

Functions of Schooling

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This tutorial will cover the functions of schooling, through the definition and discussion of:

1. Functions of Schooling
 - a. Socialization
 - b. Cultural Innovation
 - c. Social Placement
 - d. Social Integration
2. Latent Functions of Schooling

1. FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOLING

The functions of schooling in society are an outgrowth of the structural functional perspective, which views society as a complex, interconnected machine with various parts that work together to promote stability and harmony in the society as a whole. The education system is one of these parts, and therefore has functions for the maintenance of society as a whole. There are multiple functions of schooling in the education system, in the capitalist society:

- Socialization
- Cultural Innovation
- Social Placement
- Social Integration

1a. Socialization

With **socialization function of schooling**, children need to be able to grow up and develop into functioning adults on their own in order for society to continue to perpetuate itself, and schooling is a fundamental part of socialization. Teachers impart specialized knowledge that students will need in their adult lives in order to be successful in life and in their careers, therefore schooling socializes you and prepares you for a life as an adult that is outside of the nuclear family, as your own person. People go on to make families of their own and keep society going.

🔗 **EXAMPLE** You don't need to know trigonometry, for example, in order to be a successful participant in your family. However, you will need trigonometry if you want to be an architect or you want to have a

career as an engineer.



TERM TO KNOW

Socialization Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that passes on the skills and attributes that students will need in order to grow into successful, functional adults in society.

1b. Cultural Innovation

Cultural innovation function of schooling involves producing new culture, and developing new ideas and technologies that have effects which reverberate through society and culture as a whole. In this regard, universities--especially the major research centers--generate new technologies that people bring into their lives and adapt and go on to create new cultural practices around technology and research that occurs in universities.

Also, the university itself is a laboratory. People continually interact, developing insights and thinking about new things, so the university is essentially a laboratory for innovation.



EXAMPLE Consider Facebook, a game changer with respect to culture. A whole new culture has emerged around Facebook, which was created at a university by a university student, Mark Zuckerberg. Even though he didn't finish college or get the degree, simply being there put him in contact with the right people, which allowed him to develop this technology, and forge a new culture as a result.

There's a complex social machinery involved with knowledge production, research, funding research--the whole sociology of science is interesting. Professors and doctors at research universities and laboratories, as well as the students there, develop new technologies and ideas that spur cultural change and innovation.



TERM TO KNOW

Cultural Innovation Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that creates new ideas and technologies that have ramifications for society and culture.

1c. Social Placement

Regarding **social placement function of schooling**, school is where you get to showcase your abilities and aptitude for success, and show how smart you are. School sorts people, in a sense.



EXAMPLE Bobby, for example, is good at math, while Julie is good at science, and Stephanie is brilliant at writing. School allows people to show what they have--it is one of the first places they display their abilities.



DID YOU KNOW

In Germany, students are even tracked. In the early years of high school, students are either placed on a university track or are geared towards employment. This kind of tracking is abhorrent to Americans, nonetheless, even in American society, school is one big sorting machine that parcels individuals out into

different positions in the division of labor.

Likewise, college is another step in the tracking process. You either go to college or you don't, and that will sort you into a certain track in life, into a specific place in the social structure, doing a specific function to keep society functioning. College is yet another sorting machine, in which people decide if they want to be a sociologist, for example, or a financial lawyer, etc.



TERM TO KNOW

Social Placement Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that sorts individuals such that they go on to fill various positions in the division of labor as adults.

1d. Social Integration

Social integration function of schooling involves establishing one dominant culture and one cohesive social entity. The school system molds its pupils into one polity, shaping them all such that they share the same cultural values and norms.



THINK ABOUT IT

What do you do when you get to school? You venerate America and what it stands for with the Pledge of Allegiance: "I pledge allegiance to America for which it stands." Students do this every day. There are some people who say that perhaps the Pledge of Allegiance shouldn't be recited in school, which is an offensive notion to many, since the pledge is akin to a Durkheimian sacred ritual. In many schools, it involves people coming together to venerate the religion of the flag and America for which it stands.



TERM TO KNOW

Social Integration Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that shapes all manner of diverse pupils so that they come to share similar cultural norms and values.

2. LATENT FUNCTIONS OF SCHOOLING

In the structural functional approach, latent functions are the unintended consequences of a social institution or social system that are nonetheless functions themselves.

The following are **latent functions of schooling**:

- **Free childcare during the day:** In modern society, parents work outside the home, and they need to do something with their kids during the day. Hence, they can send them to school, making it a nice source of daycare for parents so they can get out and work.
- **College is a marriage market:** A multitude of young people are thrown together at the same time without parental supervision, so it's a way to find a marriage partner. It often happens that you find a marriage partner while in college.

- **Schooling shapes a capitalist workforce:** Schooling perpetuates capitalism. When you get to school, from a very early age, you're always being asked, "What do you want to do when you grow up?" Emphasis is on career preparation, whether you want to be a firefighter, or a policeman, or a civil engineer, etc. You take tests at school, which are intended to help you think about where you're going to fit in the division of labor.

It's important to note that you're not questioning the capitalist system itself. In school, you're not being asked, "What do you think about capitalism as a system? Would you like to live in a different kind of society?" Instead, you are taught to focus on deciding what you want to be when you grow up.

- **No equal opportunity with respect to college:** The system perpetuates class inequalities to a large extent, because there's no equal opportunity to college access. College costs money, and college for some is prohibitively expensive--in fact, it is only getting more expensive. Due to the politics of education, neoliberalism, and other politics in American society, it's getting progressively more expensive for people to go to college, because the states are not granting colleges the funding that they used to in the past. Now, everyone is primarily on their own with respect to college, and being so expensive, not everybody who would like to go, can. This translates to a lack of equal opportunity, with the college system helping to perpetuate class inequalities and the status quo.



TERM TO KNOW

Latent Functions of Schooling

Latent functions of schooling are those things that are not immediately recognized like schooling providing childcare, and schooling keeping young people out of the workplace as competitors.



SUMMARY

Today you learned about the **functions of schooling**, as an outgrowth of the structural functional perspective, in which the education system is one of the parts that work together to promote stability and harmony in the society as a whole. You also learned about some of the **latent functions**--unintended consequences--of schooling.

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia author Zach Lamb.



TERMS TO KNOW

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Latent Functions of Schooling

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Social Integration Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that shapes all manner of diverse pupils so that they come to share similar cultural norms and values.

Social Placement Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that sorts individuals such that they go on to fill various positions in the division of labor as adults.

Socialization Function of Schooling

A function of schooling that passes on the skills and attributes that students will need in order to grow into successful, functional adults in society.