American adults are functionally illiterate by the simplest tests of everyday reading, writing, and comprehension.
- About 13 percent of all 17-year-olds in the United States can be considered functionally illiterate. Functional illiteracy among minority youth may run as high as 40 percent.
- Over half the population of gifted students do not match their tested ability with comparable achievement in school.
- The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests (SAT) demonstrate a virtually unbroken decline from 1963 to 1980. Average verbal scores fell over 50 points and average mathematics scores dropped nearly 40 points.
- College Board achievement tests also reveal consistent declines in recent years in such subjects as physics and English.
- Both the number and proportion of students demonstrating superior achievement on the SAT's (i.e., those with scores of 650 or higher) have also dramatically declined.
- Many 17-year-olds do not possess the "higher order" intellectual skills we should expect of them. Nearly 40 percent cannot draw inferences from written material; only one-fifth can write a persuasive essay; and only one-third can solve a mathematics problem requiring several steps.
- There was a steady decline in science achievement scores of U.S. 17-year-olds as measured by national assessments of science in 1969, 1973, and 1977.

- Between 1975 and 1980, remedial mathematics course in public 4-year colleges increased by 72 percent and now constitute one-quarter of all mathematics courses taught in those institutions.
- Average tested achievement of students graduating from college is also lower.
- Business and military leaders complain that they are required to spend millions of dollars on costly remedial education and training programs in such basic skills as reading, writing, spelling, and computation. The Department of the Navy, for example, reported to the Commission that one-quarter of its recent recruits cannot read at the ninth grade level, the minimum needed simply to understand written safety instructions. Without remedial work they cannot even begin, much less complete, the sophisticated training essential in much of the modern military (A Nation at Risk, 1983; 8-9).

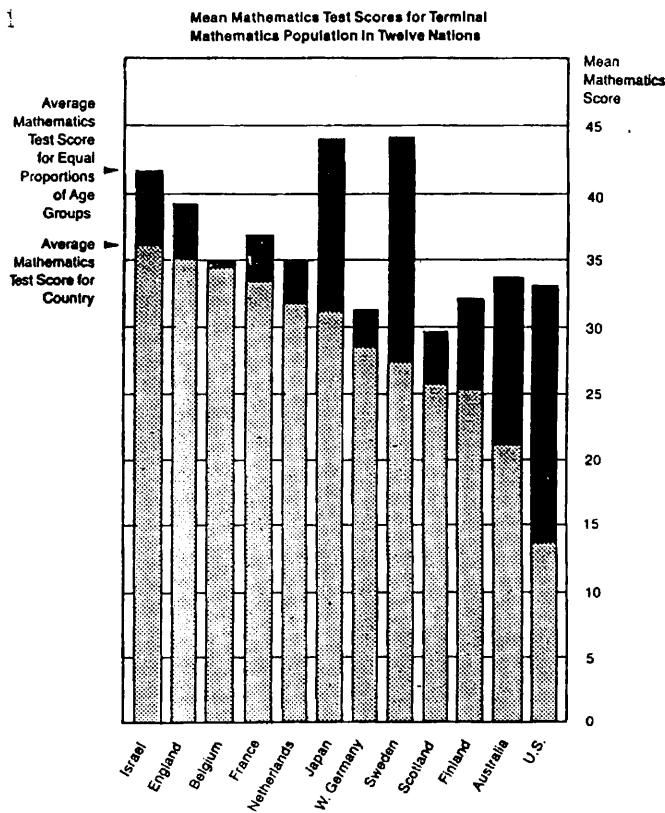
A public report card shows decreased faith of the public in schools. In 1974, Gallup Poll asked people to grade schools. Eighteen percent of the people polled gave schools an A, and six percent gave schools a D. In 1982, eight percent of the public gave schools an A, and those giving D's more than doubled from six to fourteen percent (Boyer, 1983; 22).

Test scores are often used to compare the achievement of American students to those of other countries. In 1967 a twelve nation study of mathematics was conducted. Overall, students in the U.S. did not compare very well. Later, 1973 to 1977, a seven subject survey which included mathematics, science, reading comprehension, literature, English and French as foreign languages, and civic education was conducted by Torsten Husen, University of Stockholm, Sweden. On the comprehension reading test American students scored

in the lowest one-third. In mathematics, Americans students scored lowest among the nations tested. In civic education, students in Ireland and the U.S. had the lowest scores among industrialized countries. (Boyer, 1983; 33).

Test scores, however, are hard to compare because not all students of similar age level attend high school in other countries. In the U.S., 75 percent of the youth complete high school. In Sweden, 45-50 percent complete high school. And, in the Federal Republic of Germany only 15 percent of the students are enrolled (Boyer, 1983; 33).

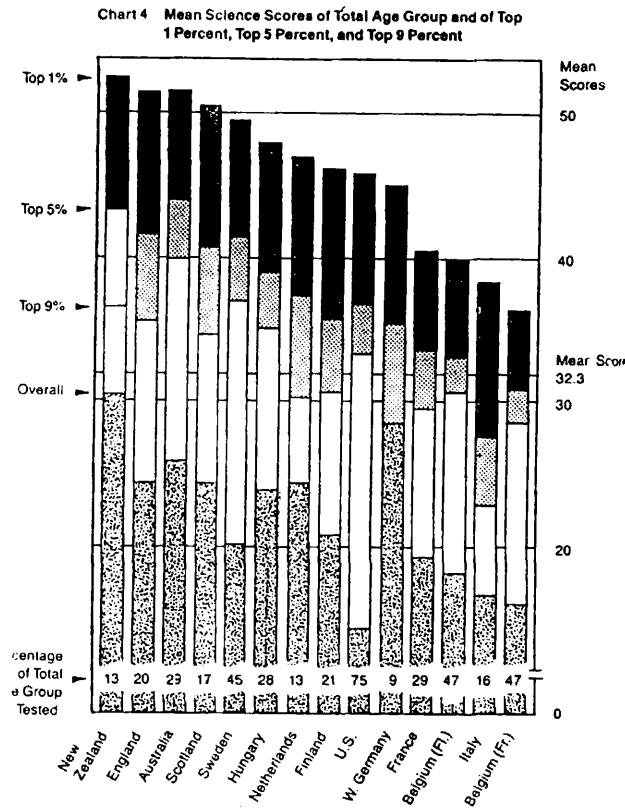
CHART 1



SOURCE: Torsten Husén (ed.), *International Study of Achievement in Mathematics: A Comparison Between Twelve Countries* (New York: Wiley, 1967)

Husen attempted to overcome this problem by comparing the top nine percent, seven percent, and five percent as well as all the students. According to these results, when all the students were compared the U.S. did poorly (see chart 1). The top average math score was Israel with 36 and the U.S. followed last behind eleven other countries with 13. However, when only top students were compared, the U.S. compared better with other countries (see chart 2). The U.S. ranked ninth with not as much variance in score (Boyer, 1983; 33).

