

Review of Ballantine's The Sociology of Education; A Systematic Analysis. 6th Edition.

Introduction

This book by Jeanne H. Ballantine and Floyd H. Hammack is a thirteen chapter, 449 page book. Its sheer volume has ensured that issues in the field of sociology of education have been discussed in rare depth.

The authors state that the writing of this book was guided by six goals. These are:

1. To make the book comprehensible and useful to students.
2. To present material in a coherent framework
3. To present diverse theoretical approaches in sociology of education
4. To include as major sections that have been singled out by many others but are important current or emerging topics and are of interest to students
5. To indicate how change takes place and what role sociologists play.
6. To stimulate students to become involved with educational systems where they can put to use the knowledge available in textbooks.

Thematically, the book is organised into five broad themes.

The first theme focusses on the philosophical underpinnings of sociological study and constitutes chapters one. Chapter one is 'Sociology of Education: a unique perspective for understanding schools'. This chapter explores the various definitions of sociology of education, theories of sociology of education as well as research methods in sociology of education. In essence chapter one provides the justifications or rationale for studying sociology of education and sets the tone for analyzing and understanding the rest of the book. This introductory chapter is excellent and once on it the reader wants to go on right to the end.

The second theme comprises chapters three and four. Chapter three is entitled 'Education and the process of stratification'. In chapter four (Race, class and gender: Attempts to Achieve Equality of Educational opportunity), the authors make a good case of the gender gap between

males and females in terms of their participation and achievement in math and science. This is striking when one considers that even the U.S.A is still grappling with issues of gender inequality in education. They further highlight some of the reasons to the deep seeded resistance to attempts to desegregate schools and how these are rooted in societal stereotypes and not necessarily in schools.

Theme three focuses on the school system and is made up of chapters two, five, six, and seven. Chapter two is 'Conflicting functions and processes in Education: what makes the system work'? Chapter five is "The school as an organization". Chapter seven is 'Students ; the core of the school. Chapter six is "Formal school statuses and Roles: the way it should be'. In chapter two the author aptly discuss the issue of what should be taught in the school system (p. 50). This is typical everywhere. The authors ably discuss the major functions of education which include amongst others, socialization social control, selection and allocation. Chapters six and seven need special mention. In chapter six the authors address an issue that strikes a familiar chord to most teacher trainers. This has to do with teacher preparation and the never- ceasing argument that teacher preparation programmes are ill- equipping teachers by giving them inadequate content. The argument for more content during training strikes a familiar if not universal chord (p. 206). In chapter seven Ballantine and Hammack discuss the issues of family background and its effect on academic achievement. The authors write 'children's positions in school and society are determined in large parts by their family background' (p. 248). This is an issue close to people's hearts particularly when linked to the topic of social stratification tackled in chapter three. The many factors at play such as social class background, parenting styles and family aspirations are singled out as key factors in the academic achievement of learners (pp. 250- 252).

The fourth theme addresses the issue of the relationship between school systems and environment. It is made up of chapter eight "The informal system and the "hidden Curriculum": what really happens in school'? and chapter nine 'The Educational system and the environment: A symbiotic relationship'. Chapter eight explores the interaction between the internal system, the internal workings of schools and examines the connection between the many individual positions that people hold in educational systems and the structural units of the school organization. Particular attention is paid to the informal aspect of a school as it relates to the environment. Chapter nine emphasises the interdependence between the different institutions of society and

touches on the thorny issues of school financing, such as who should fund education and to what extent (p.295).

The fifth theme which focuses on higher education has been handled in one chapter, namely chapter ten entitled 'The System of Higher Education'. Ballantine and Hammack develop the argument of school financing started in chapter nine and extend it to higher Education (p. 350).

The sixth and last theme deals with comparative education and is developed in three excellent chapters. These are chapters eleven, twelve and thirteen. Chapter eleven is 'Educational systems around the world: A comparative view.'

