FIFTH EDITION
5
FIFTH EDITION

A Sociology of Educating

Roland Meighan and Clive Harber

continuum

A Sociology of Educating

Also available from Continuum

Psychology and the Teacher 8th Edition, Dennis Child
Teaching Thinking 3rd Edition, Robert Fisher
When Teaching Becomes Learning 2nd Edition, Eric Sotto
Analysing Underachievement in Schools, Emma Smith
Education and Community, Dianne Gereluk
Philosophy of Education, Richard Pring

A Sociology of Educating

5th EDITION

Roland Meighan
and Clive Harber

with contributions by

Len Barton, Iram Siraj-Blatchford and
Stephen Walker

continuum

Continuum International Publishing Group

The Tower Building
11 York Road
London SE1 7NX

80 Maiden Lane
Suite 704
New York NY 10038

www.continuumbooks.com

© Roland Meighan, Clive Harber and Contributors 2007, 2011.

Roland Meighan, Clive Harber and Contributors have asserted their right under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, to be identified as Authors of this work.

First published in the United Kingdom by Cassell, 1981.
Reprinted 1986, 1997, 2004.

First published in the United States by Holt, Rinehart and Winston Ltd, 1981.
Reprinted 1986.

Fifth edition published by Continuum, 2007.

Reprinted 2009, 2010 (twice)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system, without prior permission in writing from the publishers.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 9780826481290 (hardcover)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
A catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress.

Typeset by YHT Ltd, London
Printed and bound in Great Britain

Contents

Acknowledgements viii
Preface to the 5th Edition ix
Preface to the 1st Edition xi

Part One FAMILIARIZATION

1 A Taste of Sociology 3
2 Pupils as Clients? 14
3 Teachers as Victims? 31
4 Parents as Educators? 45
5 Mass Media 62

Part Two THE HIDDEN CURRICULUM

6 The Hidden Curriculum: An Overview 75
7 Space Talks: The Hidden Curriculum of Educational Buildings 91
8 Timetables 105
9 The Official Curriculum 118
10 Organization 145
11 Teacher Expectations 157
12 The Hidden Curriculum of Language 171
13 Assessment 194

Part Three IDEOLOGIES OF EDUCATING

14 The Concept of Ideology 211

15 Ideologies of Education 218

16 Authoritarian and Non-authoritarian Ideologies of Education 236

17 A Case Study in an Ideology of Education: Autonomous Study 247

18 Case Studies: Democratic Education 263

Part Four SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES AND THE STUDY OF EDUCATION

19 Social Systems, Structures and Functions 285

20 The Action Perspective 299

21 The Conflict Perspective: A Marxian Approach 316

22 Doing Research in Schools and Classrooms 336

23 Postmodernism 346

24 The Discourses of Education 356

Part Five EDUCATIONAL LIFE CHANCES OR WHO GETS WHAT?

25 Labelling Theory and Life Chances 367

26 Gender Identity 375

27 Social Class 389

28 'Race' and Ethnic Identity 403

29 Other Minorities: Those with 'Special Needs' 421

Part Six SIGNPOSTS TO THE NEXT LEARNING SYSTEM

30 **Alternatives** 441
31 **Anatomy of Choice in Education** 453
32 **The Next Learning System** 463

References 484
Subject Index 511
Name Index 517

Acknowledgements

Many of the people who have contributed to this book cannot be adequately acknowledged. They include pupils, students, colleagues, friends and writers who have contributed ideas, comments or reactions that have become part of our consciousness or woven into our teaching and writing. Although we cannot name them all, we recognize our considerable debt to them all. Among those we can name are Len Barton, Christine Brown, Gerald Cortis, Lynn Davies, Janet Meighan, Frank Reeves, Mike Roberts, Richard Szreter and Stephen Walker. Special thanks are due to John Siraj-Blatchford for his comments and support during the preparation of the manuscript for the third edition. Inadequacies in the work, however, remain the writers' sole responsibility. The authors and publisher would like to thank the following for permission to use material in this book:

British Journal of Educational Psychology
Department of Education and Skills
Education Otherwise
Educational Review
Grant MacIntyre
Heinemann
Sophia and Frances Howard
Journal of Curriculum Studies
New Science Publications
Open University Press
Oxford University Press
Penguin Books
Peter Davies Ltd
Punch
Ivan Reid
Routledge and Kegan Paul
Anthony Rudolf
Social Science Teacher
Times Educational Supplement

Preface to the 5th Edition

I was delighted when Clive Harber agreed to join me as co-author of the 5th Edition of this book after Iram Siraj-Blatchford had decided she had to withdraw for personal and family reasons. It meant a renewal of a previous successful partnership, as I worked with Clive at the University of Birmingham in the 1980s.

Clive Harber has distinguished himself in the field of International Education and Education in Developing Countries. He was Head of the School of Education at the University of Birmingham until August 2006 and Head of the School of Education at the University of Natal before that. But he is not afraid of taking a radical position, as his book, *Schooling as Violence* (2004), gives witness. His experience of teaching courses and supervising research on International Education, plus his experience of working in South Africa, while conducting research in various countries throughout Africa and elsewhere, adds a fresh, new dimension to this book. There are now many more comparative and international passages, illustrations and references in the book. Specifically, his analysis of schooling internationally as, paradoxically, both currently contributing to authoritarianism and violence on the one hand, and peace and democracy on the other, has added a fresh aspect to the book.

A Sociology of Educating, has become regarded as a classic text, ranking alongside works such as Waller's *Sociology of Teaching* (first published in 1932), according to feedback we have received. Moreover, regular users of the book frequently request that we leave the main text alone as far as possible, using the 'Signposts', 'Discussion and Activities' and 'Further Reading' as the main vehicles for updating – especially as many have devised their own notes for students on recent developments in the subject matter, research and readings.

Nevertheless, a long-standing problem is that the general principles outlined in this book are subject to many local variations in practice and in legal stipulation. There are variations across Europe, within the British Isles among England, Wales, Scotland, Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and in other countries across the globe. If we take the single example of home-based education, there are variations in legal requirements, expectations and practice from country to country. But this problem did not prevent Polish academics from organizing a translation of the text into Polish. They argued that they could explain to their students the nature of the variations that occurred within Polish education.

We continue to use website references sparingly, knowing that current-day students are usually computer literate and so are their tutors, and well able to do any necessary searches for contemporary material.

Inevitably, statistics in a textbook refer to a particular time and situation. Readers will need to use their computer skills to assess changes and current positions by using the Internet. A start can be made by readers in the UK by visiting www.dfes.gov.uk, www.statistics.gov.uk and www.statsed.co.uk.

This 5th Edition comes with a new chapter, entitled 'The Discourses of Education', written by Stephen Walker, which appears at the end of Part Four. As Walker notes, 'Discourses, then, are central to both the formation of the individual in society and they provide the rules for the conduct and interactions of any individual in all social situations and encounters.' Discourses both permit and constrain, they can be complementary or contradictory. Sources of Internet discussion of these ideas are provided at the end of this chapter.

I was encouraged to read a review by Mary Thorton of the University of Hertfordshire, of the 4th Edition of *A Sociology of Educating*. It said, 'An old warhorse perhaps, but what a joy to read! It reminded me why the sociology of education became such a key part of my working life as an academic. Does it still inspire? Yes …' (*The Lecturer*, December 2005).

Roland Meighan

Note to the reader:
All chapters are authored by Roland Meighan unless noted as being the work of other authors at the start of each chapter. Clive Harber has worked together with Roland Meighan to update material throughout for this Fifth Edition.

Preface to the 1st Edition

Many harsh things have been said about the writers of books. Samuel Johnson observed, 'Your manuscript is both good and original: but the part that is good is not original, and the part that is original is not good.' A gibe about bland writing comes from Charles Colton: 'Many books require no thought from those who read them, and for a very simple reason – they made no such demand upon those who wrote them.' But the most helpful advice I found came from Anthony Hope: 'Unless one is a genius, it is best to aim at being intelligible.'

This book is written with three audiences in mind. First, those who are beginning a career in education, such as students on initial teacher education courses. Second, experienced teachers on in-service courses with little or no sociological study in their previous courses. The third group that may find the material of interest is comprised of educationalists whose previous sociological study has been limited to the structural functionalist perspective.

The title of the book contains the verb 'educating' rather than the noun 'education', and this indicates that a particular perspective is employed for large sections of the book, namely the interactionist perspective. Since the perspectives are discussed at some length, it is sufficient to say that a key concept in the interactionist approach is that of the contradictions and ironies in social life. Key ideas in other approaches may be harmony in society and its organizations, or conflict in social structures.

This book is meant to be a progress report. Its intention is to stimulate sociologically informed thinking about educating rather than to provide any final conclusion or necessarily 'true' message. It is meant to be interpreted as constructive doubt and review, rather than the establishment of certainties.

The structure of the book is idiosyncratic and needs some explanation. Many sociology of education texts begin with an account of sociological concepts and theories and then use these to scrutinize education. Others develop a sociology of education which reflects on the theories and concepts of the parent discipline of sociology at the end. This book does neither. It begins with a light-hearted taste of sociology to give something of the flavour of this approach to thinking about society, and then gives three sociological accounts of topics unrelated except in their tendency to be provocative. These topics are assessment, the pupil's viewpoint and the teacher as a victim. I hope that this first part will establish some of the excitement and interest of sociology, as well as some of its relevance to an understanding of schooling.

The section on sociological theories and perspectives comes in the middle of the book, on the logic of a 'time out' in sports like basketball. It seems appropriate, after doing some sociological thinking, to reflect on the theoretical nature of the enterprise before undertaking some more investigation in the remainder of the book. (Len Barton and Stephen Walker have written this theoretical section at my invitation.) Users of the book are, of course, at liberty to ignore these ideas and use the material in any order they think fit.

Any selection of the concepts of a book is somewhat arbitrary. Those selected by the writer are: the hidden curriculum for Part Two, ideologies of education for Part Three, and educational life chances for Part Five. The final part, alternatives in education, uses the concepts of the previous parts to analyse various educational institutions. These are selected as the concepts that have emerged in the writer's teaching, reading and research as the most significant of those so far developed.

I have tried to write in an intelligible style and if I have been successful, there is the potential penalty of being interpreted as facile and simplistic, since, as research quoted in the book indicates, the same idea expressed in difficult and dense language gains higher applause as 'more academic' and 'superior in depth'. As Molière observed, 'That must be wonderful; I don't understand it at all.' However, I shall take the risk, and aim at communication rather than mystification.

ROLAND MEIGHAN

To Janet, James, Mark and Steve
In memory of Shirley
R.M.

To Mary
C.H.

