**2- Role and Function of Education – Functionalism**

**INTRODUCTION**

You will remember from previous learning that the functionalist are a consensus structural approach. This means that they believe that their research focus is on social institutions rather than, the individual, and how institutions influence and impact both the behaviour of the individual and the shape of society in general. As a consensus theory, they believe that everybody, all the social institutions work together in order to maintain and society that there's a organic analogy, where like the human body, everything works together positively for the betterment of society. In general, Functionalist belief is that the role of education and the function of education in society is to create and maintain social solidarity and cohesion. So they believe that one of the is one of the cornerstones of society, and exists to ensure that society flourishes, and that society remains a positive place for all its members.

**DURKHEIM – Social Cohesion**

Durkheim didn't really spend a lot of time thinking or talking about education, but he did say that education was key in the socialisation process, and there are particular key and secondary agents of socialisation. So what he's suggesting here is that the family, the caregivers, the immediate people and groups surrounding a child provides primary socialisation, they teach them the essentials of society, the norms and the values and the ways of behaving in the home and then when they go to school, they are reinforced through the education system. So adding to the socialisation that happens in the home. As a secondary agent of socialisation, it reinforces the positive socialisation for society, and maybe negates some of the more negative norms and values that might be more familial or sub cultural to society. Durkheim believes that this is a really important element of the education system in order to maintain social cohesion.

**PARSONS – Bridging Effect**

Talcott Parsons, who later looked at what Durkheim was saying and developed it further, talks about how the education system has a the bridge effect, and acts as a bridge between the family and society in general, and he talks about particularistic and universalistic values. Particularistic values are a normal behaviour or a value that is unique to a particular person in a particular context. For example, a child in their home has behaviours that are accepted within the home but may not be accepted in wider society, and this links into the universalistic values, these are the social norms and values, these are the values that society says that we should be aiming for, and the norms of behaviour that allow us to be part of society. Parsons viewed the education system as kind of a bridge between the family and society. A place where students or young people can learn the universalistic values, make social mistakes without having too much of an impact, because the purpose of education is to teach those universalistic values and therefore letting young people be able to engage in society as a whole and be an active positive member of society. By understanding that, you can do certain things at home, but you can't do them in wider society, it might be, to use a rather gross example, perfectly okay to pick your nose at home, but you don't do it in public. It might be okay to swear at home or use certain curse words in your home. But it's not okay in public. And schools provide that buffer to allow students and young people to find out these universalistic values and find out what is the difference between being at home and being part of a society. And this kind of understanding is the key role of education because it means that people are able to be part of society and the current maintain that cohesive nature of society because all members are following the same set of rules, and the same set of values.

**EVALUATION**

Now, there are slight issues with this, it is not a perfect view of education, and it's quite a rose tinted view, because it's assuming that children are passive puppets of the socialisation that they receive in schools. They just soak it all up like a sponge, accept it and change their behaviour. Now, we know that this is not the case because we have behaviour issues in schools, we have anti school subcultures, and we have the formation of other subcultures within schools. That shows us that children are not passive puppets, they will act against norms and values that they don't agree with, they will act up against the norms and values that perhaps they don't understand, or know why that they have to behave in certain ways. You often hear it particularly in primary schools, when somebody uses the phrase because "I said so" is responded to with, "*but why?*" "*Why am I not allowed to use that word*?" "*Why am I not allowed to pick my nose?*"

Now, occasionally, you get some silly responses, I remember, as a child being told, Don't pick your nose, or your brains will fall out, really not going to happen. But as a small child, you kind of believe it. So there are times where people will make up reasons for not doing certain behaviours. But the fact that children are asking why, and requiring that explanation of certain behaviours, or certain beliefs and things like that shows us that children are not passive puppets or sponges, who are soaking up the norms and values that are being transmitted, and are actually questioning. Another criticism of the education system, it knocks out that curiosity and questioning nature by using phrases such as "because I said so" or "because it's the rules".

Another criticism is the idea of dysfunction and the view that schools are not always positive places. In fact, they can be quite negative for some people. And we can see that through bullying, and through people who our school refusers. But we can also seeing it through things like the ethnocentric curriculum, or the institutional racism within schools, where not all students have a positive experience within school. So this may mean that they reject those universalistic values that are being taught. A final criticism is that it is suggesting that there is a value consensus in society. A value consensus suggests that we all have the same values, we all have the same goals in life. We all have the same desires in life, and that's what keeps society stable and cohesive. Now we know that this is not the case because we have diversity within society. We have different family types, different career paths, choices that people make within society. We are not all cookie cutter the same that you'd find doing like American movie from the 1950s for example, where everybody has the same house, everyone has the same goals in life, and everyone wants the same things, we don't have that in society. Durkheim and Parson's view that education system passes on the values and norms of society suggests that perhaps there is, but we have the evidence that that is not the case.

**SHULTZ – Human Capital**

Another view of the role of education comes from Schultz who talks about at the education system developing human capital. He suggests is that investment in education, benefits the wider economy and this therefore, benefits society as a whole, and creates that cohesive nature. Because a society with a stable economy has less social conflict, there's less barriers between different groups within society. Shultz argues that the education can provide properly trained, qualified and flexible workforce and ensure that the skills necessary for a society to continue and to get better and move forward, the best place for that to happen is within the education system. This development of human capital means that it allows every person within the society to have a place have a an appropriate role to play that fits them, they are of benefit to society.