In chapter eleven the authors deal with the key issues that Durkheim dealt with- namely his four themes of sociology of Education. These are a cross- cultural and comparative study of different types of education systems, an analysis of the relationship between education on one hand, and social institutions, society and social and cultural change on the other, a study of social facts/phenomena of education and their social functions as well as a study of the school and classroom as social systems; the structure and the process of these systems. In the same chapter the authors present a typical situation of an African child and the many challenges he/she faces to get an education while another in Britain faces far less challenges. (p.362- 364) While the scenario is accurately dealt with the authors overlooked the fact that the dichotomy they have drawn could have easily been made with West Africa itself. Disparities between the haves and the have- notes exist in most African countries, Zambia included. Chapter twelve is 'Educational systems around the world: Britain, china, and Postcolonial Africa'. Chapter thirteen is 'Educational Movements and Reform.'

Strengths

The authors have appropriately cast the book and whatever it deals with in relevant theoretical theory. Emile Durkheim's contribution regarding the functions of school moral values as 'the foundation of the social order and society is perpetuated through its educational institutions, which help instill values in children is highly appropriate (p.14).

The Conflict theory which 'assumes a tension in society and its parts created by the competing interests of individuals and groups is equally well handled (p.17).

Ballantine and Hammack cogently summarise the growing set of studies on various issues that she addresses in the book. There is substantial cross-referencing within the chapters.

Though an accomplished international author of huge repute, Ballantine and her colleague draw heavily on the work of other prominent authors and researchers as if to validate their work. This gives the book a rich diversity of perspectives and sources of information and provides a rich summary of works on sociology and sociology of education in various areas of interest. Its scope is wide but generally appropriate to its vision as articulated in the six goals that inspired the writing of this book.

Further to this the authors provide appropriate summaries of the key issues raised in each chapter. Revision questions are used throughout the book to engage the reader and bring alive the topics under discussion. This is very helpful revision tool for students.

Weaknesses

While the authors deal briefly with some of the reasons for studying sociology of education, they do not tackle the issues of the relevance or significance of sociology of education to a classroom teacher in a clear manner. Admittedly the authors have dealt at length with the issues surrounding learners' achievement caused by differing socio-economic backgrounds. However, how an understanding of this can result in a better teacher is left to the reader's ability to read in between the times. For example, the authors simply state that 'an understanding of school system can be gained from a study of the sociology of education' without explaining what they (readers) can learn about the school system (p3). Admittedly, explanations are provided elsewhere but could have been better handled at this stage which is attempting to justify the study of sociology of education.

The same is true of the statement 'Sociology helps taxpayers understand the school system for which they are paying' (p.3). In addition, while this is true, it is worth noting that the authors keep oscillating from sociology to sociology of education as is the case with other examples. As stated above the reference to the benefit to teachers and other professionals of studying sociology of education (p.3) could have been more thorough and detailed with laser cut examples for the benefit of trainee's teachers and practicing teachers. These issues should have been dealt with in detail and relevant examples provided. For example the significance of the labeling theory to a teacher can be seen in the following: It enables the teacher to know the nature of labels teachers use to label learners, the sources of these labels as well as reasons why teachers label learners-to control them but more importantly that labels affect the academic behavior and behavior patterns of learners who are negatively labeled. In terms of the Human Capital Theory, the significance to the teacher is that it helps teachers understand that education is a productive investment that

leads to industrial and economic growth and can be a big economic equalizer but that individual success is affected by structural factors in the society. The 'New' Sociology of Education on its part alerts the teacher to the how labels given to learners can lead to differential academic achievement of learners. The structural functionalist theory can help the teacher understand that society is made up of interrelated parts or structures but that every part has a role to play in society and each role may attract different rewards depending on its perceived importance to society and lastly that education should prepare young learners for adult roles in society. This level of analysis on this topic is conspicuously missing from the book.

As an African I cannot help but notice that though examples are drawn from right across the globe, but especially from the U.S.A, very little is drawn from Africa. This seems a major weakness considering the phenomenal changes in education that are taking place across the African continent.

Conclusion

However, inspite of these weaknesses the book is a classic for academic staff, students of education, parents and then general public. Few texts are as comprehensive with plenty of examples making the book easy to follow and use. The authors definitely stay true to their six goals of writing this book. This book demonstrates clearly the relevance and practical nature of sociology of education. Although the stage is largely set in the U.S.A, the script has a universal language. It is a user-friendly book. I recommend it to all who can, to read it and I hope readers will find much to appreciate in this great book.