This page intentionally left blank

Other books by the Authors

Roland Meighan

Sociological Interpretations of Schooling and Classrooms: A Reappraisal (with Len Barton, 1978)
Perspectives on Society (with Ian Shelton and Tony Marks, 1978)
School, Pupils and Deviance (with Len Barton, 1979)
Schooling, Ideology and the Curriculum (with Len Barton and Stephen Walker, 1980)
Alternative Educational Futures (with Clive Harber and Brian Roberts, 1984)
Flexischooling: Education for Tomorrow, Starting Yesterday (1988)
The Democratic School (with Clive Harber, 1989)
Learning from Home-based Education (1992)
Anatomy of Choice in Education (with Philip Toogood, 1992)
Theory and Practice of Regressive Education (1993)
The Freethinkers' Guide to the Educational Universe (1994)
The Freethinkers' Pocket Directory to the Educational Universe (1995)
John Holt: Personalised Education and the Reconstruction of Schooling (1995)
The Next Learning System (1997)
The Next Learning System: Pieces of the Jigsaw (2000)
25 Years of Home-Based Education: Research, Reviews and Case Material (2001)
Learning Unlimited: The Home-Based Education Case-Files (2001)
Natural Learning and the Natural Curriculum (2001)
Damage Limitation: trying to reduce the harm schools do to children (2004)
Comparing Learning Systems (2005)

Clive Harber

Authored Books
2005 *Global Citizenship Education: The Needs of Teachers and Learners* (Report on DfID Funded Research Project, Centre for International Education and Research, University of Birmingham) (with L. Davies and H. Yamashita)
2005 *Democratic Professional Development: a Guidebook for Supervisors and Inspectors of Teachers* (Reading: Centre for British Teachers)
2004 *Schooling As Violence: How Schools Harm Pupils and Societies* (London: RoutledgeFalmer)

2003 *Towards Ubuntu: Critical Teacher Education and Citizenship in South Africa and England* (Birmingham: Development Education Centre) (with J. Serf and C. Carter)
2002 *Democracy Through Teacher Education: a Guidebook for Use with Student Teachers* (Reading: Centre for British Teachers) (with L. Davies and M. Schweisfurth)
2001 *State of Transition: Post-Apartheid Educational Reform in South Africa* (Oxford: Symposium Books) pp 1–95
1997 *Education Democracy and Political Development in Africa* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press) pp 1–168
1997 *School Management and School Effectiveness in Developing Countries* (London: Cassell) (with L. Davies) pp 1–189
1996 *Small Schools and Democratic Practice* (Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press) pp 1–73
1992 *Democratic Learning and Learning Democracy* (Ticknall: Education Now) pp 1–41
1989 *Politics in African Education* (London: Macmillan) pp 1–202

Edited Books
2002 Learning Democracy and Citizenship: International Experiences (Oxford: Symposium Books (Edited with M. Schweisfurth and L. Davies) pp 1–304
1998 *Voices for Democracy: a North–South Dialogue on Education for Sustainable Democracy* (Nottingham: Education Now in Association with the British Council) (Edited C. Harber) pp 1–138
1995 *Developing Democratic Education* (Ticknall: Education Now) (Edited C. Harber) pp 1–115
1989 *The Democratic School* (Ticknall: Education Now) (Edited with R. Meighan) pp 1–202
1987 *Political Education in Britain* (Lewes: The Falmer Press) (Edited C. Harber) pp 1–188
1986 *Social Education: Principles and Practice* (Lewes: The Falmer Press) (Edited with C. Brown and J. Strivens) pp 1–253
1984 *Alternative Educational Futures* (Eastbourne: Holt Rinehart) (Edited with R. Meighan and B. Roberts) pp 1–180

Part One

FAMILIARIZATION

The opening section is rather unconventional, since it is based on the ideas of browsing in libraries, familiarization through wandering around a new place, tasting or taking an aperitif. A rigorous, structured opening has been discarded for something more eclectic and appetite-whetting. Chapter 1 attempts to review observations made about sociology and the sociological enterprise rather than develop a conceptual map or a systematic account of the discipline. The remaining chapters of Part One are connected in two ways. First, they are rather provocative ideas: mass media, the pupils' viewpoint, the teacher as victim, and the parent as educator. Second, they can be seen as examples of the interactionist concept of layers of meaning mentioned in Chapter 1. The interpretation of the phenomenon of schooling varies according to the situation of the viewer: there is no objective entity called 'school'; only overlapping and varying accounts can be obtained. If, at the end of the section, the reader is not curious about the sociological contribution to the understanding of the processes of educating and is not intrigued by the possibilities of a sociological imagination, the writer has failed in his intentions.

This page intentionally left blank

1

A Taste of Sociology

Gossip: sociologists on a mean and petty scale.

Woodrow Wilson

INTRODUCTION

People usually ask for the recipe after tasting a dish rather than before tasting it. Following this kind of logic, this introduction will avoid definitions and lists of concepts in favour of observations about sociology. This approach is not original. Peter Berger used the same approach in his book *Invitation to Sociology* in 1966. The approach is also very much in keeping with Frank Smith's arguments regarding the means by which most of us first joined the *literacy club*. Smith (1985) argued that children begin reading because they wish to join others who seem to be getting something out of it. We have precisely the same aims regarding the sociology of schooling. We all started reading and writing because we found that we had interests in common with other readers and writers, and we committed ourselves to it because we developed an expectation that we would ultimately achieve all the fluency and capability of the experts. In just the same way, in terms of sociological literacy, we want you to become quickly involved in evaluating the arguments and researching and writing about the educational issues that concern you.

The *sociology club* has a long history; in fact there is a sense in which sociology may be seen as one of the oldest of the sciences. As Abraham (1966) noted, just as soon as people began to reflect on the way in which their society was or should be organized they were thinking in sociological terms. All those who have come to hold views on humanity and on its destiny, on the rise and fall of peoples and civilizations, are thinking in sociological terms even if they consider themselves philosophers, historians, law-givers or seers.

THE STUDY OF THE SOCIAL LIFE CREATED BY PEOPLE

Reflecting on society has not always been regarded as necessarily desirable:

> To quote from a matchbox – sociology is the study of those who don't need it by those who do.
>
> Weightman, 1977

This joke suggests a suspicion of those who study others. In addition, the common confusion between psychology and sociology is present, and the joke could more accurately be applied to psychology in its study of people as individuals, rather than to sociology, where the subject matter is more centrally, the institutions, cultures and social systems created by people, and, in turn, influencing people's behaviour.

Sociology is the source of fewer jokes than psychology, and this is an interesting feature for reflection. Psychologists seem to have been 'recognized' rather more than sociologists. One possible explanation lies in the success of psychology in establishing a claim to be special, and mysterious, rather like the impression many people have of physics:

> People do not expect to have a special knowledge of a subject like physics . . . But because they are familiar with the objects the sociologist studies, they feel they already have a special knowledge of them and resent any sociological claim that they do not.
>
> McGee *et al.*, 1977

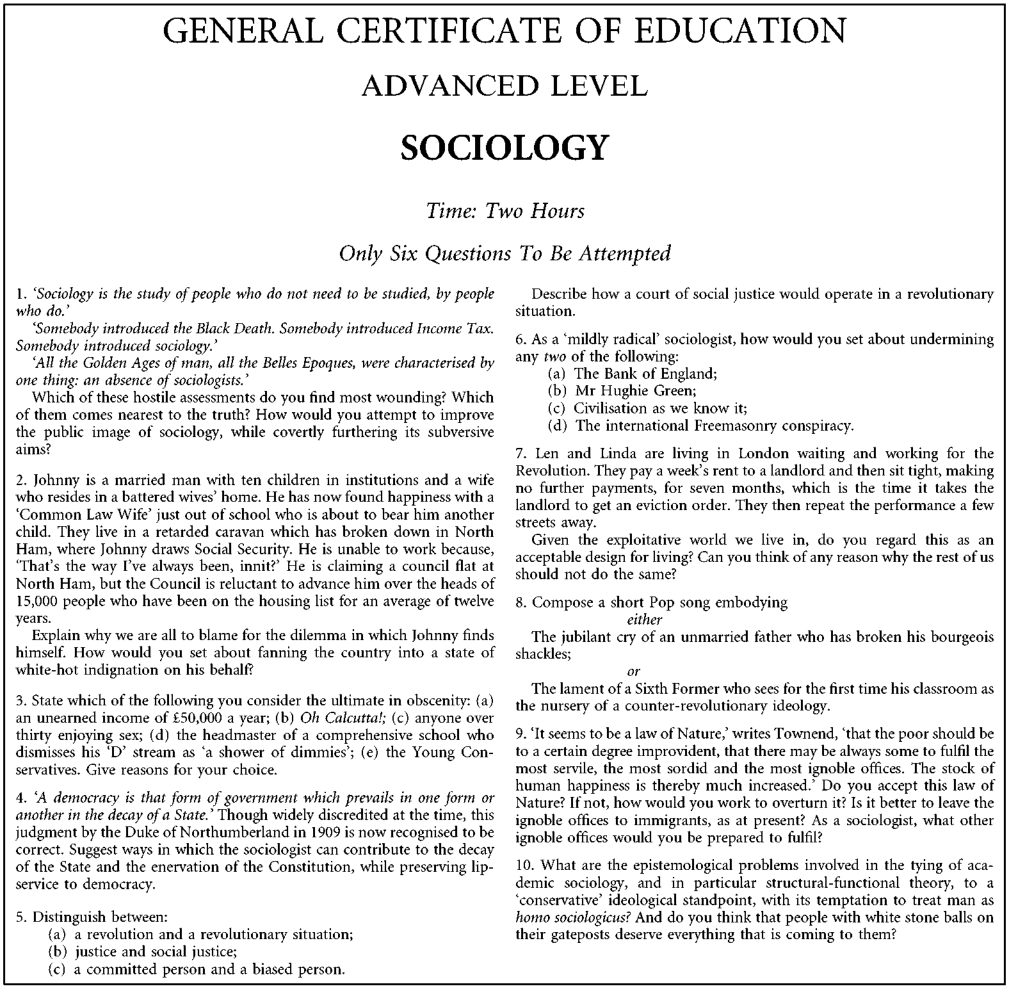
One sustained joke about sociology appeared in the form of an 'examination paper' in the satirical magazine *Punch* on 2 October 1974 (see Figure 1.1). Some of the questions in this spoof examination paper can be said to raise important issues about sociologists. Thus the statement 'Somebody introduced the Black Death. Somebody introduced Income Tax. Somebody introduced sociology' is stated in a sympathetic form as the point of a discussion by Cuzzort and King (1989):

> Even if the people who have the official title of 'sociologist' were to cease offering their interpretations of social conduct to the world, the world would still demand that somebody tell it what is going on.

The introduction of sociology or its equivalent is seen by Cuzzort and King as inevitable and desirable, though whether they would say the same about the Black Death and Income Tax is another matter.

Another source of humour in the 'examination questions' is the questioning approach assumed in the jokes to be revolutionary:

> As a 'mildly radical' sociologist, how would you set about undermining any *two* of the following:
>
> (a) The Bank of England;
> (b) Mr Hughie Green (a quiz show host);
> (c) Civilisation as we know it;
> (d) The international Freemasonry conspiracy.



GENERAL CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

ADVANCED LEVEL

SOCIOLOGY

Time: Two Hours

Only Six Questions To Be Attempted

1. '*Sociology is the study of people who do not need to be studied, by people who do.*'

'*Somebody introduced the Black Death. Somebody introduced Income Tax. Somebody introduced sociology.*'

'*All the Golden Ages of man, all the Belles Epoques, were characterised by one thing: an absence of sociologists.*'

Which of these hostile assessments do you find most wounding? Which of them comes nearest to the truth? How would you attempt to improve the public image of sociology, while covertly furthering its subversive aims?

2. Johnny is a married man with ten children in institutions and a wife who resides in a battered wives' home. He has now found happiness with a 'Common Law Wife' just out of school who is about to bear him another child. They live in a retarded caravan which has broken down in North Ham, where Johnny draws Social Security. He is unable to work because, 'That's the way I've always been, innit?' He is claiming a council flat at North Ham, but the Council is reluctant to advance him over the heads of 15,000 people who have been on the housing list for an average of twelve years.

