Tutorial Letter 201/1/2019

Sociology of Education

SED2601

Semester 1

Department of Educational Foundations

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

This tutorial letter contains important information about your module.

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1. MEMORANDUM OF ASSIGNMENT 01

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TOTAL: [40 MARKS]

2. MEMORANDUM OF ASSIGNMENT 02

Question 1

a) Discuss the following four features of the functionalist theory. Provide examples of your own to explain their meaning:

i) social order (3)

Social order is a system of linked/related social structures which include institutions such as schools; customs; values and practices. All these structures conserve, maintain and enforce social patterns. The emphasis is on the 'social' (society) and the 'order' (as in keeping 'order') in a society so that it functions/works effectively. (**SoE: 7**)

ii) the interdependence of different parts of society (3)

Functionalists argue that different parts of society such as schools, the economy, the state all are dependent on each other. So, schools cannot function properly in society unless, for example, they have a connection with the economy. If the economy demands that we become computer literate then schools should provide computer courses and have computer centres. Hence the different parts of society need each other to keep modern society functioning. (**SoE: 6**)

iii) manifest functions (3)

These are functions that can be seen; they are obvious. So if you attend a function, such as a wedding, through experience and observation, you will gain knowledge of how weddings are conducted culturally. (**SoE: 7**)

(iv) latent functions (3)

These functions are unintentional and not obvious. For example, schools do not *only* teach learners subject knowledge, they also teach, less obviously, punctuality through school opening times. There is no subject in the timetable which teaches punctuality, but learners learn it in less obvious ways. (**SoE: 7**) (12)

b) Briefly indicate two positive and two negative features of functionalist theory.

Positive features of the functionalist theory: It promotes co-operation and avoids conflict in society. It focuses on the importance of shared values and norms amongst members of society. Functionalists see education as being central to the successful functioning of society because education socialises learners, teaches them norms and values and provides opportunities and training for their future roles in the workplace. (**SoE: 11**) (One mark for any 2 points).

Negative features of the functionalist theory: Functionalism does not question why society is stratified and unequal. This is because functionalism encourages the maintenance of the status quo (society staying the same). It also encourages society's members to accept inequalities as 'normal' instead of questioning them. Functionalism does not always play a role in encouraging people to change society, in fact social change is often frowned upon. Most societies are multicultural and functionalism, with its emphasis on shared norms and values, could lead to certain cultures being marginalised. Functionalists stress that all learners have equal opportunities, however, because of social class differences some learners are more privileged than others. Functionalism does not mount a convincing critique of inequalities in society. (**SoE: 12**) (One mark for any 2 points). **(2)**

c) Briefly discuss the following concepts: Role differentiation and social solidarity. Provide your own examples to explain their meaning. (4)

Role differentiation: when members of society perform different tasks. For example capitalist societies need workers with different skills, such as street sweepers and accountants, if they are to function. According to functionalists, all roles in society are equally valuable and necessary for a society to function. (**SoE: 7, 39**)

Social solidarity: Social solidarity: members of society function as a unit because they have shared value systems and think in similar ways. Schools have a social solidarity function, for example, by promoting 'school spirit' through sports days and cultural events. (**SoE: 7, 39**)

d) Functionalists argue that for societies to survive and develop there needs to be some agreement or consensus on norms and values. Briefly argue whether you think we have agreement on norms and values in South African schools. (2)

Possible responses:
Yes, because schools teach the same syllabus and convey similar norms and values underpinned by the South African Constitution. Also, unlike families which are particularist, the school teaches universal values to all learners.

No, because learners come from different social class backgrounds and come from a different cultural milieu hence it is difficult to find consensus on norms and values. Modern industrialised societies are socially stratified in terms of class, status, gender, ethnicity. These differences and inequalities make it problematic for South African schools to convey a universal, cohesive approach to norms and values. (Examine sections on functionalism and conflict theory in Chapters 1, 2 and 4 to assist with the response)

[20]

Question 2

(a) Paraphrase (restate/write in your own words) the following FIVE sentences. First read the sentences and then look up the vocabulary and concepts you find difficult (use your textbook, guide and a dictionary). Once you have done that, rewrite the sentences in your own words. You need to simplify the language in the sentences when you paraphrase.