CHART 2



SOURCE: L.C. Comber and John P. Keeves. *Science Education in Nineteen Countries* (Stockholm and New York: Almqvist & Wiksell and Wiley-Halsted Press, 1973)

Due to these kind of reports and the fear of an unprepared work force, the Michigan Literacy Task Force was created by the State of Michigan to create a plan of action for the work force needed between 1988 and the year 2000. They reported in March 1988 that:

- Thirty percent of the new jobs will require at least four years of college; only 17% of our work force possess college credentials.
- Twenty-two percent of the new jobs will require from one to three years of college, but only 20% of our work force has reached this level.
- Only 34% of the new jobs will require a high school diploma, although 40% of our work force has reached that level.
- Only 10% of new jobs will require one to three years of high school, the educational level of 16% of our work force.
- Only 4% of the new jobs will require only an elementary school education, the educational attainment level of 6% of our work force.
(Pearson, 1989: 11).

CRISIS AS SEEN BY THE BUSINESS WORLD: BLAMING THE VICTIM

Paul Pearson, director of Resources Development Steelcase Inc. " states that the business world is not happy with the educational product. He says the title, "America's schools aren't making the grade...a quarter of high school grads are only marginally literate--and reformers disagree on what to fix," found in Business Week Magazine, September 19, 1989 p. 129, captures their appraisal. He continues by listing facts such as; one million kids drop out of high

school each year, 2.4 million that graduate each year, 25 percent cannot read or write at an eighth grade level (Pearson, 1983; 11).

A 1988 study done by two chamber of commerce task forces on education and jobs in a southern U.S. city investigated the idea of inadequate education which is creating problems for the U.S. in a global economy (Ray and Mickelson; 1990). The task force had several business people and some from the education field. The Sunbelt city task force started with the problem of deficit education and by the end of their study had shifted the problem to low income students and their parents like many national reports were doing.

...recent reports have implied that it was not necessarily schools that needed to be restructured and reformed but rather particular pupils. They referred specifically to working class and minority students who were most likely to drop out of school or who analysis assert, possess flimsy high school diplomas (Ray and Mickelson, 1990; 183).

Like the national reports, the Sunbelt City soon changed from blaming schools to blaming the individual. The children-at-risk and a labor shortage were blamed for the education crisis. Therefore, the weakness of U.S. business was blamed on low income and minority youths and their parents (Ray and Mickelson, 1990; 184). Ray and Mickelson say,

By shifting the task force's gaze from the schools to low-income and minority students

and their families, educators and the growth elite successfully asserted that schools were basically good, and were suitable for prospective client companies considering relocation to Sunbelt City (Ray and Mickelson, 1990; 187).

They conclude by saying that by continuing to ignore the problems of schools and their relationship to the corporate structure will continue to put off any school improvement in Sunbelt City (Ray and Mickelson 1990; 188). Although this is only one city in the south, it is probably not much different than many other cities in the U.S. The business world complains about the product of American schools, while at the same time, it does not take any responsibility for its part in the production of a poorly educated work force.

The business world is a contributor in developing social class, and social class, will be argued, is a factor in student achievement.

Blaming the victim in education is not new. Michael Katz gives several examples of the poor being singled out as the "ones" to educate. In the early 1800's, poor attendance was blamed on the family who were seen as bad examples (Katz, 1971; 5). Education was to civilize the lower class in order to produce a well trained work force (Katz, 1971: 10). Belief was that children needed to be removed from a poor family surrounding at an early age.

No one at all familiar with the deficient household arrangements and deranged machinery of domestic life, of the examples of rude manners, impure and profane language, and all the vicious habits of low bred idleness, which abound in certain sections of all populous districts--can doubt, that it is better for children to be removed as early and as long as possible from such scenes and examples. (Katz, 1971; 39)

Coleman, et al, (1982) found other reasons for lower student achievement in public schools. They found academic and disciplinary standards are lower and have continued to slacken during the 1970's. They continue to list several causes for the decreases in standards. The Youth Movement in the 1960's led to a student defined curriculum and more liberalized grading. Colleges have more flexible entrance exams. An example is the removal of the foreign language requirement. The increase of student's rights which has been backed by legal decisions in the 1970's has constrained schools in exercising authority and has increased school involvement in litigation brought on the student's behalf. The emphasis on equal opportunity has led to easier courses, systems of grading and a reduction of standards. The family structure and authority is weakened. Parents are more willing to give up authority and responsibility for their adolescents. (Coleman, et al, pp. 188-191) Blaming the victim whether it is education, schools, the family, or the individual has not lead to a better educated populace. Other structures of society must share the blame as well).

NEED FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

Besides these indications that American education needs improvement in raising the achievement levels of students, there is also the concern that schools do not provide equal opportunities for all students. In the past, schools were seen as the one place left where the American Dream was still believed to come true. The belief that if a student worked hard enough, he/she would achieve and receive a piece of the pie. Despite all of this rhetoric, schools do not promote equality among students. In 1987, John Hardin Best explains, that students are not dealt with equally and all too often success depends on class and race.

Evidence is overwhelming that in spite of our rhetoric of equality of opportunity American schools have endorsed and promoted the children of advantage, have restrained and discouraged those of disadvantage. The schools have sorted out the successes and the failures, and all too often the successes came from the "good" families, had the "right" skin color, spoke in the "proper" accents.
(Best, 1987; 101)

There is, therefore, a need for school improvement.

Looking ahead to the future, and even more grim picture of public schools is foreseen. If schools are mirrors of society, what will schools look like with the increasing gap between the haves and the have nots? The shrinking middle class is already seen as a problem to

public schools, because as the middle class shrinks, the students who achieve well shrinks also. Jane Power wrote the following statistics:

Already about 20 percent of U.S. children live below the poverty line--a rate that's risen by more than a third since 1970. A sixth of our four- and five-year-olds live in homes where no adult is employed, and another sixth have parents whose earnings are below poverty level. If the current trend continues, many more of the students in tomorrow's classrooms will be poor. (Power, 1987; 12)

Power predicts that children will need food and medical care to learn as well as Head Start programs to give them the experiences that they need and parents are unable to provide. Power also says the distance between poor and rich school districts will be greater with the poor school districts being ignored (Power, 1987; 12). This being true, the plight of schools appear to be getting worse.

Due to these reports by academics, the mass media, and the business world, there is a feeling of crisis in American schools. Because education is one of the institutions American society depends on to socialize and stratify its members, the reports of its short fallings is creating this sense of crisis. At first blame was directed at the schools but was soon transferred to the individual.