Explain why we are all to blame for the dilemma in which Johnny finds himself. How would you set about fanning the country into a state of white-hot indignation on his behalf?

3. State which of the following you consider the ultimate in obscenity: (a) an unearned income of £50,000 a year; (b) *Oh Calcutta!*; (c) anyone over thirty enjoying sex; (d) the headmaster of a comprehensive school who dismisses his 'D' stream as 'a shower of dimmies'; (e) the Young Conservatives. Give reasons for your choice.

4. '*A democracy is that form of government which prevails in one form or another in the decay of a State.*' Though widely discredited at the time, this judgment by the Duke of Northumberland in 1909 is now recognised to be correct. Suggest ways in which the sociologist can contribute to the decay of the State and the enervation of the Constitution, while preserving lip-service to democracy.

5. Distinguish between:
   (a) a revolution and a revolutionary situation;
   (b) justice and social justice;
   (c) a committed person and a biased person.

Describe how a court of social justice would operate in a revolutionary situation.

6. As a 'mildly radical' sociologist, how would you set about undermining any *two* of the following:
   (a) The Bank of England;
   (b) Mr Hughie Green;
   (c) Civilisation as we know it;
   (d) The international Freemasonry conspiracy.

7. Len and Linda are living in London waiting and working for the Revolution. They pay a week's rent to a landlord and then sit tight, making no further payments, for seven months, which is the time it takes the landlord to get an eviction order. They then repeat the performance a few streets away.

Given the exploitative world we live in, do you regard this as an acceptable design for living? Can you think of any reason why the rest of us should not do the same?

8. Compose a short Pop song embodying

either

The jubilant cry of an unmarried father who has broken his bourgeois shackles;

or

The lament of a Sixth Former who sees for the first time his classroom as the nursery of a counter-revolutionary ideology.

9. 'It seems to be a law of Nature,' writes Townend, 'that the poor should be to a certain degree improvident, that there may be always some to fulfil the most servile, the most sordid and the most ignoble offices. The stock of human happiness is thereby much increased.' Do you accept this law of Nature? If not, how would you work to overturn it? Is it better to leave the ignoble offices to immigrants, as at present? As a sociologist, what other ignoble offices would you be prepared to fulfil?

10. What are the epistemological problems involved in the tying of academic sociology, and in particular structural-functional theory, to a 'conservative' ideological standpoint, with its temptation to treat man as *homo sociologicus*? And do you think that people with white stone balls on their gateposts deserve everything that is coming to them?

Figure 1.1 A spoof examination paper in sociology by E. S. Turner. From *Punch*, 2 October 1974. Reproduced by permission of *Punch*.

The nature of this questioning approach is the subject of considerable comment by writers on sociology:

> Sociology is a subject with important practical implications. It can contribute to social criticism and practical social reform in several ways. First, the improved understanding of a given set of social circumstances often gives us all a better chance of controlling them. Second, sociology provides the means of increasing our cultural sensitivities, allowing policies to be based on an awareness of divergent cultural values. Third, we can investigate the consequences (intended and unintended) of the adoption of particular policy

> programmes. Finally, and perhaps most important, sociology provides self-enlightenment, offering groups and individuals an increased opportunity to alter the conditions of their own lives.
>
> Giddens, 1989

SOME SOCIOLOGICAL THEMES

The following poem combines a statement about the point of questioning institutions, cultures and social conduct, and a useful content list of themes covered in sociological writings. The exceptions are perhaps the themes of 'unconscious' and 'genes', which psychologists would claim as their particular province, 'climate', which is the concern of geographers, and 'deep linguistic structures', which are studied by psycholinguists. Additionally, a sociologist would study the phenomenon of 'belief in God' rather than a theological study based on the assumption of a God.

The Humanist's Sonnet

by Anthony Rudolf

I am determined by my sex
I am determined by my class
I am determined by my God
I am determined by my genes
I am determined by my unconscious
I am determined by my childhood
I am determined by my death
I am determined by my climate
I am determined by my homeland
I am determined by my work
I am determined by my newspaper
I am determined by my deep linguistic structures
I am determined by my etcetera
I am determined to be free

From the *New Humanist*. Reproduced with the permission of Anthony Rudolf.

This 'freedom' of the last line can easily be misinterpreted. The kind of freedom to which sociological inquiry contributes is a matter of continual debate among sociologists. Freedom is not seen as 'doing as one pleases'. Even choosing between alternatives is only a partial freedom.

> Freedom is first of all the chance to formulate the available choices, to argue over them – and then the opportunity to choose. That is why freedom cannot exist without an enlarged role of human reason in human affairs.
>
> Wright Mills, 1959

PERSONAL CONCERNS AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES

The issues raised in 'The Humanist's Sonnet' include a further theme, the link between personal concerns and social structures. A key feature of the sociological imagination, C. Wright Mills argued, was an awareness of this interplay. People in a mass society have personal problems which are intertwined with the social structure, but many do not recognize the connections. Knowledgeable people do. They understand that what they think of as personal troubles are very often also problems shared by others, and are incapable of solution by any one individual. Then only modifications of the structure of the groups in which they live, and sometimes the structure of the entire society, can be effective initiatives.

SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTIONS

Sociological questions are couched in terms of the social world that people create:

> The sociologist's questions always remain essentially the same: 'What are people doing with each other here?' 'What are their relationships to each other?' 'How are those relationships organized in institutions?' 'What are the collective ideas that move men and institutions?'
>
> Berger, 1966
>
> Copyright, © Peter Berger, 1966. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

Another famous attempt to outline the kinds of questions of a sociological approach is that of C. Wright Mills. Classic social analysts, he suggests, have consistently asked three sorts of questions:

> 1. What is the structure of this particular society as a whole? What are its essential components, and how are they related to one another? How does it differ from other varieties of social order? Within it, what is the meaning of any particular feature for its continuance and for its change?
> 2. Where does this society stand in human history? What are the mechanics by which it is changing? What is its place within and its meaning for the development of humanity as a whole? How does any particular feature we are examining affect, and how is it affected by the historical period in which it moves? And this period – what are its essential features? How does it differ from other periods? What are its characteristic ways of history-making?
> 3. What varieties of men and women now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties are coming to prevail? In what ways are they selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted? What kinds of 'human nature' are revealed in the conduct and character we observe in this society in this period? And what is the meaning for 'human nature' of each and every feature of the society we are examining?
>
> Wright Mills, 1959
>
> From *The Sociological Imagination*. Reprinted by permission of Oxford University Press.

SOCIOLOGY – FOR WHAT PURPOSES?

Sociologists are not agreed on the purposes of their study. Although there is general agreement that understanding social life is a key feature, the uses of sociology are disputed. One point of view is as follows:

> Should sociologists themselves actively advocate, and agitate for, practical programmes of reform or social change? Some argue that sociology can preserve its objectivity only if practitioners of the subject are studiously neutral in moral and political controversies, but there is no reason to think that scholars who remain aloof from current debates are necessarily more impartial in their assessment of sociological issues than others. There is bound to be a connection between studying sociology and the promptings of a social conscience. No sociologically sophisticated person can be unaware of the inequalities that exist in the world today, the lack of social justice in many social situations or the deprivations suffered by millions of people. It would be strange if sociologists did not take sides on practical issues, and it would be illogical as well as impractical to try to ban them from drawing on their sociological expertise in doing so.
>
> Giddens, 1989

The products of an enquiry that is conducted in an effort to understand society may be used by different individuals or groups for differing purposes. Berger (1966) argued that there was nothing inherent in the sociological enterprise that leads to any particular practice or outcome. One's choice of an area of study is, however, bound to be significant.

An alternative view is held by those who see prescriptions for changing cultures and institutions as a major concern. The idea is contained in the statement of Marx: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it.'

THE IRONY OF HUMAN ACTION

Those who would urge caution about this commitment to change society do so on various grounds, one of which refers to the difficulty of ensuring that change goes as planned. One finding derived from interactionist sociology is that of the irony of human action:

> the outcome of ideas is commonly very different from what those who had the ideas in the first place planned or hoped. Such a consciousness of the ironic aspect of history is sobering, a strong antidote to all kinds of revolutionary utopianism.
>
> Berger, 1966

Another reason for urging caution is that discovering 'error' does not automatically guarantee a superior alternative, since the alternative actions possible are multitudinous:

> Some 'advanced thinkers' are of the opinion that anyone who differs from the conventional opinion must be in the right. This is a delusion; if it were not, truth would be easier to come by than it is. There are infinite possibilities of error.
>
> Russell, 1950

Russell argued in his writings that the prior outcome of all critical and reflective thinking, not just sociological, was constructive doubt (see Russell, 1926). It follows that any social change should be subject to review and revision rather than implemented as the right answer.

SOCIOLOGY AS UNCOMMON SENSE

A view frequently encountered is that sociology is just common sense. Yet wherever sociology is studied, it tends to have a disturbing effect, a disturbing of that very common sense in question. Even though the sociologist investigates and reflects on the familiar society, and even though the categories employed in the analysis are only refinements of the categories which other people use – power, class, status, gender or race – the findings are often unexpected and can contradict common sense.

Therefore one claim made by some sociologists is that their intention is to 'improve' on common sense and 'expose' some of the folk interpretations of social behaviour as incomplete. Berger (1966) employed an interesting range of images to convey this point. He used phrases such as 'seeing through' and 'looking behind' very much as such phrases would be employed in common speech – 'seeing through his game', 'looking behind the scenes' – in other words, 'being up on all the tricks'. The sociologist is seen as trying to penetrate the smokescreen of the official versions of reality, those of the manager, the civil servant or the teacher, and to grasp the signals that come from the 'underworld', from the worker, the client or the pupil.

In setting about this kind of task, sociologists may find themselves in strange company, associating with the outsiders, the outcasts and the minorities, and on a broad range of missions. They may become involved in matters that others regard as sacred or distasteful. They will seek the company of judges or criminals, depending not on personal preferences but on the questions being asked. They will be interested in the human interaction that goes with warfare, with crime or with religion, and also in the relations between people in a classroom, or in a group of children playing in the street. The outcomes of these missions are not guaranteed. The investigation may yield something fresh and unexpected. This may be something totally unfamiliar or it may be the familiar taking on a new meaning. Sociology may make us see in a new light the very world in which we have lived all our lives.

Often, the uncommon sense of today becomes the common sense of tomorrow. As Giddens (1986) observes, a great deal of what we regard as common sense in this context, 'what everyone knows about society', has actually been based upon the routine work of social scientists for decades. We all know, for example, that divorce rates have risen since the Second

World War; we will also be aware of changes in the way teachers work in the classroom, in class sizes and in academic achievements. All this knowledge is based upon sociological research that has been publicized widely to inform social interest.

LAYERS OF MEANING

One reason why something fresh and unexpected is sometimes the outcome of sociological research is related to the complexity of human social behaviour, with its various layers of meaning. An individual may sample only a few of these layers of meaning in the routines of everyday life, e.g. teachers are unlikely to gain a view of school from the point of view of the pupils unless they make a special effort to gain this information. A sociologist is more likely to collect such data. A chapter that follows (Chapter 2) gives an account of the pupil's perspective and shows how the evidence demonstrates that holders of a transmission view of education have made unreasonable assumptions about pupils and that radical educationalists have sometimes embraced a delusion regarding pupils' aspirations. As we shall see in Chapter 23, this recognition has led some social theorists to adopt 'standpoint' theories of knowledge itself.