i) "The school acts as a socialisation agent, functioning between the family and society to instil the value of achievement and the value of equality of opportunity in learners." (SoE, p 11) (3)

Schools teach learners how to fit into society and to become good citizens. Schools also teach learners to recognise that all learners have equal opportunities in schools and that all learners can become successful members of society.

ii) "Structural inequality: inequalities in power and rewards are built into all social structures." (SoE, p 18) (3)

Society is not equal. In fact, inequalities are deep and built into social systems or institutions. For example, people in jobs that are considered to be powerful (such as executives)) are rewarded (paid) far more than those who are seen to be in less powerful jobs (such as cleaners).

iii) "The capacity for thought is shaped by social interaction." (SoE, p 20) (3)

How we think about things is influenced by our contact and communication with other members of society. So thought is not created and shaped by individuals only, other members of society help us to think.

iv) "…Bronfenbrenner places the school in the microsystem where the school forms part of the holistic environment of the ecology of the school." (SoE, p 37) (3)

The school is part of the micro system because it forms part of the learner's interactions with others in a human, face- to -face way. Schools teach the learner to interact with others through activities and social contact.

v) "Culture as a symbol system occurs when individuals or groups function using a set of symbols as defined by the group." (SoE, p 83) (3)

Culture as a symbol system is defined firstly by the language people speak. It is also defined by people's dress and activities such as song and dance. These aspects are associated with certain groups and are valued by these groups.

(b) In your own words, explain how conflict theory differs from functionalist theory in relation to education. (5)

Conflict theory argues that schools promote inequalities whereas functionalists argue that schools provide equal opportunities for all learners. Conflict theorists argue that equality is impossible because schools themselves are unequal. They suggest that working class learners go to working class, often poorly equipped schools with large class numbers and middle class learners go to middles class, better equipped schools with small class numbers. Schools are an important tool to maintain power and class differences in society. (**SoE: 43-46**)

[20]

Question 3

a) Explain why conflict theorists suggest that conflict between the 'haves' and the 'have-nots' is inevitable in society. (5)

Conflict theorists argue that there are deep, inherently unequal power relations in society: some people or groups are more powerful than others. From a conflict theory perspective, power relationships are defined by social class. The owners or capitalists are the most powerful grouping, then the middle class and the working class is the most oppressed group in society. These troubled social relations are inevitable because contesting social classes are an integral part of the capitalist system. (**SoE: 43, 44**)

b) Discuss FIVE criticisms of education/schooling as propagated by conflict theorists. (10)

Instead of promoting equality, schools legitimate, or give credibility to, social inequalities. Knowledge transmitted in schools is designed to keep the elite in power. So, learners

from the working class will often have limited opportunities to do, for example, science at school because of the lack of laboratories in working class schools. Working class learners tend to go into working class jobs partly because of the subjects they take and because of factors such as high drop-out rates due to poverty.
On the other hand, middle class learners have opportunities such as economic resources, good housing, books and educational toys that give them a head -start in schools.
The ideologies of the dominant class are often against the interests of the working class. (**SoE: 44**)

c) Explain what is meant by the 'hidden curriculum'. Provide an example of how the hidden curriculum functions in schools. (5)

The hidden curriculum includes all unrecognised and unintended knowledge that is conveyed in schools. So, the hidden curriculum contains all knowledge learnt in schools that is not in the formal curriculum. For example, learners learn certain beliefs and values through the hidden curriculum such as respecting authority. Learners also learn how to behave towards other learners through the hidden curriculum. For example, class room activities are often gender based: girls do certain tasks and boys others. This is all part of the hidden curriculum. (**SoE: 45**)

[20]

Question 4

a) Explain what is meant by 'context' in symbolic interactionism. Give an example of two different contexts found in schools. (4)

In symbolic interactionism, the context is a social one. It is defined by the social interactions between members of the school community. These interactions are influenced by the race, class and gender of the participants, hence there is always a 'bigger' context within which 'smaller' interactions occur. Example 1: the social class context of learners is important if one wants to understand how learners construct meaning. Middle class children might have an advantage in relation to reading because they have more access to books. Example 2: gender is also a significant social context in the schools. Boys and girls are often treated differently, for example, in relation to the school subjects they take. **(SoE: 21, 46)**

b) Discuss how some symbolic interactionist theorists view the family in relation to socialisation. (4)