As Best suggests, however, there is some evidence that schools do not treat all students equally. Power goes a step further by predicting that schools may have increasing

problems educating students due to the shrinking middle class. Best is saying that perhaps the way schools stratify students is wrong, and even Power advocates helping to fill the gap between rich and poor students by providing more programs for the poor. Nevertheless, Ray and Mickelson summarize that in order for effective school improvement to occur other structures of society such as the business world must take their blame and look at ways they can help to reshape the current stratification shape of education which may include the stratification shape of society as well.

II. EXPECTATIONS AND DEMANDS OF SCHOOLS

The feeling of crisis in education has started many people like President Bush and the state governors as well as others talking about how to improve schools. Most schools are being encouraged to develop school improvement projects which generally includes a list of missions and goals for schools to fulfill just as President Bush's summit on education produced a list of goals. American society, however, needs to decide on what exactly is the purpose of schools before mission statements and goals can be prepared.

The very nature of education creates a struggle over which values and ideas will be taught in schools. Education being the process by which adults transmit knowledge to their young. Education exists in all societies even if no formal education system exists and is needed because societies can only persist if they successfully provide their young with the ideals and values that make the society distinctive. Since no society is homogeneous, there is always a struggle over values and ideals by competing social groups (Hurn, 1985; 5-9). Americans like those of other societies have possessed different views on schools

and education. Thomas Jefferson expressed that schools should not be a universal panacea. Horace Mann felt that education played an "ameliorating role." He felt that education would vanquish crime, profit-making, and poverty. John Dewey saw education as a lever of social progress. (Ravitch, 1977; 8-12). As views on education change, expectations are just added to the list of things schools are to accomplish instead of eliminating conflicting expectations or substituting one for another leaving schools with more than they can handle.

American schools are expected to provide equality of opportunity, develop cognitive skills in students, teach our cherished values, and train students for work. As Hurn says, we may be expecting too much from schools. (Hurn, 1985; 21). Often times, these expectations work against each other. David Labaree makes a good argument for conflicting missions/expectations of schools (1989). Labaree argues there are three missions for schools; democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility. As schools carry out these missions, one mission cancels another and vice versa making it impossible for schools to fulfill all three.

Democratic equality was established by the founding fathers of the high school. High schools were to provide political and moral training. At the turn of the century, high schools became regional comprehensive public schools.

In the past few decades, expectations have grown to expect everyone to graduate. Along with this expectation came pressure on teachers to make sure students graduated. Unfortunately, some students even get through without learning anything.

Social efficiency became important in the twentieth century. This is the view that schools should provide students the skills necessary in the job market. In order to attain this, schools had to change emphasis on producing republicans to producing workers which nils the mission of democratic equality. Social efficiency also leads schools away from comprehensive education, because vocational education lends itself to tracking. Tracking places students into a specific curriculum like vocational education or college preparatory early on in their education. If students are tracked they do not receive the same education.

Through tracking, schools develop a stratification system of their own which mirrors that of society. One way in which schools produce differential education is through the tracking system. When students reach high school, they are placed on a track. Different tracks are available--college prep., vocational ed., or business ed. An argument for tracks, is that they equalize students of the same age group which produces more homogeneous classrooms. Homogeneous classrooms are easier to teach.

Tracking also allows individuals to start training for the segment of the job market that they may wish to pursue later. (Dreeben, 1968; 22-23). On the other hand, students do not get the same education, and students at an early age must make a decision about their future. As Eitzen argues, students of the low track do not produce up to their potential, students of the high track develop attitudes of superiority, and tracks seem to follow the stratification system. Students of low-income families are placed disproportionately in low tracks (Eitzen, 1985; 500).

Social mobility came with the realization that a high school diploma gave students an advantage in the job market. This mission stresses the importance of the individual and not the economy. Students are encouraged to become educated in order to fill the better paying jobs of society and not necessarily the jobs available. If all the students were well educated and college bound, they would be competing for the limited number of good jobs in society. Studying hard and obtaining a college degree helps students get ahead, only because not everyone does this. This undermines equality and, therefore, the mission of democratic equality. A high school diploma will only help students get ahead if they are distributed unequally (Labaree, 1989; 15-17). Therefore, once again all three missions can not be fulfilled.

Besides the problem of carrying out the above stated missions, schools also have to motivate students and try to teach in classrooms that are not conducive to active learning. Hurn explains that the problem of motivation is due to the fact that the reward for students is too far removed, just as the threat of lung cancer at age 50 or 60 does not stop people from smoking (Hurn 1985; 21-22). The promise of a better job four to eight years down the road is too far removed for many high school freshman to be motivated. Students are often blamed for not being motivated, but students have a hard time finding a need to learn what schools are teaching. As William Glasser states, "students do not learn by stimulus-response but rather because they perceive some need to learn the information that is being given to them." (Glasser 1985; 241-246). If students are to learn what schools want them to learn, then society must provide them with some use for it.

Besides having varied missions and expectations within schools, schools across the U.S. have little conformity in their curriculum which makes a universal purpose for schools more difficult. In Europe and Japan, national elites control the curriculum. Whereas, in the U.S., there is local control over the curriculum (Hurn, 1985; 26). This can be both good and bad. Elite control does not allow for equality of opportunity, because elitist views would dominate. Local control allows for communities to make

decisions for their students and allows for more opportunities. However, local control also means inequality because students in different school districts do not receive the same educational opportunities. Some school districts have more money or even better access to facilities. As Eitzen states, "the schools labeled 'lower class' tend to get a disproportionately smaller slice of the economic pie than 'middle class' schools" (Eitzen, 1985; 499).

U.S. schools also lack national examinations which are found in other countries. With national tests there is more conformity in the curriculum because teaching is geared towards the test. The U.S., therefore, has less conformity in the curriculum (Hurn, 1895; 27).

This lack of conformity in the curriculum is viewed as a problem by many. There seems to be many people in support of a more centralized nationalized educational system. Hirsch (1987) agrees that conformity in the curriculum is needed. Hirsch contends that students are lacking basic knowledge to be culturally literate in American society today. Hirsch appeals for a nationalized education system which mandates a move back to the basics. He has even gone as far as to make a list of what every American needs to know. On the other hand, a back to basics move would be saying that schools do not teach the basics. The problem is not that the schools do not teach the basics, but that

students do not learn the basics. Students do not learn the basics because of pressures from outside of education which influence present methods of teaching and current beliefs held by educators like tracking.

Tracking, which is widely practiced by most high schools today, is probably the most decisive factor in who will learn what. Students are sorted into different tracks. If a student is tracked into a vocational or technical track, it is almost certain that he will not have an opportunity to learn the basics--Hirsch's list. A student on the college preparatory list will definitely go over more items on "the list." Schools are training students to fit into present roles in society. Putting all the vocational tracked students into academic classes would not be the answer either. Under current structures, society, schools, and vocational students do not perceive a need to learn this information. Although an argument against a nationalized curriculum and Hirsch's list can be made, there is a trend among educators to support Hirsch's idea of a nationalized system.