THE INVISIBLE SOCIAL WORLD

A large part of the introductory literature to sociology is taken up with questions of appropriate methods of study and the claim for the scientific nature of sociology. Sociology may be a network of propositions about the social life created by people, just as physical science is a network of propositions about physical reality, but the difficulties of procedure are increased when the invisibility of the subject matter is recognized:

> It comes as a mild shock to most people to be told that the entire web of human social interrelations is founded on many invisible and indirect meanings which we bestow on various individuals. Not only have we never seen a family. We have never seen a student or a teacher. Nor have we ever seen a scientist, a saint, or a sinner. So it is with socially defined statuses. We can observe the people who occupy such statuses: but, until we are informed that they occupy a certain status and are expected to behave accordingly, we cannot respond in any appropriate manner . . . The social world is, then, largely an invisible world. This constitutes a major methodological problem for the sociologist. Sociology is supposed to be a science; and science, after all, is based on observation. What kind of science is it that devotes itself to an examination of events which are, by their very nature, not directly observable?
>
> Cuzzort and King, 1989

In fact, all this should not alarm us unduly if we recognize that the physicist's observations are often equally indirect, and the phenomenon studied, whether it be concerning forces, gravity, light, electricity or energy, is equally invisible and socially constructed.

The balance of power between the social structures that shape (or even determine) our lives and life chances (social class, gender, race) and individual agency (the ability of an individual to influence or control their life) is a significant debate in sociology. The relationship between the two has been extensively analysed by Giddens (1984).

CONCLUSION

Sociology, then, is many things, some of them seemingly paradoxical.

It is a relatively new discipline, yet its quests and questions are among the most ancient forms of reflective thought.

If sociologists were not available, some form of substitute reflection on social behaviour would probably emerge: yet sociological thought and inquiry are also resisted and resented.

Everyone tends to feel familiar with the world of the sociologist: as members of the social world we should be the experts on it. Yet common-sense views are frequently disturbed by the inquiries of sociologists.

Sociology, in attempting to free us from the determining effect of social frameworks, may only make the strength of the structures more apparent and the sought-after freedom more elusive.

Sociology attempts dispassionate inquiry, yet cannot eradicate values from its investigations, the investigator or the subject of the investigation. The sociologists, like good detectives, must suspect everything and everyone, including themselves.

Sociologists themselves are far from united on many issues related to their discipline, yet have some unity in their undertaking to meet argument with argument and to acknowledge the value of the constructive doubt, and in their willingness to live with the creative uncertainty of a constantly changing subject matter.

If this buffet, this smorgasbord, is to your taste, welcome to sociology!

Further Reading

Ball, S. (2004) *The Routledge Farmer Reading in Sociology of Educating*, London: RoutledgeFalmer.

Berger, P. (1966) *Invitation to Sociology*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. Well known as a lively, interesting and readable introduction to sociological thinking.

Berger, P. and Kellner, H. (1983) *Sociology Reinterpreted*. Harmondsworth: Penguin.

Brown, C. (1979) *Understanding Society*. London: John Murray Ltd. The opening chapter has a very intelligible introduction to sociological theory and the problems of social research.

Cuzzort, R.P. and King, E.W. (2002) *Social Thought into the Twenty-First Century*, 6th edn. Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace. The first chapter of this book is a well written account of some of the basic problems of social thought,

its premises, sources of error and degrees of objectivity. The rest of the book gives a very useful account of the work of well known sociologists, including Durkheim, Marx, Weber, Mead, Wright Mills, Becker, Goffman. Garfinkel and Berger.

Giddens, A. (1984) *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Lee, D. and Newby, H. (1983) *The Problem of Sociology*. London: Hutchinson. This book develops some of the themes of this chapter.

Wright Mills, C. (1959) *The Sociological Imagination*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. This is harder reading than the previous five. It is thorough and worth the effort of reading, but perhaps is best tackled after reading one or more of the above.

Discussion and Activities

1. Write down your definition of sociology. Compare it with the definitions written by fellow students, and check it against dictionary, particularly sociological dictionary, definitions. The working definition of this chapter is that sociology can be seen as the systematic study of the social life (institutions, cultures and behaviour patterns) created by people and in turn influencing their behaviour in a continuous interaction.
2. In C. Brown's *Understanding Society* there is an interesting activity: draw a picture or diagram which represents society to you. The first chapter of this book contains a discussion of common responses to this activity, including variations on circles, triangles, networks and stick figures.
3. Conduct an informal survey of opinions about sociology among your friends and relations. How many of these responses are misunderstandings of the kind mentioned in this chapter? Are there regular patterns in the responses? How can we cope with a diversity of interpretations?
4. Take some of the questions from the spoof examination paper (Figure 1.1) and discuss the ideas that are being parodied, misrepresented or accurately stated in each case.
5. Refer back to *The Humanist's Sonnet* by Anthony Rudolf. Prepare an account of how each influence has contributed to your own self-concept.

Signposts

1. The limitations of sociology

This chapter has suggested some of the positive features of sociology but an awareness of limitations is worth some enquiry. A start can be made with Shipman, M. (1972) *The Limitations of Social Research*, Harlow: Longman. Further sources are Burgess, R.G. (ed.) (1984) *The Research Process in Educational Settings: Ten Case Studies*, Lewes: Falmer Press; and Burgess, R.G. (ed.) (1984) *Field Methods in the Study of Education*, Lewes: Falmer Press.

2. The ethics of sociology

If you join a group to study it, what happens if you are required to follow the members into illegal or immoral acts? This was a dilemma presented in Patrick, J. (1973) *A Glasgow Gang Observed*, London: Eyre-Methuen. Further ethical issues are raised in Berger, P. (1977) *Facing up to Modernity*, Harmondsworth: Penguin.

3. The looking-glass self

The looking-glass self is an idea attributed to Charles Horton Cooley (1972). Our reflection in a mirror gives us information about appearance and Cooley proposed that our reflection in other people's attitudes to us, and our interpretations of how they see us, are used as key sources of information about our self-concept. George Herbert Mead (1934) took the idea further, in noting a process he called 'taking the role of the other', whereby a kind of internal debate can take place as an individual rehearses possible courses of action and possible consequences. Mead stresses that in play children develop this activity and develop their self-concept at the same time. An excellent summary of this aspect of interactionism, symbolic interactionism, appears in Chapter 1 of Hargreaves, D.H. (1972) *Interpersonal Relations and Education*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. As an activity derived from this concept, you should be able to interview yourself about your experience of schooling or pretend to be a stranger trying to interpret puzzling aspects of schools, such as bells, uniforms or compulsory religious assemblies.

2 Pupils as Clients?*

> I resented being told what to wear, what to think, what to believe, what to say and when to say it.
>
> C. Burke and I. Grosvenor, *The School I'd Like*

INTRODUCTION: SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Some of the issues raised in this chapter require some awareness of the different perspectives within sociology. These are described in more detail in Part Four, and the account given here is only a brief introduction. One feature that complicates this issue is that there is no universally agreed categorization of the perspectives and the reader will encounter categorizations which are different from the one that follows.

Here, three broad groupings of the sociological perspectives – macro, micro and interactionist – will be proposed.

Macro Perspectives

There are several of these, but they all have a common feature: they start with a view of societies, cultures and institutions as having set patterns of rules and behaviours, with the result that individuals are seen as being forced, persuaded, manipulated or socialized into some degree of compliance with these patterns.

Two major sub-types of macro perspective are frequently described: structural functionalist and structural conflict.

Structural functionalist

This approach is based on an assumption that society is a structure or framework of parts which are closely linked together. Each of these parts (e.g. the economy, the family, education) performs a function in keeping society going. For the most part this structure is seen as relatively harmonious, because there is seen to be general agreement or consensus about the usefulness of the whole pattern.

---

* An earlier version of this chapter appeared in *Educational Review*, Vol. 29, No. 2.

Structural conflict

This approach disputes that all groups are relatively well served by the structural arrangements and the idea of a conflict of interests is stressed. Some groups are seen as having advantageous positions over others and they will strive to keep this situation as it is, while other groups are seen as trying to obtain an alternative structure, with a redistribution of advantages and scarce items. One kind of conflict approach, known as Marxist, is derived from the ideas of Karl Marx.

Micro Perspectives

There is a variety of micro perspectives and a confusion of labels, including some lengthy ones like 'ethnomethodology' and 'phenomenology'. Other labels used are 'interpretivist', 'symbolic interactionism' and, confusingly, since it will be treated here as a separate category, 'interactionist'. At this stage these labels, and the variations they signify, need not detain us: they will be explained in Part Four.

What these micro perspectives have in common is a view that, instead of individuals being forced by the patterns of society or pulled by the strings of society like puppets, individuals create society every day by their social actions. Change occurs when individuals cease one set of social actions and start another. Social order is seen as an active production by members of society, and meaning is seen as being negotiated by social actors rather than being imposed upon them.

Interactionist Perspectives

There are several interactionist perspectives, some inclined towards a micro view, some towards a macro view. What they tend to have in common is a view of society as a loose network of related parts in a constant state of flux. This network can be sometimes harmonious, sometimes conflict-laden, sometimes rigidly structured, sometimes more open and flexible, and sometimes can contain some or all of these features in a contradictory state of affairs.

Interactionist perspectives tend to have a Janus view. Janus was a Roman god, the guardian of gates and doorways, who had two faces looking in different directions. Interactionist perspectives tend to look two ways, both at the patterns of society stressed by the macro sociologists and at the work and negotiations that individuals accomplish in keeping society going, as stressed in the micro perspectives.

THE STRUCTURAL FUNCTIONALIST VIEW OF PUPILS

A structural functionalist view of education tends to stress the activity of schools in training and selecting children so that they fit into some necessary slot in a relatively harmonious society. This view implies that children need to be manipulated in some way for that society's convenience or for some other reason. The images used by people who take this view stress this. The teacher is said to be like a potter moulding clay, or like a gardener cultivating plants, or a builder building a house on sound foundations. In each case pupils are seen as things being processed, and often as having no rights. Stone and Taylor (1976) researched legal cases involving pupils' rights. One example was that pupils who were pacifists could still be compelled to join the cadet force of the school: the right of conscientious objection allowable to adults could be overruled by the headteacher. In recent times some international legislation on the rights of children (the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989) could provide support for children to question impositions on their beliefs. Articles 14 and 15 of the Convention outline children's rights to freedom of thought, conscience and religion as well as freedom of association. Some European legislation has also strengthened individual rights, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Social Charter (see Signpost 4).

This is often the official view. In 1976, the Labour Prime Minister, James Callaghan, made a speech about education, and the Secretary of State for Education, Shirley Williams, followed this by starting a series of public debates about education. The people to be involved included teachers, employers and trade unions. Pupils were not mentioned at first. Later, a proposal to invite pupil representatives was negatively received by teacher representatives. This is consistent with a functionalist view: why should you consult the clay about what kind of pot it is to be made into?

It might seem that any attempts to establish the pupil's point of view and to take it into account are bound to be using perspectives other than the functionalist. Some headteachers consulted appeared to think like this (Meighan, 1977a). Here are some of their reactions to a research project on consulting pupils about teaching:

> It is dangerous to involve children in this kind of comment on their teachers.
> Discipline would be adversely affected by this kind of exercise.
> It is bad for classroom relationships.
> Children are not competent to judge these matters.

These reactions occurred despite the fact that the teachers had been provided with a written briefing that summarized several previous researches, both in the UK and in the USA, in which the findings contradicted all the above statements. (This is not particularly unusual. People operating with particular views of teaching might often behave like this when first given information that is contrary to their beliefs. We are all, from time to time, liable to prefer 'not to let the evidence confuse the issues involved'.)

