Lecture 7: Education

Education is a social science that encompasses teaching and learning specific skills. Practicing teachers in the field of education use a variety of methods and materials in their instruction to impart a curriculum. There has been a plethora of literature in the field of education that addresses these areas. Such literature addresses the facets of teaching practices to include instructional strategies, behavior management, environmental control, motivational strategies, and technological resources. However, the single most important factor in any teacher’s effectiveness is the interaction style and personality of the teacher, for the quality of their relationships with the students provides the impetus for inspiration. The best teachers are able to translate good judgment, experience, and wisdom into the art of communication that students find compelling. It is their compassion for varied human qualities, passion, and the creativity of potential that assists teachers to invigorate students to higher expectations of themselves and society at large. The goal of education is the growth of students so that they become productive citizens of a dynamic, everchanging, society. Fundamentally, the imparting of culture from generation to generation (socialisation) promotes a greater awareness and responsiveness through social maturity to the needs of an increasingly diversified society.

Overview

It is widely accepted that the process of education begins at birth and continues throughout life. Some believe that education begins even earlier than this, as evidenced by some parents’ playing music or reading to the baby in the womb in the hope it will influence the child’s development.

The word ‘education’ is often used to refer solely to formal education (see below). However, it covers a range of experiences, from formal learning to the building of understanding through day to day experiences. Ultimately, all that we experience serves as a form of education.

Individuals can receive informal education from a variety of sources. Family members and society have a strong influence on the informal education of the individual.

Origins of the Word “Education”

The word “education” is derived from the Latin educare meaning “leading out” or “leading forth”. This reveals one of the theories behind the function of education – of developing innate abilities and expanding horizons.
Formal Education

Formal education occurs when society or a group or an individual sets up a curriculum to educate people, usually the young. Formal education can become systematic and thorough. Formal education systems can be used to promote ideals or values as well as knowledge and this can sometimes lead to abuse of the system.

Life-long or adult education has become widespread in many countries. However, ‘education’ is still seen by many as something aimed at children, and adult education is often branded as ‘adult learning’ or ‘lifelong learning’.

Adult education takes on many forms from formal class-based learning to self-directed learning. Lending libraries provide inexpensive informal access to books and other self-instructional materials. Many adults have also taken advantage of the rise in computer ownership and internet access to further their informal education.

Technology and Education

Technology has become an increasingly influential factor in education. Computers and associated technology are being widely used in developed countries to both complement established education practices and develop new ways of learning such as online education (a type of distance education). While technology clearly offers powerful learning tools that can engage students, research has provided no evidence to date that technology actually improves student learning.

History of Education

In 1994 Dieter Lenzen, president of the Freie Universität Berlin, said education began either millions of years ago or at the end of 1770. (The first chair of pedagogy was founded at the end of the 1770s at the University of Halle, Germany.) This quote by Lenzen includes the idea that education as a science cannot be separated from the educational traditions that existed before.

Education was the natural response of early civilizations to the struggle of surviving and thriving as a culture, requiring adults to train the young of their society in the knowledge and skills they would need to master and eventually pass on. The evolution of culture, and human beings as a species, has depended on this practice of transmitting knowledge. In pre-literate societies this was achieved orally, story-telling from one generation to the next. As oral language developed into written symbols and letters, the depth and breadth of knowledge that could be preserved and passed increased exponentially.

As cultures began to extend their knowledge beyond the basic skills of communicating, trading, gathering food, religious practices, etc., the beginnings of formal education, schooling, eventually followed. There is evidence that schooling in this sense was already in place in Egypt between 3000 and 500 BC.

Basic education today is considered those skills that are necessary to function in society.
Challenges in Education

The goal of education is the transference of ideas and skills from one person to another, or from one person to a group. Current education issues include which teaching method(s) are most effective, how to determine what knowledge should be taught, which knowledge is most relevant, and how well the pupil will retain incoming knowledge. Educators such as George Counts and Paulo Freire identified education as an inherently political process with inherently political outcomes. The challenge of identifying whose ideas are transferred and what goals they serve has always stood in the face of formal and informal education.

In addition to reading, writing, and arithmetic, Western primary and secondary schools attempt to teach the basic knowledge of history, geography, mathematics (usually including calculus and algebra), physics, chemistry and sometimes politics, in the hope that students will retain and use this knowledge as they age or that the skills acquired will be transferrable. The current education system measures competency with tests and assignments and then assigns each student a corresponding grade. The grades usually come in the form of either a letter grade or a percentage, which are intended to represent the amount of all material presented in class that the student understood.

