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EDUCATION AND SOCIAL MOBILITY

JOHN P. NEELSEN

THE JUXTAPOSITION of education and social mobility is generally based on five propositions: (1) that society is stratified; (2) that the system of stratification permits mobility, or that it is essentially open; (3) that education plays an important role in mobility; (4) that education is an achieved status; and (5) that role performance is closely linked to education. Furthermore, society is seen as a hierarchy of positions differentiated in terms of job requirements (e.g., manual, administrative, executive, etc.). Its structure is assumed to be conditioned by the development of productive forces and is, therefore, relatively fixed. However, the rewards related to the different positions (e.g., income, political power, etc.) and the process of recruitment to different positions are generally assumed to be flexible, open to manipulation. From an egalitarian perspective, the primary concern lies with the recruitment process. That is, in egalitarian societies, the allocation of positions should approach random probability.¹ It is from this perspective that the relationship between education and mobility is examined in this paper. It is carried out on both theoretical and methodological levels through reference to comparative empirical data.

SOCIAL MOBILITY AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Here, social stratification is understood as a societal process distributing scarce goods. Positions with similar access to these goods form clusters which, in turn, form a hierarchy of strata. By implication, the study of education and mobility narrows the meaning of social mobility to changes which involve a movement from one stratum to another.

Geiger stressed the fact that processes of individual mobility never occur in isolation but, rather, are indicative of concomitant changes in the social structure.² Three related phenomena can be discerned:

(1) The static volume of a stratum may be either the result of no mobility at all or an outflow balanced by a similar inflow of persons.

(2) More often, however, an unequal flow to or from a stratum will be ob-

¹ Inequality of rewards appears to be a mechanism to maintain or establish inequality of opportunity and/or positional allocation between various social groups or strata. Thus, while a society with equality of positional allocation has to dispense with the inequality of rewards in order to prevent the rise of new group-related privileges and deprivations, the mere removal of such rewards does not indicate the abolition of all social contradictions, i.e., the end of the class society. Cf. in this context the proponents of the "new middle class society," H. Schelsky, *Gesellschaftlicher Wandel*, in: *Offene Welt* 41, 1953.

² Th. Geiger, "A Dynamic Analysis of Social Mobility," in: *Acta Sociologica, Scandinavian Review of Sociology* I, 1 (1954), pp. 26-34.

served, producing a redistribution in the volume of individual strata and effecting a change in the form of the societal structure.

(3) A transformation of a total societal distributive system, finally, is characterized by the progressive replacement of one set of differentiating criteria of positional ranking by another. The transition from an estate to an industrial society is a prime example of this process. Mobility analysis, therefore, must focus on the whole social structure rather than on a single individual, institution, or stratum. The time factor must also be considered in order to comprehend a particular stratification system as a historically conditioned and transitional phenomenon. In contrast to a static perspective, a dynamic approach views social mobility as the movement of individuals between strata within the context of changing stratification structures and stratification criteria.

The relevance of these observations will become apparent after considering the following phenomenon. It would appear that the horizontal mobility of Black Americans from agricultural labor to unskilled and semi-skilled employment in the urban centers was accompanied by upward mobility. Such a conclusion, however, appears premature and is attributable to the range of the analysis being confined to an isolated group or stratum. The evidence provided by Baran and Sweezy in fact, indicates that the absolute mobility of Black Americans did not include simultaneous improvement of their *relative* social status.³ While participating in the general upgrading of the individual ranks of the total status ladder, Blacks, as a group, have remained at the bottom of American society. Clearly, valid conclusions on mobility phenomena require a comprehensive approach encompassing the total positional and reward structure of a society. From an egalitarian objective, only those instances of mobility which reduce the social distance between groups or strata are decisive.

These remarks apply to educational research as well, particularly that aimed at assessing the social-structural function of formal education. This is apparent when the level of analysis in studies of the recruitment patterns of particular educational institutions and/or levels is considered. The controversy over the openness of the Ghanaian school system serves to illustrate this point.⁴ A second observation is that education is only a means for social mobility and not the end of the whole process; democratization of access to education does not necessarily indicate egalitarian trends. Institutional differences may be more decisive in segregating social groups and strata than the absolute level of education reached. Data on India⁵

³ P. Baran, P. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1966), chapter 9.

⁴ Against Foster's conclusion of a "remarkable fluidity of access" established for the fifth school-grade, Hurd and Johnson argue that the sixth grade represents the chief selection mechanism in the Ghanaian school system, at which level the social composition of students is strikingly less mixed and egalitarian. P. Foster, *Education and Social Change in Ghana*, (London: Routledge, 1965). G. E. Hurd, T. J. Johnson, "Education and Social Mobility in Ghana," *Sociology of Education* (Winter 1967), pp. 55-70. The following issue of *Sociology of Education* (Winter 1968) contains Foster's reply and another specification of their argument by Hurd and Johnson.