**DAVIS AND MOORE – Role Allocation**

Davis and Moore talk about role allocation. meaning that the education system sifts and sorts people into the social hierarchy which is linked to the idea of meritocracy. So the idea is that people are able to access the best jobs, wealth and status, because they have talent or because they have worked hard. It's not to do with other social structures such as class, ethnicity or gender, because according to the functionalist, all the other social structures, and in to benefit and support the education system. So for Davis and Moore, the education system as a way of sorting people to the best possible position that they should have in society. And that is based upon a meritocratic system, you get there because of hard work you get there because of talents. It is not linked to your social structures, such as class, ethnicity, or gender.

**EVALUATION**

Now, again, there are issues with this view, and the Marxists are very quick to point out the myth of meritocracy and suggest that this idea of work hard, do well in school and you can move up the social hierarchy and get a job, all of these things is actually a myth. Because your gender, your ethnicity, your social class, all have an impact on your educational achievement. And they argue that the education system is built by the middle class for the middle class. So they are able to attain better grades, achieve more within their education, which then allows them to access more high paid jobs, or access higher social status. Marxists also argued that this idea of meritocracy is a complete myth, because we have private schools, which work on a not what you know, but who you know, type system and even if you don't do very well, academically, the connections you make, the people you meet, and the alumni associated with your private school can still get you those high powered jobs and social status. A good example come from, Boris Johnson who went to Eton and Oxford University but didn't do particularly well in terms of academics achieving only a second class degree. He's now prime minister, and he was a journalist in a high status newspaper. A lot of which came from the connections that he made at Eton not necessarily hard work.

**NEW RIGHT**

The New Right are a branch and development of functionalism. They believe that the education system has failed in its aims. So they agree with the idea that the education system is about socialisation, and that it is creating social solidarity and social cohesion. But for the New Right, they believe that the education system has failed in its job to do this, they believe that in order for the education system to fulfil its functions, of socialisation, developing human capital, role allocation, there needs to be more competition, and not just competition within school, but competition between schools.

Chubb and Moe were very much proponents of parentocracy. The idea that parents should have choice, they should be able to choose to send their children to the best schools, and they put forward a suggestion of education vouchers. Chubb and Moe were looking at the American education system, but this could be applied to the UK as well, and what they wanted was to remove government oversight for the education system, basically turning education private, and the government would then provide vouchers to parents to use to spend on fees to send their children to school. So all parents would get this not just the disadvantaged. So they're not saying that certain groups shouldn't get vouchers, and that certain children shouldn't get an education. What they're saying is by providing these vouchers, parents could find the best school for their child, and there would be more competition between schools, because they would then have to compete for students in the same way that shops have to compete for customers.

The New Right believe that schools should see parents and students as consumers. So in order to get the best look to get the students, they are required to be the best school. So it raises the quality of education with increased competition within schools, they talk about limiting grading so that, we still grade on a bell curve, but really comes down to saying that within a year group, only the top 5% can get an A for example, again, remember they're talking about the American system, so when they don't have GCSEs and A levels in the same way that we do. They have GPA, grade point averages, and they rank their students. So in a lot of films in American shows, you hear characters say, "oh, I graduated in the top 5% of my class", and things like that we don't have that in the UK. But their argument is if we did, that would increase attainment, it would increase achievement within school, and create more in terms of ensuring that the best people get into the best jobs, because you're suggesting to students that if you want to be the best, if you want to do these high level jobs, you need to work hard for it. So it's that self-sufficiency that we associate with the New Right. But their argument is that by creating this competition, we will improve the education system. And we will allow the education system then to complete its aims of developing human capital and ensuring that people are sifted and sorted into the social hierarchy appropriately.

**EVALUATION**

Now, there are issues with this theory. And the biggest one being that that creates a fear of failure. Now, if you haven't watched it, there's a really good documentary on Netflix called Varsity Blues, the college admissions scandals. And as part of that they have the short interview clips from students who talk about how the moment they start high school, they're taught, they have got to be on the advanced placement courses. And you're going to do this or that extracurricular and the pressure is immediately on the students, if they're not getting straight A's, if their GPA is below four, they are terrified, because that could influence their opportunities later in life. There's also an issue that is simplifying a very complex system. The education system isn't as simple as Chubb and Moe are making out. There are factors where it's not just about the cost of sending your child to school in terms of vouchers, there's the geographical element to it and being able to physically get your child to that school. There is ethos of the schools, there's parental experiences, which will influence where you send your child to school. On paper, a school may look amazing, you go and visit and you're like, yes, no, not so much out there.

This view is also contradictory, because it's saying that we need more competition and they want less government oversight. But at the same time, they're influencing policy and saying that this is what governments should put in place. So it contradicts itself in the sense that they don't want government oversight, but they do want the government to tell schools what to do. So it doesn't quite work.

**CONCLUSION**

So, in terms of the functions theory of education, the main thrust of their theory is that it is to the function and role of education is to maintain social solidarity and social cohesion and they do this through socialisation, the bridging effect, development of human capital and role allocation. So socialisation is not the role of education but the process by which the functions are carried out.