Educational progressives or advocates of unschooling often believe that grades do not necessarily reveal the strengths and weaknesses of a student, and that there is an unfortunate lack of youth voice in the educative process. Some feel the current grading system risks lowering students' self-confidence, as students may receive poor marks due to factors outside their control. Such factors include poverty, child abuse, and prejudiced or incompetent teachers.

By contrast, many advocates of a more traditional or “back to basics” approach believe that the direction of reform needs to be quite the opposite. Students are not sufficiently inspired or challenged to achieve success because of the dumping down of the curriculum and the replacement of the “canon” with inferior material. Their view of self-confidence is that it arises not from removing hurdles such as grading, but by making them fair and encouraging students to gain pride from knowing they can jump over these hurdles.

On the one hand, Albert Einstein, one of the most famous physicists of our time, credited with helping us understand the universe better, was not a model school student. He was uninterested in what was being taught, and he did not attend classes all the time. However, his gifts eventually shone through and added to the sum of human knowledge. On the other hand, for millennia those who have been challenged and well-educated in traditional schools have risen to great success and to a lifelong love of learning because their minds were made better and more powerful, as well as because of their mastery of a wide range of skills.

There are a number of highly controversial issues in education. Should some knowledge be forgotten? What should be taught, are we better off knowing how to build nuclear bombs, or is it best to let such knowledge be forgotten?
Education in Developing Countries

In developing countries, the number and seriousness of the problems faced is naturally greater. People are sometimes unaware of the importance of education, and there is economic pressure from those parents who prioritize their children's making money in the short term over any long-term benefits of education. Recent studies on child labor and poverty have suggested, however, that when poor families reach a certain economic threshold where families are able to provide for their basic needs, parents return their children to school. This has been found to be true, once the threshold has been breached, even if the potential economic value of the children's work has increased since their return to school. Teachers are often paid less than other similar professions.

A lack of good universities and a low acceptance rate for good universities is evident in countries with a relatively high population density. In some countries there are uniform, over-structured, inflexible centralized programs from a central agency that regulates all aspects of education.

- Due to globalization, increased pressure on students in curricular activities
- Removal of a certain percentage of students for improvisation of academics (usually practiced in schools, after 10th grade)

India however is starting to develop technologies that will skip land based phone and internet lines. Instead, they have launched a special education satellite that can reach more of the country at a greatly reduced cost. There is also an initiative started by AMD and other corporations to develop the $100 dollar computer which should be ready by 2006. This computer will be sold in units of 1 million, and will be assembled in the country where the computer will be used. This appears to be a different computer to that developed by MIT, with the same price tag, believed to be powered by clockwork and a generator. This will enable poorer countries to give their children a digital education and to close the digital divide across the world.

In Africa, NEPAD has launched an "e-school programme" to provide all 600,000 primary and high schools with computer equipment, learning materials and internet access within 10 years.

Parental Involvement

Parental involvement is an essential aspect of a child's educational development. Early and consistent parental involvement in the child's life is critical such as reading to children at an early age, teaching patterns, interpersonal communication skills, exposing them to diverse cultures and the community around them, educating them on a healthy lifestyle, etc. The socialization and academic education of a child are aided by the involvement of the student, parent(s), teachers, and others in the community and extended family.
Education and Socialization: A Functionalist View

In the broadest sense, all societies must have an educational system. That is, they must have a way of teaching the young the tasks that are likely to be expected of them as they develop and mature into adulthood. If we accept this definition of an educational system, then we must believe that there really is no difference between education and socialization. As Margaret Mead (1943) observed, in many preliterate societies no such distinction is made. Children learn most things informally, most incidentally, simply by being included in adult activities.

Traditionally, the family has been the main arena for socialization. As societies have become more complex, the family has been unable to fulfil all aspects of its socialization function. Thus, the formal educational system must extend the socialization process that starts in the family. Modern industrialized societies draw a distinction between education and socialization. In ordinary speech, we differentiate between socialization and education by talking of bringing up and educating children as separate tasks. In modern society, these two aspects of socialization are quite compartmentalized. Whereas rearing children is an informal activity, education or schooling is formal. The role prescriptions that determine interactions between students and teachers are clearly defined, and the curriculum to be taught is explicit. Obviously, the educational process goes far beyond just formalized instruction. In addition, children learn things in their families and among other peers.