⁵ J. P. Neelsen, "The Impact of Education on The Social Stratification in India," *Journal of So-*

and Puerto Rico⁶ amply substantiate this point. Thirdly, the nexus between educational attainment, occupational placement and income differentials indicates that education is a necessary precondition for social mobility.⁷ However, even perfect equality of educational opportunity does not automatically mean equality of opportunity in terms of job allocation. The former Untouchables in India, who despite equal qualifications were unemployed for longer periods of time and given only the lower paying jobs, demonstrate the predominance of particularistic selection criteria such as caste membership over universalistic ones such as education.⁸ And, fourthly, in the case of structural transformations, as, for example, from an ascriptive to an achievement oriented society, the comparative openness of society or a particular institution may reflect the process of restructuring itself, i.e., the dissolution of traditional groupings and the realignment and emergence of new ones, rather than the new structural principles of the social order.⁹

STRATIFICATION MODELS, STRATIFICATION THEORIES AND THE ROLE OF EDUCATION

The choice of the stratification model, and even more, the selection of its variables limits as much as it facilitates analysis and policies by focusing on particular sets of data. Consequently, stratification models cannot be judged in terms of right and wrong, but must, instead, be measured in terms of the relevance and range of the facts they explain. Nevertheless, while we are bound to interpret society from the standpoint of our particular model, it is further argued here that the various models are derived from two basic theories of social inequality.

The most commonly used models of social stratification are four:

(1) Prestige models: These are based on the differential prestige of occupations.¹⁰

(2) Occupational-functional models: In these, kinds of work and related qualifications represent the criteria for ranking occupational titles.

(3) Socioeconomic status models: The high degree of social differentiation in industrial society has resulted in an individual's total social status being a com-

cial Research 15, 2 (1972), pp. 51-76. And J. P. Neelsen, *Schichtungsmodelle, Schichtungstheorien und die sozial-strukturelle Rolle von Erziehung—Eine theoretische Diskussion und eine empirische Fallstudie aus Indien*, (Munich: Weltforum Verlag, 1974).

⁶ L. Sussman, "Summary Review by the Rapporteur," in: OECD, *Social Objectives in Educational Planning*, (OECD, Paris 1967), pp. 18f. And L. Sussmann, "Democratization and Class Segregation in Puerto Rican Schooling—the US-Model Transplanted," *Sociology of Education* 41, 4 (1968), pp. 321-341.

⁷ The finding that this correlation has weakened in recent years does not contradict our argument, since it is the objective functional demand on role performance and not the distribution of a particular educational standard in a population which is referred to here. Cf. J. K. Folger, C. B. Nam, "Trends in Education in Relation to the Occupational Structure," *Sociology of Education* 38 (1964), pp. 19-33.

⁸ E. Hommes, N. Trivedi, "The Market for Graduates—A Field Report," *Economic and Political Weekly* 6 (1971), pp. 2486-2491.

⁹ Th. Geiger, "Theorie der Sozialen Schichtung," in: Th. Geiger, *Arbeiten zur Soziologie*, (Neuwied: Luchterhand, 1962), pp. 186-205, esp. 203.

¹⁰ Cf. R. Hodge, et al., "A Comparative Study of Occupational Prestige," in R. Bendix, S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status, and Power* (New York: The Free Press, 1966) pp. 308-321.

plex of statuses of potentially differing ranks. Taking this multidimensionality into account, socioeconomic status combines in a quasi one-dimensional scale a number of variables, such as income, education, consumer goods, and cultural level.¹¹

(4) Class models: Even a cursory look at the literature reveals substantial differences in the meanings assigned to the term "class" and disagreements over its determinants.¹² Strictly speaking, however, the term "class" applies only to models which use positions in the social process of production as the primary basis for social stratification and differences in amount and source of income, as well as the degree of executive versus routine functions as secondary structuring principles.

Starting with our earlier definition of "stratification" as a distributive system of scarce goods, it is clear that social status is the basic category in both the prestige and socioeconomic status models. The subjective aspect of status is prestige, a fact which points to the rationale of related models as based on interaction, i.e., micro-sociological processes. With evaluation at the heart of a stratification system, the importance attached to outward symbols indicating particular statuses, becomes understandable. A man's status in society is where others place him primarily on the basis of his appearances, i.e., his objective status within the stratification system is defined by the generalized subjective evaluation of his fellow countrymen.