Schools do strive for excellence, however, due to the varied expectations and demands placed on schools, the product is somewhat less than excellent. Hurn's explanation of varied levels of students is a good example. Hurn claims that U.S. schools strive for excellence but due to the various levels of students mediocrity or low standards are

the outcome. Most students cannot attain the criteria of excellence. Instead of failing half of the students, evaluation is determined by achievement of the majority (Hurn, 1985; 30).

Despite the many varied demands on schools, the role of socialization still comes through strong. Besides teaching students to read and write, schools teach students how to behave in society. In a study done by Remmers and Radler 75-80 percent of a nationwide sample of high school students liked school, but only 14 percent viewed acquiring "academic background" as "the most important thing that young people should get out of high school." 72 percent said, "knowing how to get along with people," "understanding our society," and "acquiring a sense of discipline and responsibility" were real goals. Another 14 percent rated vocational skill first. In Roper's survey of the adult population only 13 percent chose the development of an "academic background" as an important objective (Tannenbaum, 1962; 6). Even among the general public, the objective of schools is to provide students with a practical education in which they will be able to fit into society.

There is a desire in American schools to train students in practical skills. U.S. students are more likely to study business English, bookkeeping, typing, or driver's education than foreign language, calculus, physics, chemistry, and biology than most European or Japanese students. Through

this choice in curriculum, the U.S. clearly tends to put more emphasis on practical skills and less in the arts and sciences (Hurn, 1985; 25-26).

The educational product may not be up to par but producing a product is hard to do when the process and precise goals are not agreed upon. Schools are expected to do too much in American society today. They must provide political and moral training, as well as, equality of students, social mobility, and practical skills. In order to understand the purpose and goals of schools, a good understanding of the role of schools is needed.

III. ROLE OF SCHOOLS: DEBASING THE MYTH



'INTO THE BUS, OFF THE BUS, INTO THE BUS, OFF THE BUS — MAN, WHAT AN EDUCATION!'
(Carnoy, 1977)

Schools are believed to be an opportunity for social mobility--the great equalizer. This, however, can be argued to be false. It can be well documented that the U.S. has a history of inequalities in education which are related to the class structures of society. The U.S. depends heavily on education to properly socialize its members and not to upset the status quo. Samuel Bowles claims that inequalities in education are found in the class structure and are typical of capitalist societies.

Although the unequal distribution of political power serves to maintain inequalities in education, the origins of these inequalities are to be found

outside the political sphere, in the class structures itself and in the class subcultures typical of capitalist societies. (Carnoy, 1977; 39).

According to Martin Carnoy there are two kinds of ruling-class educational reforms. One is the ruling class has a vision of how society should be and tries to achieve it through schools. Carnoy uses the example of the British in West Africa. "Schooling was one of the tools by which the British hoped to convert Africans into the new mold" (Carnoy, 1977;362). The second is to assimilate or socialize people into accepting roles. Carnoy says this was the case with the U.S. reform begun by Horace Mann. It was designed to assimilate the masses into a new economic structure (Carnoy, 1977; 362-363).

Samuel Bowles says the defense for modern society is that the "equalizing effects of education can counter the disequalizing forces inherent in the free-market system" (Carnoy, 1977; 38). Bowles argues, however, that (1) schools in the U.S. evolved to provide a mechanism for social control and social stability; (2) as economic importance of skilled workers and well-educated labor has grown, inequalities in education have become more important in reproducing class structure; (3) the U.S. school system is pervaded by class inequalities; and (4) unequal control over school boards and decision-making bodies is not a sufficient explanation of inequalities (Carnoy, 1977; 38-39). The role of schools can be seen from three

different perspectives; history, education, and through the structural inequalities of education.

HISTORY OF EDUCATION

Understanding the history of education in the U.S. is important to understanding the role of education in contemporary society. The U.S. has had controversy over how to report the history of education--how the history is to be recorded and what is considered important. Harold Silver explains that both British historians and Americans in the past have represented a distorted view of education. Education history was that of policy formation and education of a few. There was no social history. The education of large numbers of people were not reported--women, minorities, lower class...(Silver, 1983; 17-24). Silver continues by explaining that current historians have linked education to contemporary issues.

American historians found in the common school a necessary explanation of twentieth-century industrial democracy. British historians have found in the elementary school and its surrounding legislation and policies and explanation of the development of twentieth-century welfare state democracy (Silver, 1983; 22).

Diane Ravitch explains, that conservatives view reforms as producers of mediocrity, and the liberals see schools as not doing enough to produce equality (Ravitch, 1977; 5-6).

The history of education is understood differently depending on the interpreter. In histories of American schools, schools can be seen as champions of excellence despite the barriers in the way. Schools can also be viewed from the opposite extreme as tools of capitalists and needed to produce workers of all social classes. Bailyn says history of education has been poorly betrayed because it looks at education as the champion of democracy (Ravitch, 1977; 22-23). Some say this is the history of bureaucratic success of schools and not of the students. Radical Revisionists, on the other hand, say, "American schools have been an intentional, purposeful, failure and an integral part of the larger failure of American society." (Ravitch, 1977; 36). Education has been used to produce workers needed by the capitalists. Education is used to socialize and maintain the status quo in an intentional deliberate way. Liberals say that failures are due to good intentions whereas radicals say failures are endemic (Ravitch, 1977; 36-37). Although education may not always be successful and inequities exist, it is not the intentions of educators. Despite good intentions of educators failures do persist.

Another point of argument between historians, is what should be included in the history of education. Some historians feel that only the education through institutions of schools should be looked at. Others feel that education is not accomplished solely through schools and other things

should be included. Cremin argues that other agencies are of importance to education while Butts says Cremin is a "culturist." He claims that mixing other things in makes the view of education dim (Ravitch, 1977; 25-27).

Keeping in mind these shortcomings, the history of schools is still insightful. The education revolution began earlier and developed longer in the U.S. Out of this the "common school" was developed--a school which was publicly supported and attended by lower and middle class students. The public comprehensive high school was a U.S. innovation (Hurn, 1985; 77).

Around World War I, classical academies developed into comprehensive high schools. In 1910, less than 15% of those aged 14-17 were enrolled in high schools. By 1940, over 75% were enrolled, and high school graduation was realistic for half the population. After World War II, high school graduation exceeded 85% of all students. The meaning of formal education had changed from elite to the mass learning of the three "R's". Learning used to be mainly in the arts and sciences. Today less than half of the U.S. college graduates are associated in this category. Business which was not even offered before 1930 is the most common major (Hurn, 1985; 78-79).