The family is seen as an important micro-unit of socialisation. Symbolic interactionists study family dynamics and the relationships between family members and the meanings that family members make around these relationships. Some symbolic interactionists focus on the different roles that family members take, for example: the mother, the eldest daughter. Other symbolic interactionists study how children's self-concepts develop in

relation to other family members. The family is seen as an important socialising force in relation to the transmission of culture and cultural values. (**SoE: 22**)

c) In a paragraph discuss what is meant by 'democracy'. Discuss both ancient and modern concepts of democracy in your outline. (8)

A democracy is a political system in which citizens are supposed to participate in decision making and running affairs in their group, community or their nation state. In modern societies citizens over a certain age (18 in South Africa) can vote in elections.

In an Athenian democracy citizenship includes status (a citizen); a sense of belonging and active participation in public affairs. Active participation meant that citizens were exercising their agency.

In a modern democracy, personal and public dimensions of citizenship are not mutually exclusive but are reciprocal (give- and -take). So, if you want to live a green, eco-friendly life you need to ensure that the state legislates around environmental issues and you yourself live a 'green' life. Modern democracies are inclusive and do not exclude women and slaves (as in ancient democracies) nor do they exclude people based on their race as in apartheid South Africa. Modern democracies can be representational (you vote for someone to represent you in parliament) or they can be active and participatory (you are an active agent for change and development in your community). (**SoE: 52-60**)

d) Explain 'soft' and 'hard' notions of community participation in citizenship education. (4)

A **soft notion of community participation** entails that learners rely on the school curriculum to learn about citizenship education. By extension it is a more 'passive' way to learn about the topic. So, citizenship it 'taught'.

A **hard notion of community participation** refers to learning by doing and creating opportunities to learn about citizenship in school but also outside of the school walls. So citizenship is 'caught not 'taught'. (**SoE: 62**)

[20]

Question 5

a) Do you agree that gender and race are social constructs and not biological in nature? Discuss with reference to the sections in SoE on *gender and race* to back up your argument (SoE, pp 85 - 90). (12)

NB: As this is a sociology of education modules, hence, a stronger response will be to answer 'yes' to the above question. You also will have access to more examples to back up your response. (See SoE: 85 – 90) In addition, you have been asked to address issues of gender (socially constructed) not biological (sex) issues. Race too has a strong socially shaped component.

Yes: The distinction between the terms gender and sex is important. Gender refers to the qualities between women and men. These are social qualities and are created by culture. Sex relates to biological differences between females and males. As we are examining gender, we can argue that gender is socially conveyed and comprises learned behaviours, attitudes and expectations. Families and schools (which are social constructs) play a significant role in encouraging different gender roles. Functionalists argue that schools should teach learners gender toles that are appropriate to the society that the school is part of. Conflict theorists argue that women are often exploited in the workplace (for example they get lower salaries) and that men often devalue women's work. Symbolic interactionists agree that gender is constantly constructed in society and is produced, and reproduced or perpetuated, through social interactions. By behaving in gender-specific ways we are confirming the current, dominant social order.
Race is socially constructed: "society assigns people to racial categories such as Black, White and so on not because of science logic or fact, but because of opinion and social experience." (SoE: 88). Sociologists have different approaches to the issues of race and schooling. Functionalists argue that minority groups should assimilate into mainstream, dominant society Hence learners from minority groups should fit into the dominant culture of the school (for example in some American schools). Some conflict theorists argue that not only is race a factor in schools, but social class also plays a major role in school achievement and life chances. It is more important to make changes in economic and class structures than to focus on race. However, other conflict theorists argue that the issue of race and racism should be confronted. Symbolic interactionists who make use of contact theory argue that conflict between races is reduced if contact is among people of equal status, is long-term and there is consensus among participants about what equality means.
Any relevant examples will be considered.