However, it does not follow that consulting pupils automatically suggests a nonfunctionalist perspective, because there are several approaches to manipulating pupils. One is based on confrontation, where teachers order pupils to behave in certain ways and rely on fear and punishment to get their way. But other functionalist approaches are based on persuasion, coaxing and more subtle forms of control. Consulting pupils and using some of their responses can become a means of coaxing them into niches of society rather than ordering them into them. Nevertheless, many attempts to establish the pupil's point of view do use other perspectives, e.g. structural conflict and interactionist.

WHICH PERSPECTIVE IS IN USE?

This is often a difficult question to answer because the perspectives in sociology overlap a great deal and researchers often use more than one perspective in the course of their research. There are often clues to the perspective being used in studies of the pupil's point of view, in the concepts used, the methods of inquiry and the kind of questions asked. Studies using a conflict perspective may often use the concept of alienation in schooling. Studies using a functionalist perspective would be likely to ask a question such as, 'What are the best teachers you have had like?' rather than 'If you designed the ideal school, what would it be like?' The first question limits the pupils to the status quo, whereas the second question is more radical, in allowing the pupils to consider alternatives, whether or not they have experienced them. Micro-sociological studies would be likely to gain data from spontaneous discussion, conversation with pupils and 'uncensored' or anonymous written material that was not going to be used to grade pupils or be marked by teachers (see Woods, 1976).

AN INTERACTIONIST APPROACH

An interactionist approach would tend to explore the network of perceptions in play. This might result in studying several of the 'layers of meaning' referred to in Chapter 1, or concentration on one layer of meaning, in this case that of the pupils. The questions involved might include the following:

1. How do pupils interpret the experience of schooling? Are they critical? Is there a division of opinion? How do the 'successful' react? How do the 'unsuccessful' react? Do boys and girls react in the same way? How do 'deschooled' pupils educated at home react?
2. How reliable and valid are pupils as judges of their school experiences? Do they judge some aspects of schooling accurately and other aspects inaccurately? Is consultation welcomed by pupils?
3. What do pupils see as ideal in schooling? What is a 'good' teacher, as they see it? How do they define a 'bad' teacher?
4. How much are the pupils aware of any aspects of the 'hidden' curriculum?

5. Pupils' view of school includes their view of fellow pupils, and this raises even more questions. How do peer groups operate in schools? What is the influence of such groups? Is there a youth culture opposing a school culture?

STUDIES AVAILABLE

There is only a limited number of studies of the pupils' point of view of schooling in Britain available. Therefore a first conclusion is that this is a neglected issue in educational research.

In some studies the viewpoint of pupils has been one aspect of a larger study. In his analysis of a boys' secondary school, Hargreaves (1967) obtained information from the pupils about how they interpreted some of the features of school life, especially streaming by ability.

In contrast, the study by Blishen (1969) concentrates entirely on pupils' view of schooling by providing selections from essays, written mostly by secondary school children, on the theme of 'the school that I'd like'.

The educational weekly *The Times Educational Supplement* (1969) carried a two-part study entitled 'Child's eye view of teacher', which contained a summary of primary school children's comments on their teachers. In the following year there appeared a study of early school-leavers' views of teachers and schools by Maizels (1970), and three years later a pair of studies reporting the views of primary and secondary school children was produced by Blishen (1973a, b).

A comparative viewpoint was available in two educational paperbacks. One by Holt (1969) reported his observations of how pupils reacted to schooling in the USA, while the other was written by eight Italian boys protesting about their experience of schooling in Italy (School of Barbiana, 1970). Another writer in the USA, Jackson (1971), was writing about a 'hidden' curriculum of influences in school that affected pupils considerably but was hardly recognized by teachers.

However, since 1973, there has been a growing number of researchers interested in the pupils' view of schooling, and one collection of articles is entitled *The Learners' Viewpoint* (Meighan, 1978b).

The influence of growing youth unemployment is reflected in subsequent studies by Gow and McPherson (1980) and by White and Brockington (1983). Further collections are edited by Hughes (1984) and by Hammersley and Woods (1984).

Two perspectives presented in the *British Journal of Sociology of Education* (Vol. 12, No. 3, 1991) report on a US study into why pupils drop out of school (Stevenson and Ellsworth, 1991). Another perspective is presented by Furlong in the same issue of the journal: 'Disaffected pupils: reconstructing the sociological perspective'.

HOW DO PUPILS INTERPRET THE EXPERIENCE OF SCHOOLING?

The studies so far suggest some tentative conclusions. First, primary school pupils do appear to be more satisfied with their experiences than secondary school pupils, except of course the very large number of four-year-olds who are entering school in reception classes. Second, where dissatisfaction is expressed, it is just as likely to come from 'successful' as 'unsuccessful' pupils.

Primary School

In response to a request to seven- to eleven-year-old school children for written portraits of teachers came 1,200 replies, which were analysed by Makins (1969). She noted how children had watched their teachers with obsessive concern, noting mannerisms, subtle changes in mood and detailed variations in behaviour; they remark on teachers who talk to lonely, left-out children during playground duty and those who are angry with children because they are angry themselves. She concludes that, on the whole, these pupils love their primary schools: 'It is a sad fate to go home. I would like to stay for more education with the great 5′10″ Mr Henshaw.'

The really popular teachers managed without many sanctions and did not shout at pupils very often. They let children talk, they explain clearly, they encourage, they are interested. Makins comments that the essays contained evidence that what children learn matters much less to them than how they are taught. Teachers who are good at something – music, art, photography, sport (it does not appear to matter what it is) – are appreciated, and so are student teachers who come prepared with new projects.

> On the evidence of our critics, hundreds of teachers are managing to make school so interesting that there is no time or reason for the old tricks and giggles and avoidance routines – and to establish a relationship with children makes the rituals of classroom warfare unthinkable.

Other studies (e.g. Blishen, 1972a, b) support these findings. A more recent study by Crocker (1988) is less positive and argues that capable young children are at risk of failing because of their infant school experience, suggesting that there is an overemphasis on conforming in schools and that by the age of six children 'closely mirror their teachers' opinions of their own and their peers' academic worth. By this age they have also learned to use the criteria that the teacher uses and can list them.'

Secondary School

The contrast with pupils' reports of their secondary schools is marked. For example, a study by Maizels (1970) concentrated on a sample of how 330 'unsuccessful' pupils who had recently left school at the earliest possible date, or were just about to leave, rated teachers in their secondary school. Schools and teachers were negatively rated for the most part. On the judgements given, Maizels concludes, few of the schools would get a 'pass' mark. Only a minority of pupils felt that their teachers had encouraged them, listened to what they had to say and praised them when they did well, had been pleasant, kind or sincere, or had kept their promises. Only 34 per cent of boys and girls had felt that their teachers had treated them like human beings.

The responses of some of the 'successful' pupils were obtained in an essay competition describing. 'The school that I'd like'. (Only children reasonably fluent in terms of literary skills and whose parents or teachers read the *Observer*, the newspaper which organized the competition, were likely to be included in such a sample.) Blishen (1969) comments that the essays amounted to an enormous, remarkably good-humoured, earnest, frequently passionate and, at best, highly intelligent plea for a new order in our schools, to replace what was currently seen as dreary and boring.

What the pupils mean by dreary and boring is diagnosed in some detail: 'Everything learnt is second-hand if it comes from the teachers and very often out-of-date and misleading if it comes from books. Far better to replace constipated ways of teaching with more active lessons.' The assessment of their experience of schooling was wide ranging and took in, among other things, the dullness of building design and dreary, unimaginative furniture, examinations and their distorting effect on learning, the role of the prefect as peer group policeman, the limiting effect of timetables, bells, the triviality of many school rules and the idea of compulsory worship and religious education as attempted indoctrination. Blishen comments that the image of the prison returned to him again and again as he read the essays. A further study of secondary school children was undertaken by Blishen in 1973.

HOW DOES IT AFFECT BEHAVIOUR?

In a survey of 15,000 British pupils carried out by the *Guardian* newspaper in 2001 some key findings were that pupils felt that schools were not happy places, that pupils' views were not listened to, that they were not treated and respected as individuals and that schools were rigid and inflexible institutions. (The survey was published later as *The School I'd Like* by Burke, C. and Grosvenor, I., London: Routledge Falmer 2003.

'Deschooled' Pupils

Some parents exercise their legal right to educate their children at home. (The organization that supports such cases is Education Otherwise, and it is studied in a later chapter.) The views of such children are of particular interest, since they often have an alternative experience with which to make comparison. Here are two examples:

> The school I'd like is what I have: my mother teaches my brother and me at home. We study maths, English, science, history, geography, French and scripture. This system has many advantages. The most important is that we can learn at our own speed: thus I have recently started A-level maths but am still struggling with O English, while my brother, who is three and a half years younger, is advanced in English but only average at arithmetic. Another advantage is that we have much more free time than other children: we don't waste time travelling to and fro and, as we have individual work, the education officer agreed to shorten lesson times for us. I spend a lot of my leisure time reading, bird watching, stamp and coin collecting, doing jigsaws, carpentry, painting, listening to radio, watching TV, swimming, playing chess, draughts, tennis and table tennis. Another advantage is that we are not hedged in by a lot of silly rules and regulations. We are also free from bullying big boys and from pressure to start bad habits like smoking and drug taking. We dress in comfortable, sensible clothes and do not have to wear some ridiculous uniform, nor do we have to play compulsory games. Again, we have home cooking all the time.
>
> When my mother started, a lot of people told her she was foolish because we would never learn to mix. I don't think this is true because, although I've always liked some time by myself, my brother likes and has lots of friends with whom he goes to play and who come and play with him . . . It was also said that we would grow up selfish: I hope we're not. About once a fortnight we have a stall in our front garden to aid Oxfam and have collected £4 2s 3d so far this year. We also do a few odd jobs around the house. People also said Mother would find it too much. I know we get her down at times, but she survives and looks, so people say, much younger than she is . . .
>
> The only disadvantage of the system to my mind is the difficulty of doing much advanced practical work in science because of the amount of apparatus required.
>
> I think it would solve a lot of problems if more people followed our system.
>
> Frank (aged 12)
> From Blishen, 1969.
>
> Copyright © Penguin Books and contributors. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

Why I like to be taught at home

> I like to be taught at home because I get more attention. For in a class there may be 40 or more children with only one person to teach them. Also if there are a lot of people in a class, each child can get only a fraction of the teacher's attention. Of course, not every pupil in a class behaves as he or she should and the teacher has to sort out fights and squabbles and make rules as to how to behave.
>
> All this wastes time that you could be learning in. But when you are at home, there is no-

> one to fight with (except your Mum), no-one to queue with to get your books marked and find out what your next bit of work is. I have found, especially in maths, that some people are stuck with their sums and cannot get on without help from the teacher. It has taken me ten minutes standing waiting for my turn.
>
> Another thing is that it is more peaceful and quiet at home because even when everyone is silent there is still a sound which you are only aware of if you have heard real silence.
>
> Sophia Howard (aged 10)

From *Education Otherwise Newsletter*, No. 8, December 1978. Reprinted by permission of Sophia and Frances Howard.

HOW USEFUL ARE THE JUDGEMENTS OF PUPILS ABOUT SCHOOLING?