Prior to the industrial era schools were not in as much demand. With cottage industries, education, skills, and trades were passed down. With the introduction of

industry, workers went outside of the home to work and skills were not passed down as they once were. People no longer trained their own kids. Society did need, however, literate workers. As Child labor became more exploitive, formal education was stressed. In 1870, there was a greater need of white collar workers. John Dewey advocated progressive education and useful skills. 1961 brought increasing automation and lots of jobs in range of high specialization. Higher education became, therefore, more specialized and vocational (Hurn, 1985; 80-83).

Talcott Parsons sees the increase in higher education as an evolutionary trend for greater knowledge. Durkheim says schools are unified moral education. They create a truly national society. Schools emancipate students from a local view. According to Durkheim, only schools can make citizens. Perhaps this is why schools developed quicker in the U.S. to help unify values of our large heterogeneous population (Hurn, 1985; 84-85).

Revisionist historians, however, have another view of schools. They see schools as a form of betrayal offering false promises. According to revisionists, the move to compulsory education was a moral crusade to reform the character of the poor. Bowles and Gintis say expansion related to the factory method of production (Hurn, 1985; 88-89). The purpose of schools was not to produce a more literate work force, but a work force that had good

character and was compliant. Employers referred to moral qualifications that schools were to produce rather than literacy.

As capitalist production changed, more white-collar jobs were needed which called for a different kind of workers--self-motivated with interaction skills. Therefore, new schools were devised. The comprehensive high school accommodated everyone. The lower class students were tracked into vocational education. Classical curriculum dominated the rest of the electives to provide interpersonal skills. Sports provided school loyalty and unity. (Hunn, 1985: 90-91).

SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

Most sociologists view education as a conservative force in American society. Education is a means of socializing and stratifying people into society. However, sociologists like historians disagree on the analysis of education and its relationship to society. There are two schools of thought in sociology when looking at the educational system--functional theories and conflict theories.

Functionalists see society as self-regulating. Society recognizes changing needs and adjusts. Revisionists--conflict--see society as shaped by capitalist

elites. Functionalists see the schools as "triumph of liberal values over ignorance and prejudice" (Hurn, 1985; 93). Revisionists say reforms will be sabotaged and promises betrayed (Hurn, 1985; 93). According to Hurn, there is some common ground between functionalists and revisionists. Both see schools shaped by a changing character of work. Schools socialize and unify society. The demands of equality and equality of opportunity shaped the school revolution. Societal changes effect the development of schools (Hurn, 1985; 94).

The functional perspective of education views the educational structure as necessary in the maintenance of opportunity for all. Eitzen explains that education provides the vital links between students and society. Education provides students the necessary skills they need to fit their place in job market (Eitzen, 1985; 509). Dreeben argues that in an industrial society, schooling is needed to maintain equity. If education is only offered to the privileged, than a wide gap between the wealthy and the poor would appear (Dreeben, 1968; 91-105).

The conflict perspective views the educational structure as maintaining the status quo. Bowles and Gintis say, "the social order comes first and the institution of education is structured to fulfill its needs rather than playing a decisive role in creating that order" (Bowles and Gintis, 229). Schools do not provide equal opportunity for

all students. The advantaged students have a greater chance to succeed.

Randall Collins compares the functional and conflict theories of education. He argues that conflict theories of education are more precise than functional theories. He claims that functional theories do not fit with the evidence.

Economic evidence indicates no clear contributions of education to economic development, beyond the provisions of mass literacy. Shifts in the proportions of more skilled and less skilled jobs do not account for the observed increase in education of the American labor force. Education is often irrelevant to on-the-job productivity and is sometimes counterproductive; specifically vocational training seems to be derived more from work experience than from formal school training. The nature of dominant student culture suggest means of training for work skills (Collins, 123).

The conflict theory claims education produces inequalities which is true of the American education system.

STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES OF EDUCATION

The American education system is best understood by examining the structural inequalities which are perpetuated. The impact of social stratification on education can be conceptualized in three ways--social class position as an independent variable, as a dependent variable. Social stratification as an independent variable is the impact that

one's social class position has on student achievement. Schools are set up in such a way as to benefit children of the middle and upper classes. As Eitzen states, the language used in schools, as well as, the curriculum, teaching methods, and placement tests are geared for the middle class. Little is done to accommodate the poor classes (Eitzen, 1985; 498-499).

Bernstein found the same to be true. Middle class students tend to do better in school than working class students, because they have better language usage. Bernstein found that there are two basic languages--a public language and a formal language. The formal language is better at communicating complex connections between persons, objects, time and situations. Formal language is also better at communicating statements of feeling, whereas public language is more likely to use nonverbal means. The middle class is at an advantage, because they can use both languages while the working class is restricted to one (Dreeben, 1968; 53-54)

The amount of parent's education is also related to student's motivation. Students do better if parents attach importance to a college degree. Hyman did a study with differential emphasis on a college education. He asked 3,000 adults of various education levels if they recommended a college education. Seventy-two percent of the parents with a college education recommended a college education.

Fifty-two percent of high school educated parents did, and only thirty-six percent of grammar school educated parents recommended a college education (Tannenbaum, 1962; 17-18).

Godfrey Hodgson explains that traditionally education was thought to be able to solve inequality, but the Coleman Report concluded that the role of schools may be exaggerated. Christopher Jencks picked four major points from the report:

- (1) Most black and white Americans attended different schools.
- (2) Despite popular impressions to the contrary, the physical facilities, the formal curricula, and most of the measurable characteristics of teachers in black and white schools were quite similar.
- (3) Despite popular impressions to the contrary, measured differences in schools' physical facilities, formal curricula, and teacher characteristics had very little effect on either black or white students' performance on standardized tests.
- (4) The one school characteristic to which poor black children were denied access: classmates from affluent homes.

Coleman concluded that family background must be accounted for in the variation of student achievement (Stub, 1975; 36). Family background appears to play more of a part in student achievement than schools do.

Another impact of one's social class, is the way schools sort students. Sorting is supposed to be done by academic ability, but one's social class has a bearing too. As Eitzen states, "The sorting is done with respect to two

different criteria: the child's ability and his or her social class background" (Eitzen, 1985; 494). Bowles and Gintis found, "that those in the lowest 10 percent in socio-economic background with the same average IQ scores as those in the highest 10 percent will receive an average of 4.9 fewer years of education" (Eitzen, 1985; 495).