No: If you disagree with the above position you will need to focus on biological arguments. The argument will follow that gender is not a social construct, rather people behave in certain ways because they are born that way. Our emotions and attitudes are also dominated by our biology. It is 'natural' for us to behave like women and like men. Differences between men and women are also not socially constructed but are 'innate' (we are born with them) and as such they are unchanging and not subject to social change.
Race from a biological perspective pertains to a person's distinctive gene frequencies. Race is hence about innate physical characteristics and social factors do not play an influential role in this perspective. This position is problematic if one considers that 'race' also includes historical, cultural and economic factors. Any relevant examples will be considered. (**SoE: 88-89**)

b) Social class is 'achieved' rather than 'given' at birth? Briefly discuss this statement. (4)

In modern, capitalist democracies social status in not necessarily inherited, as in historic kingdoms. Instead, social status is achieved through education, hard work and economic

success. Economic resources influence the status and the type of lifestyle people have and these are generally achieved not inherited. Conflict theorists would be critical of aspects of this position as they argue there are inequalities of opportunity in society. (**SoE: 90**)

c) What is meant by access to education? Do you think there are groups in society that have greater access to education than others? (4)

Access, or entrance into the educational system, includes several different factors including the state provision of education. Functionalists suggest that education is an equalising force and all learners have equal access and equal opportunities in school. On the other hand, conflict theorists propose that schools perpetuate inequalities and that access is reliant on whether there are resources available for learners to attend schools. Access is not neutral and is also dependent on historical influences and the race, sex and class of the learner. Some learners are denied access to schools because of one or more of the latter factors. (**SoE: 92)**

[20]

TOTAL: [100 marks]

3. EXAMINATION PREPARATION

The end of the semester means it is time to prepare for the examination. We want to bring the following to your attention with regard to examination preparation:

3.1 Material to study

The tables of content in the prescribed book and study guide offer a good summary of the content to be examined.

For the examination please study the following:

- Presribed textbook
- Wrap-around guide
- Assignment 01
- Assignment 02

Test your understanding of the learning content and your examination readiness by working through previous examination papers, which you can access on myUnisa at Official Study Material. Do not expect questions from previous examination papers or assignments in the examination. **In this module, new questions are set for each examination.**

3.2 Position of the College of Education regarding the demarcation of the examination contents

I present verbatim communication that we have received from college management with regard to detailed demarcation of content for examination also known as scope

Demarcation or "scoping" for examinations and assessments

NB: In terms of a decision reached by the College, lecturers may not demarcate or "scope" specific work for examination purposes and examination questions should be based on all the work covering the notional hours of modules. Lecturers should encourage students to learn everything. In cases where competencies or skills are assessed differently during the tuition period, the various methods of assessment will be spelled out clearly by the lecturer in Tutorial Letter 201.
According to Assessment Procedure Manual 2013, paragraph 4.5.2(e), the examination memoranda (guidelines, rubrics, and so on) shall not be made available to students.

3.3 Tips on answering examination questions

In answering questions in the examination, please pay special attention to the following:

- The instructional verbs like *list, define* and *discuss* instruct you on how to answer each question. Please make sure you understand these verbs beforehand and adhere to their instructions in the examination. For example, do not list when the question instructs you to discuss.
- Use full and meaningful sentences, and avoid answering using phrases and one word answers (except in multiple-choice questions). Answer questions in full and explain the questions as clearly as possible. If necessary, give an example to demonstrate the meaning.
- Make sure you answer the posed question and not the question that you would have wanted in the examination, but is not there. Read the question several times, if necessary, before you answer it.
- Good advice: Start IMMEDIATELY to study, prepare well in time and compile mind maps to understand the contents. Remember, your common sense and experience as a student or as a teacher are also valid sources of information.

3.4 Structure of the examination paper

- The duration of the examination is TWO HOURS and the paper counts 100 MARKS.
- This paper consists of FIVE MAIN QUESTIONS with a total of 20 marks each [5x 20 = 100]
- QUESTION 1 consists of 20 multiple-choice questions.
- QUESTIONS 2 TO 5 consist of sub-questions counting 10 marks each.

4. CONCLUSION

I hope that you have enjoyed your studies related to this module and that you have broaden your academic reasoning and writing skills, and found the contents informative and of value to apply in your own family life, in the classroom and in the social sphere where you reside.

Finally, I wish you all the best with your examination. Persevere and discipline yourself to work diligently to achieve your goal. Should you experience any academic problems, do not hesitate to contact me.

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