Beliefs about the usefulness of pupils' judgement of schooling are plentiful, whereas evidence is not. Investigations into the characteristics of pupil perceptions of schooling have taken place in the USA. The most systematic attempts appear to be those of Veldman and Peck (1963). The conclusion they reached was that pupil perception of teaching performance was reliable enough and valid enough in most aspects of classroom technique to be worth considering as useful feedback to teachers about their performance. The general conclusion from the limited research available is that this holds good for samples of British children (Meighan, 1974a, 1977a) although there appear to be a few technical aspects of performance, e.g. the effective use of questions and of teaching aids, where the perceptions of pupils are less reliable. 'Usefulness', however, can be interpreted in other ways. Are the perceptions useful as feedback so that performance is improved?

The impression of students who took part in research on pupils' perceptions was that it did make a difference and that they did modify or attempt to modify their classroom technique because of things that children had drawn to their attention.

Another aspect of usefulness is whether the act of consultation affects relationships. Some headteachers feared that it would lead to a deterioration, but the students reported otherwise. Several reported that they were less tense with the children concerned afterwards and, in one case, a 'difficult' group simply ceased to be difficult. Obstruction gave way to cooperation, to the surprise of both student and supervising teacher. The pupils appeared to regard someone who consulted them and took their opinions seriously as being on their side. Werthman (1963) reports some similar responses in his studies of delinquents in schools.

WHAT DO PUPILS SEE AS IDEAL?

There appears to be a high degree of consensus among pupils of all ages about the ideal teacher. The list of qualities children wish to see in their teachers is extensive:

> They should be understanding, the children say, and patient; should encourage and praise wherever possible; should listen to their pupils and give their pupils a chance to speak; should be willing to have points made against them, be humble, kind, capable of informality and simply pleasant; should share more activities with their children than they commonly do, and should not expect all children to be always docile. They should have conscience about the captive nature of their audience; should attempt to establish links with parents; should be punctual for lessons, enthusiastic within reason; should not desert a school lightly; should recognise the importance to a child of being allowed to take the initiative in school work; and, above all, should be warm and personal.
>
> Blishen, 1969
>
> Copyright © Penguin Books and contributors. Reprinted by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.

Blishen goes on to say how the children saw clearly that these 'new' teachers could not operate easily in the present context of secondary schooling, and that widespread changes in the organization of schools might be necessary.

The bad teacher, as defined by pupils, uses fear as a means of dominance, and is extremely moody, miserable, indifferent and lazy. The study by Maizels (1970) shows a similar picture. The unfavourable references to teachers in her study were overstrictness, having favourites, being sarcastic, being moody and overemphasis on time-keeping. Only a few teachers were remembered as kind, sincere, keeping their promises, reliable, pleasant, full of ideas, efficient and encouraging.

The bad teacher, in the essays written on the theme of 'The School that I'd like' (Blishen, 1969), is found guilty of remoteness, lack of sympathy and attachment to trivial rules, and fails to admit ignorance or uncertainty. Such teachers made schools unhappy places, and denied children the kind of relationship with teachers they were seeking and expressing in their view of the ideal teacher.

Teachers are a central focus in children's comments about schools, but the context in which teachers operate is also of concern. Blishen (1969) reports how children commented on various other aspects of secondary schooling. The overwhelming majority wanted mixed schools and comprehensive schools. The buildings came in for considerable negative comment: children were tired of square rooms, unimaginative decoration, desks and the lack of common rooms for pupils. Examinations were seen as a significant cause of 'constipated' teaching and distance in teachers, and alternative forms of assessment were desired. Prefects, homework, bells and religious education all received considerable scorn and alternatives for some of these were suggested. For example, religious assembly and instruction were interpreted as a form of indoctrination that represented a failure to look at a wide range of religions, philosophies and moralities. (It was six years later that a private member's bill was drafted to propose a remedy for precisely this failure: British Humanist Association, 1975.)

The comments of the children were surprisingly sober and considered, Blishen comments, and intelligent alternatives to the status quo were presented in most cases.

DO PUPILS RECOGNIZE THE 'HIDDEN' CURRICULUM?

'The hidden curriculum' is a term used to refer to those aspects of learning in schools that are unofficial, unintentional or undeclared consequences of the way teaching and learning are organized and performed in schools. A later chapter looks at this concept in detail.

Jackson (1971) uses the term to describe the unofficial three Rs – rules, routines and regulations – that pupils must learn in order to survive comfortably and effectively in schools. Other aspects include the messages learnt from school buildings, the influence of teachers' expectations, the kind of knowledge implied by teaching techniques, the effects of different usages of language and the sex roles projected by an institution. The idea of a hidden curriculum is closely linked with the notion of labelling processes and self-fulfilling prophecies, and one consequence may be the alienation of many pupils from learning.

The responses of the children in the various studies are often reminiscent of Goffman's theory of total institutions (see Goffman, 1961), in which he analyses in detail the coercive, non-negotiable and non-consultative nature of many contemporary institutions, including armies, asylums, monasteries, hospitals and prisons.

Goffman also talks about depersonalization, and this idea is also seen by a high school pupil in the USA:

> School is like roulette or something. You can't just ask: Well, what's the point of it? The point of it? The point of it is to do it, to get through and get into college. But you have to figure the system or you can't win, because the odds are all on the house's side. I guess it's a little like the real world in that way. The main thing is not to take it personal, to understand that it's just a system and it treats you like the same way it treats everybody else, like an engine or a machine or something mechanical. Our names get fed into it – we get fed into it – when we're five years old, and if we catch on and watch our step, it spits us out when we're 17 or 18, ready for college.
>
> Cited in Silberman, 1971

The effect of 'trading for grades' gradually replacing all other educational activity is described by Becker (1968), and also by the boys in the School of Barbiana:

> Day in and day out they study for marks, for reports and diplomas. Languages, sciences, history – everything becomes purely pass marks. Behind those sheets of paper there is only a desire for personal gain. The diploma means money . . . you have to be a social climber at the age of twelve.
>
> Letter to a teacher, 1970

The process of labelling and the consequence of alienation, for some pupils at least, are indicated in the above comments from pupils. Some pupils are able to recognize some aspects of the hidden curriculum. The material quoted earlier from pupils being educated at home shows an awareness of several other aspects, including 'denial, delay and interruption', key ideas in Jackson's analysis of the hidden curriculum, as outlined in Chapter 6.

CONCLUSION

Nice Strict and Nasty Strict

> *Your strictness is not strict (if you see what I mean). A nice strict.*
>
> Fourth year pupil

The research Roland Meighan conducted on pupils' views of teaching performance yielded these two categories of 'nice strict' and 'nasty strict', and they accord with the descriptions of good and bad teachers given earlier. These findings disappoint at least two audiences in education: the traditional transmission educationalists and the radical educationalists.

The traditional transmission educationalists tend to believe that pupils should not be consulted, are not competent to make judgements about schooling and will abuse any attempts by teachers to gain their views, leading to poorer discipline, and they generally accept the spirit of 'you do not consult the clay about what kind of pot it wants to be'. The findings that pupils make sound judgements, and that relationships do not deteriorate but often improve, do not match these beliefs.

The radical educationalists tend to believe that there is a pool of untapped radical desires in the consciousness of pupils, desires for democratic relationships and autonomous situations:

> Many of the pupils of the future will not accept, as many of us did and still do, the dictatorial methods of teachers who regard the classrooms as their own little despotic kingdoms.
>
> Kohl, 1970

The findings that most pupils ask for a more kindly authoritarian situation, the 'nice strict' regime, rather than for participation, autonomy and a democratic set of relationships, do not match these beliefs either.

In short, the research supports the proposition that the transmission view, as given above, is just plain wrong, and that the radical view, as given above, is a delusion. However, the study by Blishen (1969) holds a little hope for the latter view, since pupils in his sample, mostly the articulate and the highest achievers, did ask for a more participative and consultative relationship, and did ask for rather more than just 'nice strict'.

The View from the Girls

One serious limitation of the studies to date is the habit of putting boys and girls together and reporting the pupils' view of schooling. However, the evidence that school may, to some extent, present a different experience for girls has emerged. Schooling appears to be significantly sex-typed, a theme explored in Chapter 26. Other differences, like social class, ethnic origin and geographical region, are other important factors.

The Neglect of the Pupils' Viewpoint

The reasons for the neglect of the pupils' view may be related to the low power and status of both child and pupil roles, as Calvert (1975) suggests. The existing definitions of the situation appear to consider teaching as more important than learning, and the teacher's activity as more central than the pupils', despite the official rhetoric of educational writing and debate that makes claims for the pupils' welfare as the central focus. Calvert argues that this became clear after considering the politics of education. Every other group involved in education – teachers, administrators, planners, parents, employers – can obtain a better hearing for its point of view, through pressure groups or other channels, than can pupils. Moves to establish pupil pressure groups and children's rights are very recent, and often result in highly emotional, if not hysterical, responses from senior educationalists. In Europe, however, their rights are often recognized in legislation, and government resources are used to support pupil participation (see Davies, L. and Kirkpatrick, G. (2000), *The EURIDEM Project: A Review of Pupil Democracy in Europe*, London: Children's Rights Alliance).

Apart from the low status of both child and pupil roles, the writings about education are produced largely for an audience of teachers, who have the problems of teachers as their major preoccupation. The studies of the pupils' experiences themselves are mostly directed at the teachers and their problems. Few books are written about schooling for pupils, the *Little Red Schoolbook* being one exception.

This emphasis on teachers' views is reinforced by the apparent contradiction that the teacher needs the pupil more than the pupil needs the teacher. The teacher's position is an occupational one that requires some degree of commitment, since livelihoods are at stake. The pupil has no choice, and is not paid to pursue the role allotted, and many pupils remain uncommitted and indifferent, obtaining self-esteem in peer group and other activities. Successful performance of role can therefore be more important to a teacher than to a pupil.

For these reasons the role of pupil tends to be defined by the teacher, and the pupil's viewpoint neglected:

> Because the teacher thus defined the pupil role, he tends to see himself as the more decisive participant in the performance, and thinks of the pupil's role as more receptive than his own. Things are done by the teacher to or for the pupil, just as things are done by the doctor to or for his patient; and the pupil, like the patient, is expected to conform to the expectation thus set up for him.
>
> Calvert, 1975

In this situation, sociological studies of the pupils' view of schooling that are undertaken from perspectives other than the structural functionalist are likely to be disturbing and to yield the insights that radically question what was assumed about a familiar scene, thus producing the 'uncommon sense' referred to in the opening chapter.

Summary

Although research on the point of view of pupils is limited, there emerges a considerable degree of consensus in the general findings:

1. A larger number of primary school children tend to enjoy school, whereas secondary school children tend to be less happy with their school experiences. More recent studies are showing that some groups of primary children find their experiences are not enjoyable, e.g. four-year-olds in reception classes where there is a poor nursery education and formal classes are introduced too early.
2. Both 'successful' and 'unsuccessful' pupils in secondary schools record dissatisfaction. It is not just a reaction of the 'failures'.
3. The dissatisfaction appears to be marked, and not a minor feature. Only the minority of secondary schools appear to achieve even a pass mark in the eyes of the pupils.
4. The views of the pupils are not merely negative. They are sympathetic to the difficulties of teachers. They are able to offer a wide range of constructive, and mostly feasible, alternatives.
5. The perceptions of pupils show high degrees of reliability and validity.
6. Pupils' views about preferred teachers show a high degree of consensus, as do their views of 'bad' teachers.
7. Pupils are able to recognize some aspects of the hidden curriculum and some of the labelling processes, and record their feelings of alienation that result.
8. A structural functional view tends to dominate educational thinking, so investigations of the pupils' view are often seen as radical even when they are not.
9. The pupil's layer of meaning is rarely known to teachers in any systematic way, so findings are often disturbing and represent 'uncommon sense'.
10. The pupils' preference for 'nice strict' over 'nasty strict' disappoints the beliefs of both transmission educationalists and radical educationalists.
11. The experience of schooling of girls may well differ from that of boys, therefore making generalizations about the pupils' view open to question.