Social stratification as the dependent variable is an examination of how the education process impacts the stratification system. As well as socializing students, schools produce students who will fit into the various slots/positions in the stratification system of society. Bowles and Gintis show that, "schools are structured to produce workers who have certain technical skills, to be sure, but who also have the social skills and proper motivation to participate as subordinates in hierarchical and repressive work structures" (Bowles and Gintis, 230). At an early age, students are taught not to question the way things are but to accept them as right. Eitzen states, "There is always an explicit or implicit assumption in American schools that the American way is the only right way" (Eitzen, 1985; 484).

Harry Gracey explains that kindergarten is an important step to the socialization process. It is the preparation for the schooling to come. Children are drilled and trained to fill the routine of the school taking spontaneity and creativity out of the school day. Gracey states,

Kindergarten, therefore, can be seen as preparing children not only for participation in the bureaucratic organization of large modern school systems, but also for the large-scale occupational bureaucracies of modern society (Stub, 1975; 95).

Michael Apple talks about the "hidden curriculum"--things that are implicitly taught and not usually stated in the teacher's goals and objectives (Stub, 1975; 269). He claims that schools are maintainers of society because they do not teach about conflict but rather the acceptance of the way things are (Stub, 1975; 270). Dreeben states that schools, occupation, and politics in the U.S. work together. Education allows students to accept "the occupational and political institutions which contribute to the stability of an industrial society" (Stub, 1975; 272). Apple says,

Students in most schools and in urban centers in particular are presented with a view that serves to legitimate the existing social order since change, conflict, and man as creator as well as receiver of values and institutions are systematically neglected (Stub, 1975; 285).

Tom Paxton's song "What Did You Learn in School Today" portrays the perspective of what children learn in school.

I

What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
I learned that Washington never told a lie,
I learned that soldiers seldom die,
I learned that everybody's free,
And that's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.

II

What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
I learned that policemen are my friends,
I learned that justice never ends,
I learned that murderers die for their crimes,
Even if we make a mistake sometimes,
And that's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.

III

What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
I learned our government must be strong,
It's always right and never wrong,
Our leaders are the finest men,
And we elect them again and again,
And that's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.

IV

What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
What did you learn in school today,
Dear little boy of mine?
I learned that war is not so bad,
I learned about the great ones we have had,
We fought in Germany and in France,
And someday I might get my chance,
And that's what I learned in school today,
That's what I learned in school.

Besides the stratification system within schools created by tracking, schools are not all equal and do not provide equal opportunities. Schools are run and financed by local control. People tend to live in neighborhoods of similar socio-economic status. Schools, therefore, are not of equal facilities nor are they financed equally. As Eitzen states, "the schools labeled 'lower class' tend to

get a disproportionately smaller slice of the economic pie than 'middle class' schools" (Eitzen, 1985; 499).

As the demands on schools increase, the more schooling a person needs increases as well. The U.S. has become a credential society. As more people receive degrees, the level of the degree as a job qualification increases also. Education is another means of stratifying people.

Randall Collins claims that the education system is a means of control and of monopolization by the Anglo-Protestant bourgeoisie (Collins, 1979; 79). According to Collins, more education does not make better workers or more productive workers. Education is used to raise the status of a profession and to form a "Barrier of socialization between practitioners and layman" (Collins, 1979; 17).

Most skilled workers acquire skills on the job. A lot of graduates find jobs outside of specialties. The purpose of schools has become to achieve grades with the minimum of learning. Promotions tend to be based on informal ties rather than performance (Collins, 1979; 14-31).

Society is complaining about the quality of education, yet the credential not the amount of knowledge is the most important criteria many times in the job market. Examples of knowledge not being the most important can be seen in the history of education. In the mid 1800's, Katz states that knowledge was secondary to the morality education of the

workers (Katz, 1971; 32-33). Once again, the importance of education clearly seems to be to stratify people and then to train them to accept their role in society.

American education does not make the American dream easily accessible for everyone. It is rather a conservative force in American society which is a producer of the status quo. The education system does not have to be structured the way it is. There are other options.

IV. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

Data shows that students are not prepared or have not learned what they need to be totally literate in today's society. Why is it that public education does not work for the majority of students? Inequities in society effect education. Students come to school with different levels of preparation. The problem of schools is not recognizing these inequities but dealing with them. Inequities are an institutionalized part of education. Schools acknowledge that there are inequities in education, but instead of working for equality of outcomes, schools perpetuate society by turning out a few achievers, some average students, and several underachievers. Schools teach to the top third of the students. Traditionally, the Bell Curve has been acceptable in which one third of the students do well, one third of the students do average, and one third of the students do below average. Under this belief, two thirds of the students are not doing well. New methods of teaching such as mastery learning practice the belief that all students can learn well. Traditionally, grades are competed for as if there are only a certain amount of A's to be

given. Under mastery learning, everyone can get an A and is encouraged to do so.

Why are new teaching techniques not used widely? Education is a secondary institution and a product of primary institutions like the economy. In the U.S. capitalism does not strive for equity among all. Schools produce people to fit into a capitalistic society where competition is stressed and all will not succeed. In schools the rhetoric of equality is in place but not practiced. Education does not provide for equality because the structures of society do not provide for equality.

The first thing schools must do is shift their focus from the individual to the institution. As Benjamin S. Bloom states,

Researchers who were at one time concerned about providing equality of educational opportunity for students now speak of learning conditions that can bring about equality of educational outcomes for students (Bloom, 1980; 3).

Bloom continues to say that schools must look at variables that can be changed rather than those that cannot. Time vs. time-on-task is an example. Schools cannot change the time available for learning, but they can change the time spent on active learning.

Another changeable variable is intelligence vs. cognitive entry. Schools tend to use intelligence and aptitude tests to determine whether or not students will do well. In reality, these have nothing to do with

achievement. Cognitive entry levels do pertain to achievement. Prior knowledge is needed to learn particular subjects.

Another ideology to be questioned is testing. Testing is used to determine how much a student has learned what is necessary to continue on to the next task. What would be wrong with allowing a student to correct his mistakes and retest to insure learning. If a student has not learned what is necessary and moves on just because time is up, then failure becomes compounded. The student will have less of a chance to do well on the next task, because he has not learned the previous task and the process continues.

Yet another changeable variable is teachers vs. teaching. The characteristics of a teacher are not as important as how the teacher goes about teaching. Things that a teacher can do to improve learning are cues, reinforcement, and participation. Cues tell students what they need to learn. Reinforcement and rewards, reinforce students when they are successful. Participation makes sure that students participate in learning.

The last changeable variable that Bloom suggests is parent status vs. home environment. Parent status cannot be changed, but schools can gain knowledge of the home environment and try to compensate. Educational programs can be offered for parents or parent involvement in schools can improve a student's achievement.

