Course Project for ED8111

The Historical and Socio-Cultural Analysis of Education

by

Richard Bloodworth

ED8111

December 2003

Richard Bloodworth
P.O.Box 78123
Atlanta, GA 30357
admin@rbloodworth.com
Dr. Behrooz Sabet

Historical and socio-cultural analyses of major educational trends and issues.

Listed here are some of the most influential socio-cultural trends and issues and their main proponents: socio-cultural: cultural materialism, Steward: cultural ecology, Marx: socialism or historical materialism, Skinner: behavioral psychology, reductionism. Hegel: dialectic materialism. Darwin: evolution. Freud: psychology. Smith: capitalism. Schopenhauer: will and idea. Plato: rationalism. Aristotle: empiricism. White: cultural evolution. Sartre: existentialism.

As related to the environment, culture, and society, the three levels of cultural materialism are the superstructure, the structure, and the infrastructure.

The infrastructure consists of modes of production (i.e. food production) and modes of reproduction (population control). The structure level involves domestic economy (i.e. micro economics) and political economy (i.e. macro economics). The superstructure level involves behavior (i.e. art, music, dance, literature, advertising, rituals, sports, games, hobbies,and science) and mentality (i.e. values, emotions, traditions) Harris (1979)..

The factors of socio-cultural analysis integrate and incorporate the environment, culture, and society to determine how best to facilitate plans for a better society through education. The physical and sociological model of society is represented by cultural materialism which consists of three levels: superstructure, structure, infrastructure (Harris, 1968).

In cultural materialism, the infrastructure consists of modes of production (i.e. food production) and modes of reproduction (population control). The structure level involves domestic economy (i.e. micro economics) and political economy (i.e. macro economics). The superstructure level involves behavior (i.e. art, music, dance, literature, advertising, rituals, sports, games, hobbies,and science) and mentality (i.e. values, emotions, traditions) (Harris, 1979).

Other descriptions of the socio-cultural foundations include Steward's cultural ecology, Marx's socialism or historical materialism, Skinner's behavioral psychology and reductionism, Hegel's dialectic materialism, Darwin's theory of evolution, Freud's theory of human psychology, Smith's capitalism, Schopenhauer's will and idea, Plato's rationalism, Aristotle's empiricism, White's cultural evolution, and Sartre's existentialism, to name a few.

Concerning the historical analysis of education, the methods that knowledge (in "Education Research" of 2003, the four areas of knowledge are listed as description, prediction, improvement, and explanation) is discovered or created can include accidental discoveries (Madame Curie and Radium, photography, etc.) as well as the use of the scientific method (hypothesis, experimentation, exploration, documentation, analysis, evaluation), reading, research and development, experimentation, experience, exploration, spiritualism, planned searches, introspection and inspiration, and intuition and creativity.

The problem with any study of history is that history is generally written by the victors so getting a well-rounded description of what really occurred can be difficult. Using quantitative and qualitative techniques to determine what occurred, and when, is based on recorded information that the researcher assumes is true. Historical research involves examining past events and, not only the facts, dates, and descriptions of those events, but also the interpretation of what occurred. According to Berg (1998) the reasons to pursue historical analysis is to uncover the unknown, answer questions, determine the relationship of the present to the past, record accomplishments of individuals and groups, to better understand our own culture as well as others' cultures, and by making life better for everyone today by understanding the past and not repeating the mistakes of the past.

Also, another difficulty with both historical and socio-cultural studies are the subjective/objective issues. Since all human perceptions are based on cultural relativism, finding unbiased interpretations of historical occurances and socio-cultural factors is not possible even if all of the research data and statistics are accurate.

A personal statement of one's educational philosophy that demonstrates a relationship to your knowledge of historical and socio-cultural events and analyses.

One problem within the educational system involves political philosophy: if most societies are called democratic then why don't the people govern the country by voting directly and democratically on issues rather than voting only for representatives who can then vote any way they choose after they are elected? When educating post-secondary or adult students (or even K-12 students to prepare them for being adults), how can the concepts of democratically controlled governments be introduced to them and how can they become directly involved in the execution of democratically determined plans?