Schools, as formal institutions of civilization, emerged as part of the evolution of civilization. However, until about 200 years ago, education did not help people become more productive in practical ways; thus, it was a luxury that a few could afford. This changed dramatically with the industrialization of Western culture. Workers with specialized skills were required for production jobs, as were professional, well-trained managers.

When the industrial revolution moved workers out of their homes and into factories, the labour force consisted not only of adults but also of children. Subsequently child labour laws were passed to prohibit children from working in factories. Public schools eventually emerged as agencies dedicated to socializing students, teaching them proper attitudes and behaviour, and encouraging conformity to the norms of social life and the workplace.

Cultural Transmission

The most obvious goal of education is cultural transmission, in which major portions of society’s knowledge is passed from one generation to the next. In relatively small, homogenous societies, in which almost all members share the culture’s norms, values and perspectives, cultural transmission is a matter of consensus and requires a few specialized institutions. In a complex, pluralistic society such as ours, with competition among ethnic and other minority groups for economic and political power, the decision about which aspects of the culture will be transmitted is the outgrowth of a complicated process.

Schools are one of the most important means of cultural transmission. The view emerged that for a society to hold together, there must be certain core values and
goals – some common traits of culture – that the different groups shared to a greater or lesser degree. This core culture may also be open to change. A school’s curriculum often reflects the ability of organized groups of concerned citizens to impose their views on an educational system, whether local, statewide, or nationwide. Thus, it is a political process.

Since India’s independence, multilingual education has become an educational and political issue. Proponents believe that it is crucial for children whose primary language is not English to be given instruction in their native tongues. They believe that by acknowledging students’ native languages, the school system helps them make the transition into the all-English mainstream and also helps preserve the diversity of Indian languages and cultures.

Others see a danger in these programmes. They believe that many multilingual education programmes never provide for the transition into English, leaving many youngsters without the basic skills needed to earn a living and participate in our society.

In the end, the debate centres on how closely our sense of who we are as a nation hinges on the language our children speak in school. Pro tempore, the only agreement between the two sides is that language is the cornerstone for cultural transmission.

The Conflict Theory View

To the conflict theorist, society is an arena for conflict, not cooperation. In any society, certain groups come to dominate others, and social institutions become the instruments by which those in power control the less powerful. The conflict theorist thus sees the educational system as a means for maintaining the status quo, carrying out this task in a variety of ways. The educational system socializes students into values dictated by the powerful majority. Schools are seen as systems that stifle individualism and creativity in the name of maintaining order. To the conflict theorist, the function of the school “is to produce the kind of people the system needs, to train people for the jobs the corporations require and to instill in them the proper attitudes and values necessary for the proper fulfilment of one’s social role (Szymanski and Goertzel 1979).

In India, schools have been assigned the function of developing personal control and social skills in children. Although the explicit, formally defined school curriculum emphasizes basic skills such as reading and writing, much of what is taught is oriented away from practical concerns. Many critics point out that much of the curriculum (other than in special professional training programmes) has little direct, practical application to everyday life. This has led conflict theorists and others to conclude that the most important lessons learned in school are not those listed in the formal curriculum but, rather, those that involve a hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum refers to “the social attitudes and values taught in school that prepare children to accept the requirements of adult life and to fit into the social, political, and economic statuses the society provides” (Tischler 2011).

To succeed in school, a student must learn both the official (academic) curriculum and the hidden (social) curriculum. The hidden curriculum is often an outgrowth of the
structure within which the student is asked to learn. Within the framework of mass education, it would be difficult to provide instruction on a one-to-one basis or even in very small groups. Consequently, students are usually grouped into relatively larger classes. Because this system obviously demands a great deal of social conformity by the children, those who divert attention and make it difficult for the teacher to proceed are punished. In many respects, the hidden curriculum is a lesson in being docile.

Social skills are highly valued in any society, and a mastery of them is widely accepted as an indication of a child’s maturity. The school is a miniature society, and many individuals fail in school because they are either unable or unwilling to learn or use the values, attitudes and skills contained in the hidden curriculum. We do a great disservice to these students when we make them feel that they have failed in education when they have, in fact, only failed to conform to the school’s socialization standards.

**Theories of Schooling and Inequality**

There are several theoretical perspectives on the nature of modern education and its implications for inequality.

*Bernstein: Language Codes*

One approach emphasizes linguistic skills. In the 1970s, Basil Bernstein argued that children from varying backgrounds develop different codes, or forms of speech, during their early lives, which affect their subsequent school experience (Bernstein 1975). He is not concerned with differences in vocabulary or verbal skills, as these are usually thought of, his interest is in systematic differences in ways of using language, particularly contrasting poorer and wealthier children.