Further Reading

Blishen, E. (1969) *The School that I'd Like*. Harmondsworth: Penguin. One of the most readable accounts of the pupils' point of view.

Blishen, E. (1973) 'Pupils' Views of Primary Teachers', *Where?*, 84.

Blishen, E. (1973) 'Pupils' Views of Secondary Teachers', *Where?*, 86.

Burke, C. and Grosvenor, I. (2003) *The School I'd Like*. London: Routledge Falmer.

Cleave, S. and Brown, S. (1991) *Early to School: Four Year Olds in Infant Classes*. London: Routledge.

Crocker, A. (1988) 'Are some gifted children at risk because of their infant school experience?', *Education Today*, **38**, 3, 49–54.

Educational Review, **30**, 2. This special edition of *Educational Review* is entitled 'The Learners' Viewpoint', and was published in 1978.

Gow, L. and McPherson, A. (1980) *Tell Them from Me*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Hammersley, M. and Woods, P. (eds) (1984) *Life in School*. Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

Hughes, J. (ed.) (1984) *The Best Years: Reflections of School Leavers in the 1980s*. Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press.

Newell, P. (1991) *The UN Convention and Children's Rights in the UK*. London: National Children's Bureau.

Sherman, A. (1996) *Rules, Routines and Regimentation: Young Children Reporting on Their Schooling*. Nottingham: Educational Heretics Press.

Stevenson, R. and Ellsworth, J. (1991) 'Dropping out in a working class high school: adolescent voices on the decision to leave', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, **12**, 3, 277–91.

Stone, J. and Taylor, F. (1976) 'The Sad Tale of Pupils' Rights', *Where*?, 122.

Tucker, N. (1979) 'Pupils' Views of Teachers', *Where*?, 152; 155.

White, R. and Brockington, D. (1983) *Tales out of School*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Discussion and Activities

1. One straightforward activity is a replication of the study by Blishen. Either write your own account or ask some pupils to write their account of the school that they would like. The findings in *The School that I'd Like* could be used as cue material in any preliminary discussion if you think this is appropriate. Northamptonshire LEA organized a consultation with pupils over the curriculum. For an account, see Makins, V. (1984) 'Giving the Customers a Say', *Times Educational Supplement*, 23 November 1984.
2. An activity that might appeal to some readers is to research your own teaching style by getting a class to write answers to questions about classroom performance. Here are the questions used in previous research. (They could be extended or modified as thought fit.)
   (A) Preparation:
      (1) Do you think that my lessons are well prepared?
      (2) Do the lessons have enough interest for you?
      (3) Do you feel that I have organized everything well before the lessons start?
      (4) Do the lessons seem to have a pattern? (Or are they confusing?)
   (B) Presentation:
      (5) Do I speak clearly and use my voice well?
      (6) Are my explanations and instructions clear?
      (7) Do I use questions well?
      (8) Do I use teaching aids well?
   (C) Attitudes:
      (9) Do I treat you fairly?
      (10) Am I good humoured enough?
      (11) Am I too harsh or too soft with anyone?
      (12) Do I seem to be sympathetic with you?

(D) Class management:
  (13) Am I strict enough or too strict with the class?
  (14) Is my organization of activities during the lesson sound?
  (15) Are the start and end of lessons effective?
  (16) Do I manage the time available well?

An account of the research appears in the *British Journal of Teacher Education*, Vol. 3, No. 2. *Note*. Student teachers should make sure that their supervisors give clearance to this activity.

3. Client is an analogy. To what extent would other analogies help to describe the situation of pupils? Suggestions: prisoners, partners, apprentices, slaves, conscripts, parishioners. One interesting reference might be Easthope, G. (1980) 'Curricula are Social Processes', in L. Barton *et al.* (eds), *Schooling, Ideology and the Curriculum*, Lewes: Falmer Press.

Signposts

1. Gender

The experience of girls and their perspective may differ in some respects from those of boys. Some starting points are: Davies, L. (1984) *Pupil Power: Gender and Deviance in School*, Lewes: Falmer Press; Stanworth, M. (1983) *Gender and Schooling*, London: Hutchinson; Weiner, U. (ed.), (1985) *Just a Bunch of Girls*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press; and Herbert, C. (1989) *Talking of Silence: the Sexual Harassment of Schoolgirls*, London: The Falmer Press.

2. Pupil culture

The idea that peer interaction is a crucial feature of the pupils' perspective is developed in McPherson, J. (1983) *The Feral Classroom*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul; and in Hammersley, M. and Woods, P. (1984) *Life in School: the Sociology of Pupil Culture*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press.

3. Employment and unemployment

How pupil viewpoints are influenced is the subject of Willis, P. (1977) *Learning to Labour*, Farnborough: Saxon House; and Hughes (1984) and Gow and McPherson (1980).

4. Children's rights

The world has over two billion children and young people and on 20 November 1989 the United Nations Assembly adopted the Convention on the Rights of the Child. How this international piece of legislation is of use to children (and those who work with them) is the subject of Newell, P. (1991) *The UN Convention and Children's Rights in the UK*. This has been published by the National Children's Bureau (8 Wakley Street, London EC1V 7QE), a body concerned with the welfare of children and young people.

5. The Children's Manifesto

In June 2001 the *Guardian* revisited the 'School That I'd Like' project first run in the Observer in 1967, when 1,000 children reported. This time 15,000 children responded. See *Guardian Education* 5th June 2001, stored on *www.Guardian-Education.co.uk*, and also stored on *http://bretton.ac.uk/schoolilike.html*

6. Pupil voice

Inclusionary and exclusionary processes in schools seem to involve the construction of pupil identities as either sociologically 'normal' or 'deviant'. Inclusivity as an educational goal or strategy attempts the normalization of the majority of pupils (Corbett, 1997). By contrast, pressures to exclude pupils from schools invite the identification of some as being fundamentally different 'others', marginal in status or sociologically deviant. Teachers in effect appear to be engaged in a societal process of patrolling the boundaries (Erikson, 1966) of the 'normal' social world and structuring the careers of children within schools and classrooms, or even manoeuvring them beyond their boundaries. See Waterhouse, S. (2002) 'Deviant and Non-deviant Identities in the Classroom: Patrolling the Boundaries of the Normal Social World', paper presented at the European Conference on Educational Research, University of Lisbon, 11–14 September 2002. The text is in the Education-line Internet document collection at: *http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002140.htm*

Urquhart, I. (2001) '"Walking on air"? Pupil Voice and School Choice', *Forum* (for Promoting 3–19 Comprehensive Education), **43**, 2: Summer 2001. See also MacBeath, J., Myers, K. and Demetriou, H. (2001) 'Supporting Teachers in Consulting Pupils about Aspects of Teaching and Learning, and Evaluating Impact', *Forum* (for Promoting 3–19 Comprehensive Education), **43**, 2: Summer 2001.

7. ARCH

An organization that campaigns on behalf of children's rights is *Action On Rights For Children (ARCH)*. Check out their website at *www.arch-ed.org* for further information.

Teachers as Victims? 3

It is difficult to get people to understand something when their salaries depend on them not understanding it.

Based on an observation attributed to Upton Sinclair

We are just miserable rule-followers.

Verdict of a teacher in South Africa reported in C. Harber, *State of Transition*

INTRODUCTION

Description and analysis in human affairs often proceed by the use of analogies. Sociologists use a variety of these in their work. Each analogy presents possibilities of clarification as well as problems of distortion. The analogy of teacher as victim stresses the possibility of constraint, of limited choices, of imposed conditions of work. The distortions produced by the idea of victim include the possible conclusions that teachers are helpless victims, that constraints do not change and that limited choices are equivalent to no choices. An analysis taking the idea of teacher as victim takes up most of this chapter, and these distortions need to be borne in mind.

ANALOGIES OF THE TEACHER'S SITUATION

Role

A common analogy in sociological writings about teachers is that of role. In common with many sociological analogies, it is derived from drama. Some analyses of this kind proceed by listing alternative roles and describing the content of each. Two basic sets of roles are often proposed, one concerned with the activities of instruction and evaluation and the other concerned with maintaining control and generally creating the conditions for learning to take place (see Hoyle, 1969). These two main roles may be broken down into sub-roles, and Hoyle gives a list of examples that include:

1. Representative of society: inculcates moral precepts.
2. Judge: gives marks and ratings.
3. Resource: possesses knowledge and skills.
4. Helper: provides guidance on pupils' difficulties.
5. Referee: settles disputes among pupils.
6. Detective: discovers rule breakers.
7. Object of identification: possesses traits which pupils may imitate.
8. Ego-supporter: helps pupils to develop confidence in themselves.

Another use of role theory stresses the process of performing a role with the flexibility of conduct that is required, and the complexity of managing impressions in public (see Hargreaves, 1972). This approach is often referred to as dramaturgical, and the writings of Goffman provide many examples. In this analogy, social life is seen as an elaborate form of drama, requiring that people project a convincing image of themselves to their audiences. Therefore, a key idea here is that of the presentation of self, which is indeed the title of one of Goffman's books. But this analogy, too, has limitations. The teacher lacks a well developed script and has an unchanging audience, whereas actors in theatres commonly have both a full script and a succession of new audiences.

Cultural Worker

An analogy from the world of work is that of cultural worker. The worker is envisaged as someone who works to the designs of others: the bricklayer follows the architect's plan, the car assembler works to the specification of the designers and the navvy moves earth according to the maps produced by others. The cultural workers, whether they be teachers, journalists, artists or civil servants, are seen as people who reproduce culture in the form of language, values, attitudes, images, rules and information. They are seen as perpetuators rather than innovators, and their task is to reproduce the cultural apparatus to the design of others. C. Wright Mills argues that the cultural apparatus is composed of all the organizations in which artistic, intellectual or scientific work goes on, and therefore involves a complex set of institutions, including schools, theatres, newspapers, studios, laboratories, museums and magazines. He sees a strong likelihood that cultural workers will be in cooperation with the ruling group not least because of the prestige that this ensures. Association with authority lends increased importance to the work.

This analogy of cultural worker has limitations when applied to teachers. Not least of these is overgeneralization. Some teachers innovate, some marginally, some more radically: some change does occur from within schools. The autonomy of teachers may be overstated, but it can also be understated, and an analogy interpreting teaching as solely technical, as the activity of a cultural worker and nothing more, runs this risk. A further limitation is that the analogy of cultural worker may distract attention from the contradictions of the teaching task;

e.g. teachers are expected both to preserve the cultural status quo and to produce innovators who will develop new technologies, new industries, new sources of wealth and other fresh cultural ideas.

Other Analogies

The analogies of teacher as victim, the role of the teacher and teacher as cultural worker do not exhaust the possibilities. Other analogies that occur in sociological and educational writings from time to time include the teacher as a control agent, acting as a kind of police officer or prison officer. Other analogies may stress the manipulative task of teaching, seeing teachers as technicians of an educational production line, or potters moulding human material, or gardeners tending young human stock. An alternative occupational comparison is that of a profession. Teaching does not meet the criteria for a traditional profession, for example, having little or no autonomy, and has been seen as a semi-profession, and teachers as members of a qualifying association.