In Adult Education for Social Change: From Center Stage to the Wings and Back Again, Thomas Heaney views adult education as participatory and as a tool for social change and where educational progressivism the modern approach to educating the public. " 'Adult education turns out to be the most reliable instrument for social actionists' since it assures that any action undertaken would be authentically democratic" (Brookfield 1984). Eduard Lindeman, as influenced by John Dewey, considers adult education to be intertwined with democracy, social action, and control by people over their daily decisions. To Lindeman, adult education equals social change, a method to create good and productive citizens. Even if education is viewed as a "great selector" rather than a "great equalizer" (p. 4), each person can, as a result of education, find their niche, based on their abilities and merits, within a democratic society. The concept of using the educational system to implement a direct democracy is closely connected with the ideas expressed by Heaney, Miles Horton, Paulo Freire, and Jack Mezirow since their approach is to empower the populace through education in order to create a democratic society. It is necessary to have an educated public in order to have a direct democracy work efficiently so democracy is dependent the educational system to survive and prosper.

This is an important issue because how people live and how they are governed is what government, and indeed life, is all about and since all people want to live under democratic systems then they should be allowed, utilizing computer and Internet technology, to determine their laws and rule themselves.

The historical analysis of educational issues as related to democracy can involve discussions of the concept and history of democracy and democratic methods that have been used throughout history. Discussions can involve forms of education throughout history as well as how democracy has been implemented throughout history and its relationship to current educational issues. The discussions can involve forms of education throughout history as related to current educational issues and problems as influenced by the educational philosophies of Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget. The socio-cultural analysis can compare various societies and traditional cultures and how they have adapted to the principles of democracy as well as current socio-cultural and economic concerns. Historical and socio-cultural analyses of the educational system and its relationship to democracy can involve issues such as funding, curriculum, testing, traditional cultures, McDonaldization, globalization, standardization, capitalization, commercialization, and transience.

The changes in societies brought on by social movements and technologies, which are blurring the boundaries between nations and ideologies, and the use of planned social change using the components of agents, targets, and methods as well as the empirical-rational, normative-reeducative, and power-coercive change stagies used in affecting societal change can be explored in relation to the historical and socio-cultural analysis of issue of the democratization of society and the educational system.

A case study of an educational event or issue that reflects an historical and socio-cultural analysis.

Last year when I taught in China the curriculum and textbooks, as one might expect, originated from the centralized Chinese government. The organizational structure there is bureaucratic, centralized, and organized with orders originating from the upper echelon to be dispersed to all of the connecting institutions below in the structural hierarchy (from top to bottom or a vertical structure). The teachers are meant to dispense the government approved information and the student is meant to memorize the information whether they understand the information or not.

In what is called western culture, the organizational structure and its management has evolved along other lines. The philosophical influences on education of Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget and others as well as the historical and socio-cultural influences of socialism, capitalism, economics, behavioralism, reductionism, behavioralism, determinism, rationalism, empiricism, cultural evolution, and existentialism have produced a more decentralized educational system in the western world with a more horizontal, rather than vertical, management style and a more student-centered approach to education.

To borrow a quote from Dr. Sabet to illustrate the difference between the Chinese and the "western" approach to education and management structure, in the western cultures "the primary objective of educational leadership at all levels is to release the creative power of the individuals and encourage universal participation in consultation and decision-making. Effective leadership maintains a balance between centralization and decentralization. Centralization is necessary for direction and coordination. Decentralization is necessary for innovation and development. Excessive centralization results in unwarranted bureaucracy while excessive decentralization results in anarchy." (Sabet, 2003). In the western world there is a premium attached to self-fulfillment and creativity, reasoning, and understanding whereas in the authoritarian methods there is more importance placed on obedience, loyalty, and sacrifice to the group's requirements.

Now that I am teaching in Taiwan, I still experience the sometimes frustratingly bureaucatic approach to education but I am teaching in a private language school which was begun by some Americans in Taiwan (the first school where I taught was licensed by an American company but after the school became a very large the local owners broke away from the parent institution to become an independently owned school) and teaches using a school produced curriculum for the young students and for the older students, beginning at about the third grade, the curriculum is based on the Calvert system from Baltimore and Hunt Valley, Maryland, which began as a system to be used by parents for home schooling and which covers all subject areas. The system in Taiwan is more westernized than in China so the management structure of the schools is here somewhere between centralized and decentralTized.

Selection and critique of professional literature dealing with history of education and with its socio-cultural dynamics.

In his book The Americans: the Democratic Experience, Daniel J. Boorstein (1974) writes extensively on the American experience beginning in the 1800's up until the present time. In Book Three, A Popular Culture, Part Eight concerns some issues of education and mroe specifically, language, knowledge and the arts. Chapter , "A Higher Learning for All" (p. 478) and Chapter 53 concerns college and university education and Chapter 53, "Educating the Great Army of Incapables" (p. 490), is about the development of the philosophy of high school education in the United States of America.