Bernstein’s ideas help us understand why those from certain socioeconomic backgrounds tend to be ‘underachievers’ at school. The following traits have been associated with restricted code speech, all of them inhibiting a child’s educational chances:

- The child probably receives limited responses to questions asked at home, and therefore is likely to be both less well informed and less curious about the wider world than those mastering elaborated codes.
- The child often finds it difficult to respond to the unemotional and abstract language used in teaching, as well as to appeals to general principles of school discipline.
- Much of what the teacher says is likely to be incomprehensible, using language in a way the child is not accustomed to. The child may attempt to cope with this by translating the teacher’s language into something s/he is familiar with – but then could fail to grasp the very principles the teacher intends to convey.
- While the child experiences little difficulty with rote or ‘drill’ learning, s/he may have major difficulties in grasping, conceptual distinctions involving generalization and abstraction.

*Illich: The Hidden Curriculum*
One of the most controversial writers on educational theory is Ivan Illich. He is noted for his criticisms of modern economic development, which he describes as a process whereby previously self-sufficient people are dispossessed of their traditional skills and made to rely on doctors for their health, teachers for their schooling, television for their entertainment and employers for their subsistence. Illich argues that the very notion of compulsory schooling – now accepted throughout the world – should be questioned (1973). He stresses the connection between the development of education and the requirements of the economy for discipline and hierarchy. Illich argues that schools have developed to cope with four basic tasks:

(a) The provision of custodial care
(b) The distribution of people among occupational roles
(c) The learning of dominant values
(d) The acquisition of socially approved skills and knowledge.

In relation to the first, the school has become a custodial organization because attendance is obligatory, and children are ‘kept off the streets’ between early childhood and their entry into work.

Much is learnt in school which has nothing to do with the formal content of lessons. Schools tend to inculcate what Illich called ‘passive consumption’ – an uncritical acceptance of the existing social order – by the nature of the discipline and regimentation they involve. These lessons are not consciously taught; they are implicit in school procedures and organization. The hidden curriculum teaches children that their role in life is ‘to know their place and to sit still in it’ (Illich 1973).

Illich advocates ‘deschooling’ society. Compulsory schooling is a relatively recent invention, he points out; there is no reason why it should be accepted as somehow inevitable. Since schools do not promote equality or the development of individual creative abilities, why not do away with them in their current form? Illich does not mean by this that all forms of educational organization should be abolished. Everyone who wants to learn should be provided with access to available resources – at any time in their lives, not just in their childhood or adolescent years. Such a system should make it possible for knowledge to be widely diffused and shared, not confined to specialists. Learners should not have to submit to a standard curriculum, and they should have personal choice over what they study.

Bourdieu: Education and Cultural Reproduction

Perhaps the most illuminating way of connecting some of the themes of these theoretical perspectives is through the concept of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu 1986, 1988). Cultural reproduction refers to the ways in which schools, in conjunction with other social institutions, help perpetuate social and economic inequalities across the generations. The concept directs our attention to the means whereby, via the hidden curriculum, schools influence the learning of values, attitudes and habits. Schools reinforce variations in cultural values and outlooks picked up early in life; when children leave school, these have the effects of limiting the opportunities of some, while facilitating those of others.
The modes of language use identified by Bernstein no doubt connect with such broad cultural differences, which underlie variations in interests and tastes. Children from lower-class backgrounds, and often from minority groups, develop ways of talking and acting which clash with those dominant in the school. Schools impose rules of discipline on pupils, the authority of teachers being oriented towards academic learning. Working-class children experience a much greater cultural clash when they enter school than those from more privileged homes. The former find themselves in effect in a foreign cultural environment. Not only are they less likely to be motivated towards high academic performance, their habitual modes of speech and action, as Bernstein holds, do not mesh with those of the teachers, even if each is trying their best to communicate.

Children spend long hours in school. As Illich stresses, they learn much more there than is contained in the lessons they are officially taught. Children get an early taste of what the world of work will be like, learning that they are expected to be punctual and apply themselves diligently to the tasks which those in authority set for them (Webb and Westergaard 1991).

References


Questions

1. What is meant by ‘education’?
2. What are the various challenges in education?
3. Identify the unique elements of education with special reference to the developing nations.
4. Why is parental involvement important necessary in the educational development of the child.
5. Explain the relation between education and socialization.
6. From the perspective of conflict theory, explain the concept of education.
7. Elucidate the various theories of schooling and inequality.