

According to Structural Functionalism, schooling is essential to society in so that it sorts and sifts above average students from average and below average students. It does this in order to ensure that the more talented students rise to the top of the socio-economic status system. Another major role of structural functionalism is that it teaches the skills and norms of society. This theory believes that society must function together otherwise it will all fall apart. Therefore there needs to be some sort of system that instills all of the same beliefs and values in each member of the society, this is the school. This theory believes that those who will excel in society are those who have worked the hardest for their position. This is called meritocratic society, according to Hurn "this is a society where ability and effort count for more than privilege and inherited status" (Hurn 1995:45). Society needs the best and the brightest to function at the highest levels, therefore it gives its highest rewards to this same group of people. They will work harder than the average person to get into such a high position therefore they deserve the highest rewards. Another opinion of Hurn's is that society functions much better economically when there is more education. The more skills one acquires, all the much better for society as a whole. He also goes on to say that the more education there is the less likely that there will be much inequality. According to Hurn, "Human capital theorists see education as an investment" (Hurn 1995: 48). Those who feel that the benefits of college outweigh the money that they have to apply to go, are going to be the ones that rise to the top of the socio-economic pyramid.

Those who do not decide to further their education then are less deserving of the rewards that society has to offer. This is the basic fundamentals of the way functionalists see education.

Emile Durkheim feels that schools are there to teach morals to children. These morals are the ones that society has set up so that everyone is the same. These need to be taught at school rather than in the home, because there is too much bending of the rules in home and the school can function as a colder environment. In teaching these morals the schools are also teaching the children that they must become part of society, that they must have ties to society or else the child and society will break down. Durkheim thought that these were the most important things that a school could give to its children, a sense of belonging to something larger.

According to Parsons one of schools main functions is to socialize children by using the idea of commitments. There are two types of commitments, "commitment to the implementation of the broad values of society, and commitment to the performance of a specific type of role within the structure of society" (Parsons 1959:33). The more status one has the more education one attains according to Parsons. There is a process that is done in elementary school that picks the brightest student and puts them on the track to excel. This is carried out through all the years of schooling.

There are some problems that arise from the functionalist theory of education. The amount of skills that one learns in school actually is less important than the degree that one receives. One could receive all A's in school and this would not show anything, it is the fact that they received a degree that means the most. Another problem is that with meritocracy, it has been shown that those with parents of a high socio-economic status will do better in school than those with parents from a lower one. If everything is based on merit, wouldn't it be then that no matter where you started you all have the opportunity to excel. Another problem with this theory is that there is no way to close the gap between those students who come from poorer schools with those that come from schools that have more money.