In Chapter 52 Boorstin says "If there was to be a new American religion of Education, the universities were its cathedrals, just as high schools would later become its parish churches". And "if the prime aim of education was growth, then each man was a ladder unto himself. John Dewey's new democracy of facts meant also a new democracy of subjects" (Boorstin, 1974). So to prepare the citizenry for a democratic society, a democratic choice of subjects to taught was offered.

After the Civil War in the United States, there began the practice of giving federal land to institutions of higher learning so these land grants and other economic gifts, some from leading capitalists such as Rockefeller and Carnegie, caused colleges and universities to proliferate. This growth would begin to change the educational environment so that a great number of people had accuss to the university opportunities and systems.

In Chapter 53 the development of the high school system in the United States is explored, in particular the concept of free public high school. John Dewey's concept of New Education was his effort to make the scholl environment like the old "family farm where children learned by doing and by participating in common tasks". And he promoted the idea that "knowledge could be acquired, learning could be possessed, but growth was a process" (Boorstin, 1974). Dewey's ideals of progressive education changed the educational landscape and solidified the Americans' belief in the New Education that he proposed.

References:

Boorstin, Daniel J. (1974). The Americans: The Democratic Experience. New York: Vintage Books, Random House.

Bourne, R. (1917). Education and Living. New York: The Century Co.

Chomsky, N. (1994). Prospects for Democracy. Oakland: AK Press Audio.

Egan, Kieran. (2002). Getting It Wrong from the Beginning: Our Progressivist Inheritence from Herbert Spencer, John Dewey, and Jean Piaget. London: Yale University Press.

Nietzsche, F. (1983). Schopenhauer as Educator. In F. Nietzsche, Untimely Meditations. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Ravitch, Diane and Viteritti, Joseph P. (1997). New Schools for a New Century. London: Yale University Press. .

Stirner, M. (1967). The False Principle of our Education, or, Humanism and Reform. Colorado Springs: Ralph Melees Publisher.

Sylvia, M. (2003). Philosophy of Education. Retrieved Dec.10, 2003 from http://www.newton.mec.edu/Brown/TE/portfolio/my_philosophy.pdf

Tucker, R.C. (1978). The Marx-Engels Reader, Second Edition. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

Educational Historical Research:

Vernon Lee Sheeley, Historical Research Methods. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://ericcass.uncg.edu/research/sheeley.html

Digital History. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/index.cfm?

Arhs.net search engine and directory. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.arhs.net/related/historical+research

Other data bases for historical research. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.rhd.uit.no/nhdc/bases.html,

Historical Research and Resources in the Digital Age: Libraries and Institutional Cooperation. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.h-net.msu.edu/aha/1999/papers/CronkandSmith.html

What is Historical Research? Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.southalabama.edu/coe/bset/johnson/lectures/ch12.PDF

Courtland State University of New York. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.cortland.edu/history/research.html

Hansot, E. & Tyack, D. (1982). A usable past: Using history in educational policy, in A. Liberman & M. McLaughlin (Eds.), Policy making in education: Eighty-first yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education, (pp. 1-22). Chicago: The National Society for the Study of Education.

Finkelstein, B. (1992). Education historians as mythmakers, in G. Grant (ed.). Review of research in education, 18 (pp. 255-297). Washington, DC: American Educational Research Association.

Warren, D. (1990). The federal interest: On the history of educational reform in the United States, in J. Murphy (ed.). The Educational Reform Movement of the 1980s: Perspectives and Cases. Berkeley: McCutchan.

Socio-cultural analysis:

Guidelines for Socio-cultural Analysis. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.iadb.org/sds/doc/IND-JRenshawE.PDF

Socio-Cultural Analysis. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://filebox.vt.edu/business/marketing/bao/MKTG4704/im7-11.PDF

Scholar register. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.adm.u-tokyo.ac.jp/IRS/ScholarList/ByFunction/func6953_e.html, Scholar register

Socio-cultural Theory and its Applications to Educational Practice and Research. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/~gwells/SocCult.html

Soo, Kyung Lim. Cultural Materialism. Retrieved October 8, 2003 from http://www.indiana.edu/~wanthro/mater.htm

Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of Culture. (1979). New York: Random House.

Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology. (1996). New York: H. Holt and Company

Cultural Anthropology. (1995). 4th ed. New York: Harper Collins College Publishers

Murphy, Martin F. and Maxine L. Margolis, Eds.(1995). *Science, Materialism, and the Study of Culture*. Gainesville: Univ. Press of Florida.

Harris, Marvin. (1968). *The Rise of Anthropological Theory*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.

Harris, Marvin. (1979). *Cultural Materialism: The Struggle for a Science of culture*. New York: Random House.