These analogies have several drawbacks, including the tendency to oversimplify by selecting one aspect of the complex task of teaching and thus being incapable of describing the diversity of actions and outcomes. They also share some of the limitations of the other analogies mentioned earlier, e.g. a strong tendency to overlook the contradictory nature of teaching actions.

A more complex analogy that has been used recently is that of scripts. Scripts appear both in music, as musical scores, and in drama, as play scripts, but a more modern version is the television script. The analogy of scripts may prove to be useful in the case of teaching if it extends the idea of role. Roles are seen as linked in a script which defines the setting, the action, varying audiences both in the studio and outside in their homes. The script also has a history behind it, exists alongside alternative scripts and is subject to various kinds of scrutiny as regards its suitability. The teacher may be seen as appearing in a variety of roles, including producer, actor-producer, producer-manager or director. At the end of this chapter you will be invited to use this analogy as a descriptive and analytical idea.

SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTIONS ABOUT TEACHERS

The questions asked in a sociological approach were discussed in a previous chapter. If we insert ‘teachers’ into one of the sets of questions given, it reads as follows. ‘What varieties of teachers now prevail in this society and in this period? And what varieties of teachers are coming to prevail? In what ways are teachers selected and formed, liberated and repressed, made sensitive and blunted?’

One way of assembling some ideas and evidence about this set of questions is to adopt a biographical approach, to follow the experience of a teacher taking up an appointment at a school. The experiences of a student teacher starting a teaching practice would provide many similar features. Since few teachers are involved in designing and setting up a new school, the situation encountered is that of an assorted kit of items chosen and designed by others. The quality of the thinking behind this package is outside the control of the incoming teacher, and it may be resistant to change:

> each social situation in which we find ourselves is not only defined by our contemporaries but predefined by our predecessors. Since one cannot possibly talk back to one's ancestors, their ill-conceived constructions are commonly more difficult to get rid of than those built in our own lifetime.
>
> Berger, 1963

The situation facing the person in a new appointment can be described in various ways. It is a ready-made set of recipes; it is an existing perspective; it is a cultural world presented to the stranger; it is a kit of ideas issued to the new recruit. Whichever analogy is used, there is a complex of features involved. What follows is a catalogue of features, each briefly illustrated. A fuller treatment of each of these features will be given in later chapters. The analogy in use here is that of the teacher as victim.

THE TEACHER AS VICTIM

School Buildings

Kohl reports how teachers in his seminars drew or wrote about school. The drawings were dominated by boxes representing rooms, papers, books, tables and buildings. Memories of school were predominantly rectangular.

> It is no accident that spatial memories are strong. The placement of objects in space is not arbitrary and rooms represent in physical form the spirit and souls of places and institutions. A teacher's room tells us something about who he is and a great deal about what he is doing.
>
> Kohl, 1970

The spaces provided by architects tend to be permanent and may well outlast the beliefs about education that underpinned the design instruction. To an incoming teacher, the arrangement of rooms, corridors, furniture, display areas and specialized facilities, e.g. a library or a hall, is of interest in at least three ways:

1. It suggests possibilities and opportunities for teaching and learning.
2. It places constraints on what can happen for whatever spatial layout is met; some teaching and learning possibilities are eliminated or made very difficult.
3. It implies an ideology of education, i.e. a pattern of assumptions about knowledge,

teaching, learning, relationships, organization, assessment and resources. One such pattern might be that school knowledge is best regarded as different subjects, that teaching is essentially instructing, that learning is essentially absorbing the information and ideas of the teacher, that relationships are authoritarian, that organization is into groups of about 30 learners called a class, that assessment is the judging of written end-products and that appropriate resources are books, written by teacher-commentators, called textbooks. A building designed with these assumptions in mind presents problems to an incoming teacher who does not accept one of these propositions and severe difficulties to one who rejects the whole set. One interesting account of how a teacher dealt with his 'open' ideology of education in a 'closed' building and situation is Kohl's *The Open Classroom* but, for the most part, teachers can be seen as victims of the building design.

The Headteacher

Headteachers may be regarded as victims too: they receive a building, usually handed on from predecessors. They also receive, without much power of negotiation, many of the other features listed later, e.g. the external examination system. In C. Wright Mills's analogy, the headteachers are the foremen cultural workers, controlling those in their charge to some extent, but in turn controlled by others. However, in exercising their control over the particular schools in their charge, they have power to vary the regimes in various ways, e.g. by keeping power, by delegating or by democratizing.

Some strong clues may be present in the headteacher's room layout, although these are, of course, only clues, and not conclusive evidence. In a democratized regime the headteacher may not even have a room, if the decision of the school senate was that no room was necessary for this purpose. A decision of this kind was made by the Countesthorpe Community College in 1970, although later the decision was revised.

Research by Evans (1974a) suggests that varying patterns of headteachers' room arrangement may be found representing degrees of authoritarianism. In Figure 3.1(e) the most 'modern' headteachers, in the words of Evans, 'relegate their bureaucratic function to the wall'. The headteacher rotates towards the centre of the room in a swivel chair, and can arrange more democratic or consultative groupings around a coffee table if desired. But the layouts of most headteachers' rooms are of the other four kinds. The language of the arrangement and the objects in the room are authoritarian rather than consultative or democratic. Evans comments that these various layouts bear little relation to the practicalities of sources of light and heat, but are related to the way headteachers wish to present themselves and manage relationships. Teachers have little control over headteachers' choices of regime and therefore can be victims of a particular headteacher's ideology of education.

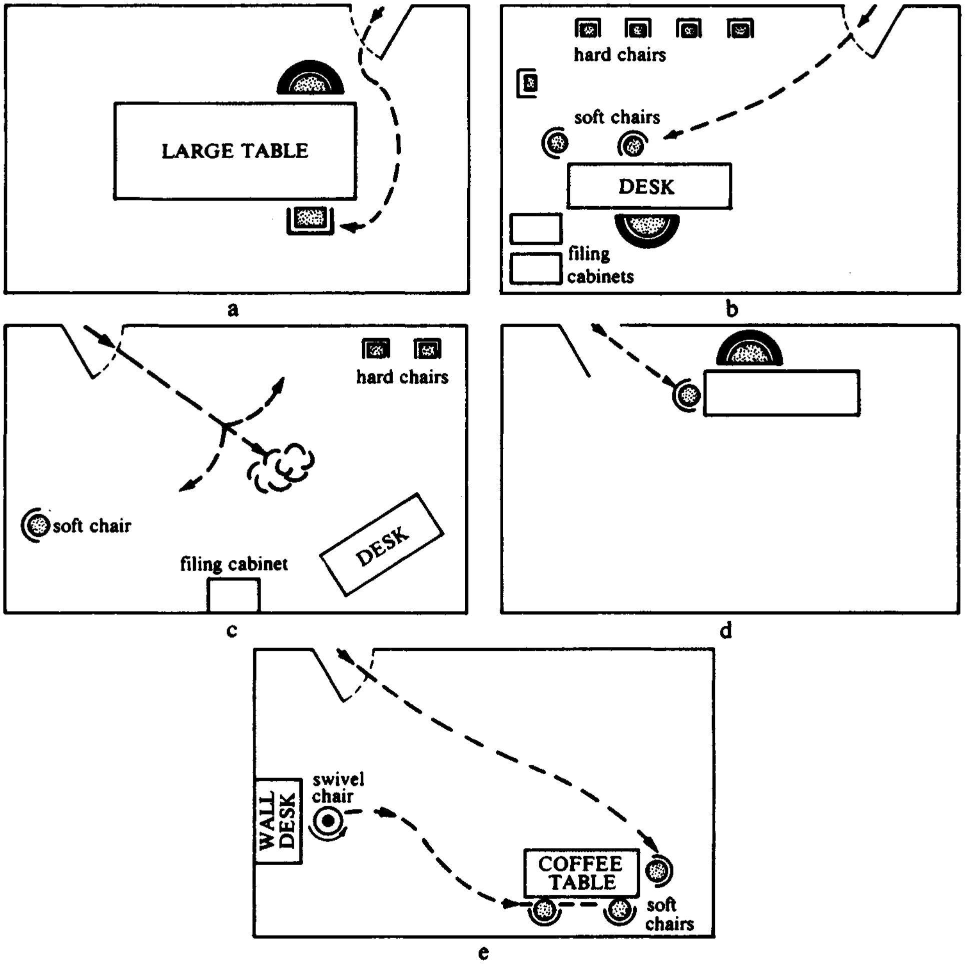

LARGE TABLE
a
hard chairs
soft chairs
DESK
filing cabinets
b
hard chairs
soft chair
filing cabinet
DESK
c
d
swivel chair
WALL DESK
COFFEE TABLE
soft chairs
e

Figure 3.1 (a) The traditional layout of a public school headteacher's study. (b) Full frontal confrontation, the most common arrangement. (c) Ideal for the authoritarian; the visitor is left isolated in space. (d) The less authoritarian favour this arrangement; an open door is desirable. (e) A 'modern' headteacher may favour the informality of soft chairs around a coffee table. This first appeared in *New Society*, London, 24 October 1974, the weekly review of the social sciences.

The Timetable

Sooner or later the new teacher will be given a timetable. In a primary school this could be slightly more flexible. Certain fixed periods of time in a week might be labelled as assemblies, physical education, games or music, and the rest would be at the discretion of the teacher, provided that certain activities, such as reading, writing, mathematics and other areas of the National Curriculum, appeared regularly.

In a secondary school the ‘cultural worker’ interpretation is more clearly made, since decisions about which groups meet with a given teacher in which places, for how long and how often are usually presented to the staff and are open to only minimal negotiation.

The Organization

Underpinning the timetable there are many organization decisions also presented to a new teacher for largely unquestioning acceptance. The actual size of classes will depend upon decisions about how many senior staff need to be free for administrative tasks. The composition of classes will depend on whether the organization is a ‘streaming by achievement’ system, a mixed achievement grouping system, grouping for subjects by sex, or some mixture of these. Age grouping by years is a common feature of such plans.

Other organizational decisions to be accepted may include rules, punishments, dress, break times, house systems and midday meal arrangements.

The Curriculum

Since the 1988 Education Reform Act, all state schools in England and Wales are obliged to deliver a National Curriculum. The decisions about the content of the curriculum vary in scope, and several levels of decision can be described. The new teacher will be presented with a range of these decisions and those at the most general level are the least negotiable. Thus a teacher may feel that a compulsory National Curriculum or religious education is a dubious idea, but since it is required by law, no negotiation is possible.

At another level of decision-making, the curriculum may exclude some subjects. The incoming teacher might be a social science graduate or have a deep interest in cross-curricular issues, e.g. multicultural education, but find that the social sciences are absent from the National Curriculum, and that the post offered is in English, history or some other National Curriculum subject only.

Within each area of the curriculum, decisions are likely to have been made about the programmes of study and about the appropriate external examination where this applies. This provides a useful example of the effect of the thinking of predecessors, since cohorts of children will already have experienced some years of the prescribed syllabus, making any changes difficult to implement and usually taking several years to phase in.

Therefore, in the area of the curriculum alone, the teacher may be presented with a wide range of ready-made practices within the external confines of the National Curriculum, with the expectation that they will be perpetuated. The analogy of the incoming teacher as a victim of circumstances therefore begins to gain plausibility.