William Bennett and Frank Falk (1970) explain a new way to use teacher aids in school to gain better parent and community participation in schools. They describe teacher aides as a way to link schools with the people they serve. Hire the poor into the schools as teacher aides and encourage them to become teachers. Currently teacher aids are used in schools mostly for clerical work. They are not necessarily a part of the community nor are they usually encouraged to become teachers. Bennett says teacher aids could be used as a way of training community members to become teachers. As teacher aids are working in schools, they could be working on their teacher credentials. This may be one way of getting members of a community to work and participate in schools as well as fill the gap between middle-class trained teachers and underachieving minorities. Students may benefit from having teachers and aids who understand, live, and come from similar backgrounds as themselves.

A teaching methodology that incorporates many of the above changeable variables is mastery learning. Mastery learning believes that all students can learn well what schools want them to learn. In order to accomplish this goal, however, many of the existing beliefs must be changed. First of all is that there are not good learners and poor learners, rather fast learners and slow learners. Students

need to be given the time to learn. Mastery learning also allows for retesting.

Mastery learning has been successfully adopted by the Johnson City School District in New York. In Johnson City, student achievement is excellent and the staff believe they enable most students to achieve. Seventy-five percent of Johnson City students are six months or more above grade level of the California Achievement Test (CAT) by the time they finish eighth grade. Usually, a school would expect 41-42 percent of their students to score that high. The staff excel, because they follow a common instructional process and share common beliefs. These were not dictated but were developed by the total staff--teachers and administrators. The whole structure of the school had to change not just a part.

Many schools are following the latest research on how students learn and are trying to implement school improvement projects to be more cosmetic than real. Robert McNergney and Martin Haberman state, "In fact, the researchers state, having a school improvement program seems to result in higher quality inservice programs--and not much else" (McNergney and Haberman, 1987; 22). In order for school improvement projects to work, a change in current structures must take place.

Inservice for teachers is not enough, because teacher practices must fit into school policy. Teachers will not

take a chance in changing their methods without a change in the present structure, simply because they are made accountable to them. Under new methods of teaching, teachers are encouraged to alter things that are variable like time. For example, if a student does not achieve a certain goal in the allotted time then more time should be given to the student. The problem is, however, that the teacher is still responsible to the school administration to cover all the objectives of the course by the end of the semester or the year. Therefore, the teacher, who is pressured to complete all the course objectives, continues even though the student may not have learned the first objective of the class. Unfortunately, the student is then lost for the remainder of the semester or year.

Inequities in education can be seen in the United States. The inequities are linked with the stratification structure. Is there any hope for a more equitable system? Many people look to schools for the answer. The problem is, however, that in order for reforms to work, other institutions in society must also change. In order to solve the problems of schools, the problems of society at large must be addressed. Bowles explains,

My interpretation of the educational consequences of class culture and class power suggests that these educational reform movements failed because they sought to eliminate educational inequalities without challenging the basic institutions of capitalism (Carnoy, 1977: 66).

Ivan Illich advocates disestablishes schools. He claims that the social structure or bureaucracies define what our values are. Learning is not promoted in schools but rather certification is. The job market depends on length of attendance. In traditional society, structures were all linked together. "Education did not compete for time with work or leisure. Almost all education was complex, lifelong and unplanned" (Carnoy, 1977; 360). Illich says "...we must learn to estimate the social value of work and leisure by the educational give-and-take for which they offer opportunity" (Carnoy, 1977; 360).

Martin Carnoy disagrees with Illich that we should disestablish schools. Carnoy explains that we need schools to present a "egalitarian" society. What we need are liberation or free schools at least for the transition, period. Carnoy says, "'free' schools or 'liberation' schools may be the strongest element in decolonizing people in society and breaking down its hierarchical structures" (Carnoy, 1977; 373).

Free schools are similar to the views of Paul Freire. People must be made aware of their oppression (Carnoy, 1977; 373). Freire claims that the failure of many education programs come from accepted ideologies. He sees it as the ideology of "paternalism, social control, and non-reciprocity between experts and helpers" (Freire, 1973: XI). Freire says that dialogue between the learner and the

teacher is necessary (Freire, 1973; XII). What is needed is the education of "I wonder" not merely "I do" (Freire, 1973; 36).

Allen Graubard talks about the free schools movement and explains there are two forms of motivation behind the free schools--one political and one pedagogical. The political motive is to gain more community control over schools. This is usually found in Black communities. In these kind of free schools the curriculum is to gain consciousness of the minority group and it's struggle for equality. The pedagogical schools are mostly middle-class. Each child is allowed the freedom to develop individually developing their own consciousness.

Graubard does not see free schools alone as the answer to minority oppression, because the problems of schools are not the problems of schools alone but come from society. He says free schools can do good for some but only in small numbers. Real help must come from the society at large.

So, from this perspective, truly liberating educational reform that works for all children can only come with major social, political, economic, and cultural transformations that eliminate not only bad educational conditions but also the roots of those conditions in other institutions (Graubard, 1972; 371).

Jonathan Kozol criticizes free schools as they currently exist in the U.S. He explains that most free schools are for and attended by wealthy kids and although

they are there to learn about freedom that are not really doing so. He says,

The issue of "free choice" is of particular importance when we speak of schools that serve primarily children of rich people. It is simply dishonest to lead children to "experience" freedom if, in fact, they are not free. In an unjust nation, the children of the rich and powerful are not free in any way that genuinely matters if they are not free to know the price in pain and exploitation that their lives are built upon. To surround these children with the bright and whimsical gadgets sold by groups like Westinghouse and I.B.M. and E.D.C. while innocently pretending to ignore the fact that everybody in this high-tuition Free School is white-skinned, well-fed and middle-class, to offer anesthesia but to call it "freedom," to speak of "options" but to fail to tell the children of the unearned wealth that makes these kinds of options possible for them, and them alone, this does not seem to me to be an honest or a conscientious process (Kozol, 1972; 45).

The problem is they are given only the pretense of free choice. Their choices are limited to a certain framework.

Another problem according to Kozol is that although each free school is claiming to do their own thing, most of the free schools are doing the same kind of thing. The originality the free schools boast about does not exist nor does unbiased presentation. Parents and teachers unknowingly bias children by the clothes they wear, the gadgets they buy, and the structures they set up. Kozol says that even in the materials that the children are supposed to explore and research are not much different from mass magazines or TV.

Schools have institutionalized inequities. On the surface, schools appear to be places of opportunity and success, but the practices of schools do not produce this. Educators do not intentionally set out to sort and place students. These practices are institutionalized and occur without anyone taking notice. In order for changes to take place, the overall structure of schools must be revamped. Before this can happen someone must see a need. Pointing fingers will not work. It is not teachers, nor the curriculum, nor the students that are at fault. Schools serve society so until society perceives a need for change then schools cannot effectively change.

