Mr. Nelson – Sociology 101

Cnelson@sewanahakschools.org

Cne



**Assignment**: Write a 2 page paper, based on the documentary and article, but which discuss the larger themes of education listed on page 2.

**Materials:**

* Little Rock Arkansas: 50 Years Later (HBO documentary, viewed in class)
* “A Tale of Two Schools” (New York Times) <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/05/04/magazine/tale-of-two-schools.html?_r=0>
* The 3 primary sociological views of education (attached on the next page)

**Task**: The documentary we are going to watch (essentially a supplement to our class content/notes/discussions), offers numerous examples of both the manifest and latent functions of education, as a sociologist (or several different sociologists) would perceive them. These manifest and latent functions are interpreted differently, however, based on the sociological perspective involved in their analysis. In your case, I want you to use all 3 perspectives to write a paper that includes the following:

1. Offer **2 (or more) specific examples** (scenes or interactions) from the documentary in which you see the Functionalist Perspective in action (see notes below). Do this by briefly describing the scene (e.g., the scene in which the principal instructs the students to ‘make a new friend’), followed by a detailed explanation of why that scene is evidence of a particular sociological viewpoint (
2. Repeat this with the other 2 perspectives (conflict theory and interactionism), with the same instructions as below.

So, in total, you should describe 6 different scenes (2 for each of the 3 perspectives, totaling 6). Remember that the film is simply a resource for you to offer evidence to me that you understand the themes in class (like your lyrics assignment), NOT for you to only focus on the film itself. It is not only appropriate, but expected, that you explore themes from our other units of study including (but not limited to):

* Cultural values
* Race and ethnicity
* Race and social class
* \*Most or All of the topics from education (e.g., tracking, the ‘hidden curriculum’, etc.)

3 Primary Sociological Views on Education:

\*Remember, like any social science, these are only theories, or different ways social scientists (in our case, sociologists) examine societal institution to look for answers to basic questions.

1. Functionalist Theory (an analysis at the macro-level) – focuses on the purpose of having an educational system (it’s ‘function’). These purposes include transmission of information (subjects like math, science, social studies, etc.) as well as things like the transmission of cultural values to students (such as achievement, hard work, patriotism, individuality, competition, and others) Therefore, children in America receive rewards for following schedules, following directions, meeting deadlines, and obeying authority. In addition, functionalists believe that schools (particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries) are performing functions historically left for the family.
2. Conflict Theorists (an analysis at the macro-level, often called the ‘Marxist’ view) – focuses on the belief schools reproduce the social inequalities of a societyand preserving the power of those who dominate society (e.g., the ‘power elite’ – see Mills, 1956). Conflict theorists argue that schools track (or sort) students along distinct class and ethnic lines and that schools train those in the working classes to accept their position as a lower-class member of society. Conflict theorists call this role of education the **“hidden curriculum.”** First, property taxes fund most schools; therefore, schools in affluent districts have more money. Such areas are predominantly white. They can afford to pay higher salaries, attract better teachers, and purchase newer texts and more technology. Students who attend these schools gain substantial advantages in getting into the best colleges and being tracked into higher-paying professions. Students in less affluent neighborhoods that do not enjoy these advantages are less likely to go to college and are more likely to be tracked into vocational or technical training. They also represent far higher numbers of minority students. Conflict theorists contend that not only do the economics favor the white affluent, but so does school testing—particularly IQ testing, which schools can use to sort students. They argue that the tests, which claim to test intelligence, actually test cultural knowledge and therefore exhibit a cultural bias.
3. Symbolic Interactionists (an analysis at the micro-level) –limit their analysis of education to what they directly observe happening in the classroom. They focus on how teacher expectations influence student performance, perceptions, and attitudes. Some famous studies of this include the Rosenthal/Jacobson Experiment and the Ray Rist experiments (check your notes). Both experiments deal with the concept of self-fulfilling prophecies.