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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PURPOSE OF EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper identifies and thoroughly explains the diversity of educational experiences children have (examples are given). It goes on to identify and deeply explain how sociological functions of education affect education in their context (specific examples are given). Finally, it elucidates and comprehensively discusses the function and purpose of schooling and education.

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Introduction:-

Identification and thorough explanation of the diversity of educational experiences children have (examples are provided):

Children around the world have extremely different experiences with regards to education. This is due, but not limited to a multiplicity of factors including: culture, wealth, religion, race, gender, geographic location, regional ideologies and social influences (Mongateko, 2016). In some countries education is free, even up to and including the degree level (e.g. Finland and Norway). In others, it must be paid for, even at the primary stage (e.g. El Salvador and Ghana) (Schaffhauser, 2017). In China, education is paid for at all levels. There is however funding in place, to ensure that parents are not required to pay excessive amounts. Typically around 20 dollars per semester is expected. The funding is limited though and the better schools tend to charge more. This affects the quality of education available to students: it limits the poorer students' ability to get high quality education and have access to as many resources ("NCEE | Shanghai-China: System and School Organization", 2019). This backs up the sociological idea conflict theory (that education is in place to keep the poor poor). There is a counter argument that treating education as a business incentivises schools to push for high standards. This is short sighted and will ensure only the rich can afford the highest quality education ("Conflict Theory on Education | Sociology", 2019).

In affluent larger cities, class sizes are smaller, as such, students experience is better. They get more attention from the teacher and the class is easier to manage. Well managed classes are conducive to learning, thus, students in this environment are able to take more from the education they receive. In rural and poorer areas of China, students often have up to 100 peers in a class. Class sizes like this are extremely difficult to manage: students rarely get the level of attention and feedback they need to get the most out of their education (Bonesronning, 2003). This divide is more extreme when comparing public and international schools.

The top international schools often charge over 30000 USD per year. The class sizes are no bigger than 14 students. The standards held on teachers are extremely high, this ensures they are extremely proficient at their jobs, as such the performance of students is also high. The students in these schools have access to technology and the classrooms are modern and well equipped ("Benefits of International Schooling", n.d.).

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Identification and thorough explanation of how sociological functions of education affect education in their context (specific examples are provided):

Sociological theories of education are said to fit well into Functionalism, Conflict Theory and Symbolic Interactionism (Ballantine & Hammack, 2009). Functionalism is focused on a few areas, these include: socialization, social integration, social placement and social/cultural innovation. This is embodied in the Chinese education system in the form of schools encouraging students to be conforming and respectful. Functionalists tend to see education as providing unity and a togetherness: this is linked to the political set-up of China (Veugelers, 2011). It affects education in China in a positive way, this is visible in that education has some funding and is made accessible to all (though the quality is limited in certain areas). It is however argued that this has led to many higher education establishments not being conducive to teaching critical thought. Finally, Symbolic Interactionism is the school of thought that is focused on the social interactions which occur in and around school areas. This is not a key area of interest in countries like China ("16.2 Sociological Perspectives on Education", n.d.).

There are huge amounts of pressure put on students with regards to testing. Chinese culture supports high family expectations, which is partly contributory to this. Another reason is, the performance and structure of the South Korean education system has been idealized by Chinese educational professionals (Lenson, 2017).

Identification and thorough discussion of the function and purpose of schooling and education:

The purpose of education and schooling is elucidated by the sociological theories discussed thus far. Connecting them lightly to Paulo Freire's philosophy, that education is a project of cultural/political liberation and societal reform (Freire, 2018), is key. The focus should be on teaching critical thinking skills to students/developing functional and well-rounded individuals that can integrate well into society. Promoting ethical values and creating autonomous students should also be one of the goals. This is well embodied by humanistic educational philosophies such as the hidden curriculum, which is underlying the formal curriculum, considers moral behavior and developing traits like proper team working skills (Martimianakis & Hafferty, 2016). These concepts also need to be connected to John Dewey, an American educational, psychological and social theorist, who believed the purpose of education was not communication of knowledge, but of social experience. He considered that education needs to take responsibility for social change (Shawal, nd). This combination of ideas works to benefit both society as a whole and the student as an individual.

There is however still the issue regarding the extreme pressure on students. Something missing from education on almost a global scale is promoting mindfulness. There is a global epidemic of mental health (arguably as a result of the test orientated high pressure schooling environment) (Hurley, 2016). Teaching students how to be mindful, and practice methods of peaceful and logical thought would be of huge benefit.

All of these points considered, the purpose of education is to benefit society and the individual, it should act as a driving force to create well rounded critical individuals who are able to take care of themselves mentally, as well as physically, all whilst operating as a functional member of the society.

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