Schools are being blamed as the victim in today's society. Schools are told to educate our youth, but society does not really want all students to be equally educated. If schools educated for equality of outcomes, where would these students fit into American society as it exists today? American society does not provide for equality of all people, and until current structures change, schools will be fighting a losing battle. Convincing a student to learn when there is no future in it is extremely difficult. The purpose of schools is to educate students to accept and fit into American society. Under this premise, American schools are effective.

Peter McLaren claims schools need a critical pedagogy. Critical pedagogy empowers the powerless and transforms

inequalities. In critical education, "teachers must understand the role that schooling plays in joining knowledge and power, in order to use that role for the development of critical and active citizens" (McLaren, 1989; 160). McLaren says schools do not teach for empowerment but for technical skills (McLaren, 1989; 162). Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux make a distinction between schooling and education. Schooling is social control whereas education is a potential to transform society (McLaren, 1989; 115). Thus far American society has been schooling its citizens and is afraid to take the leap to education.

V. CONCLUSIONS: MAKING SCHOOLS WORK

A survey of the literature has shown that the American education institution is not producing up to the expectations being placed upon it whether it comes from the media, national committees, or the business world. When tests scores were compared with other countries, the U.S. scored low compared to other countries. However, when only the best students' scores in the U.S. were compared to those of other countries, they compared more favorably. What do these test scores really mean? Schools are not doing their job or are they? Rather than blaming education something about society can be learned. One of the biggest factors in how well a student will do is not how good the school is but rather the education and class status of the parents. As the middle class shrinks in American society so do test scores while the few on top continue to do well.

The expectations of schools are varied and contradicting. Many of the demands placed on schools come from problems in the structures of society outside of schools, but schools, nonetheless, are expected to be the

cure-all. Schools not only have to solve the problems of society, but they are expected to turn all students into middle class citizens working of course within the structures of society.

If schools were somehow to educate all or most of the students where would the jobs be? As it is good paying jobs with benefits are disappearing. Which comes first the job or the workers? Maybe, if the jobs were there, people would try to attain them. If schools were bold enough and able to educate the majority of students well, so that they were ready for "good" jobs before society supplied them, a revolution may be at hand.

More often than not, schools and society work together. If schools are not to blame for uneducated people than the individual is blamed. Poor and working class people are to blame for not training their children correctly. No consideration is given to the fact that it is hard to read to your children when you are working ten to twelve hours or more per day and still worried about feeding them.

Business in the U.S. seems to come out looking like the good guy, who just cannot find, enough good "educated" workers. The American schools or the people themselves are blamed for the U.S.'s inability to compete in the world market. Business and schools alike are part of the structure of the U.S. Business plays a large role in what the class structure of the U.S. is. Class status is

directly related to student achievement, yet, business wants to blame someone else instead of acknowledging its part in the blame, and its share of the responsibility for improvement. Sharing the responsibility is not just hosting seminars or sponsoring projects. The structures of society need to be reshaped before any real improvement can take place. For example, the social classes need to be equalized. As has been discussed, social class is directly related to student achievement. If social classes are equal, than students should achieve equally well.

Education is not the great equalizer. While some students are able to study hard and make something of themselves, most do not. Middle class students tend to do better than working class students. Schools perpetuate the stratification system of society. Schools and school employees do not intentionally sort students, but implicitly they do. The way students are taught and the things they are taught, teach students very early to be accepting of society and their place in it.

Even though so much is being said about the value of education and the importance of students to achieve, education has become less and less important as the U.S. becomes more and more of a credential society. What a person knows is not as important as the credential one obtains. Education has become another way to stratify people when race, gender, and religion are no longer

acceptable. The chance of a Black woman obtaining the credential needed to become a lawyer, a doctor, or a business executive is much less likely than a white middle class male.

There are alternatives or options for schools. Education has become more research or data based than it has been in the past. Schools are trying to reach more students providing success for all, but instead of better educated students, better inserviced teachers seem to be the product. Schools should and need to look into better ways of teaching--changing the variables they can change. A teacher cannot change a student's social class, but the time that student may need to obtain an objective can be varied. All this helps in small amounts yet the bulk of the problem still remains. Real school improvement will only occur when the structures of society are altered too.

American society needs to consider what education is. Education is more than entering and leaving school. Everything a person does is a part of education. Work and leisure time have to be considered as well.

Free schools or the idea of free schools are great. People need to become aware of the hierarchical structures around them. Free schools must, however, be presented in a "free" unbiased way which is difficult to do especially when they occur in such small numbers. The overall structure of

society overwhelms free schools, because students still depend so much on the outside structures of society.

Currently in American society, education is used to maintain U.S. society as it currently exists. Education is used to socialize and sort people. Education does not have to be the maintainer of the status quo but could serve to be the catalyst for change. First, however, education must stop being blamed for the education crisis. All the American institutions must be looked at for their role in this plight. And, finally, Americans must be ready for a change, because under the current structures of society, the crisis and inequities in education cannot be solved.

I would like to see schools change their curriculum to include a critical education. Critical education is questioning by the students where students are encouraged to disagree and to think for themselves. Conflict theories must be included. Students need to be made aware of the structures around them--most do not even understand social class. My personal experience as a secondary teacher has found that students asked about social class usually identify themselves as middle class whether or not they are. When questioned about working class, students are unsure of what it is and who would fit into it. Not only are students unsure of social class, they have no idea what the institutions of society are. Most think institution means mental hospital or some kind of hospital. Not knowing what

institutions are, students have no realization how the institutions of society work. All of these things need to be taught in a critical education.

Who should the students be? Not only does education not stop and start upon entering or leaving a school, students are not just between the ages of five to eighteen. American schools need to work to become more co-generational--including all ages of the community. If schools provided services for all ages, schools would receive more support at millage time. Parents, students, as well as older people of a community need to become more critically educated. The interaction of all ages is a start.

All members of the community should share in the education process. Students should be encouraged to seek information from members of the community to enlarge their perspective on what it is like to be in a war, on strike, or unemployed. Older people need to be made aware by younger ones of the changing work place young people are going to face and the fear they have of finding a job. All members of the community need to interact and discuss instead of getting wrapped up in issues which only benefit certain groups. Families with kids want money for schools, retired people want more money for senior services, businesses want tax breaks, all of which divide the community and keep them

from dealing with the real problem--the structures which the community are built on.

A critical education program should be piloted in the form of a community study. Critical education could be included in social science and humanity classes at all levels. The whole community as much as possible should be included and encouraged to participate. The community education program could offer group discussion classes in which critical theories and ideas are discussed. Incentives could be given to get adults to attend. Before and after the program has been implemented a community survey should be taken of people's attitudes towards the schools and what they feel should be done to improve them. My guess would be that people would be less critical of schools and more critical of society as a whole after the program than before. Getting people to be critical of society as a whole is the first step towards improvement.

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