Occupational-functional models take their primary point of reference from the functional differentiation and differential contribution of positions to social productive and reproductive processes. Difficult as it is to design an instrument to grade functional importance, evaluative criteria have often been used as indirect measurements, thus linking this model with prestige and socioeconomic status models.¹³ These three models can, consequently, be called variations of the same societal view, according to which social stratification is first of all a subjective phenomenon. A class model, in contrast, is derived from macro-sociological analysis, and perceives social stratification as objectively determined by the mode and relations of production in a society.

A further step will be to show that these approaches are directly connected with two theories of social inequality. The alleged gulf between theory and em-

¹¹ K. Scheuch, "Sozialprestige und Soziale Schichtung" in D. Glass, R. König (eds.), *Soziale Schichtung und Soziale Mobilität*, (Kölner Zeitschrift: Sonderheft 5, 1968), pp. 65-103. As the title of his paper already suggests, Scheuch relates the construction of the Socio-Economic Status Index directly to social prestige as the basis of social stratification.

¹² See, for example, Th. E. Lasswell, "Variable Meanings of Social Class," in M. M. Tumin (ed.), *Readings on Social Stratification* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1970), pp. 258-267. Lasswell distinguishes here seven different uses of "class." G. Carlsson, *Social Mobility and Class Structure*, (Copenhagen: Lund Studies in Sociology, 1969), p. 12. Carlsson lists here ten different indicators which have been variously employed as stratification variables. Although it would be preferable to replace the term "class" by "stratum" (except when the former is used in a specific Marxist sense), following the general practice, the two terms have been used interchangeably, unless otherwise specified.

¹³ Cf. e.g., C. A. Moser, J. R. Hall, "The Social Grading of Occupations," in D. V. Glass (ed.), *Social Mobility in Britain*, (London: Routledge, 1967), pp. 29-50.

pirical research in stratification analysis¹⁴ does not exist; the application of a particular stratification model implies an option for its underlying theory.

The Structural-Functional Approach and the Role of Education

Hatt, one of the co-designers of the scale of occupational prestige, defines stratification as "a system of differentially valued positions" and identifies three determinants of comparative societal position: duties, pre-requisites, and rewards. Detailing his concept of stratification, Hatt formulates four postulates:¹⁵

(1) Differential positions occur in many different social structures, e.g., religious, governmental, and economic.

(2) The rewards of these positions are of various types, e.g., financial gain, advantageous working conditions, and honorific value or psychic income.

(3) Some combination of all the rewards attached to any position constitutes the invidious value of that position and hence its prestige.

(4) Total societal position is a summation of prestige, modified by the esteem bestowed as reward for the manner in which the expectations associated with any given status are fulfilled.

Hatt, himself, states that the prestige model of social stratification is not without theoretical foundations and he explicitly mentions the structural-functional theory, as propounded in particular by Parsons, Davis and Moore. Perceiving society as a system of norms, it was Parsons who first posited the origin of social inequality in the process of differential evaluation.¹⁶ Relating this concept to the functional differentiation of society, Davis and Moore objectified this differential evaluation as a system of unequal rewards.¹⁷ The two concurrent hierarchies of differential rewards and functional importance of positions are causally linked by the assumption of the scarcity of persons with the appropriate talent or training which societies need to guarantee their functioning and, in the last analysis, their survival. The anthropological notion that no one will perform more difficult roles without proper compensation connects the three determinants of the structural-functional theory of stratification, i.e., functional differentiation, scarcity of personnel and prestige of occupations. The differential distributive system of rewards (prestige) serves as the motivational stimulus by which society ensures that the most important positions are filled by the most qualified persons. Davis

¹⁴ Cf. R. Dahrendorf, "Die gegenwärtige Lage der Theorie der sozialen Schichtung," in R. Dahrendorf, *Pfade aus Utopia*, (Munich: Piper Verlag, 1967), pp. 336-352.

¹⁵ P. Hatt, "Occupation and Social Stratification," in A. Reiss (ed.), *Occupations and Social Status*, (New York: The Free Press, 1961), pp. 238-258, esp. 240, 244.

¹⁶ T. Parsons, "An Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," *American Journal of Sociology* 45 (1940), pp. 841-862. And T. Parsons, "A Revised Analytical Approach to the Theory of Social Stratification," in R. Bendix, S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status and Power*, (New York: The Free Press, 1953), pp. 92-128.

¹⁷ K. Davis, W. E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification," in R. Bendix, S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status, and Power*, pp. 43-53.

and Moore address themselves to the question of how these personal prerequisites come about:¹⁸

There are ultimately only two ways in which the personal qualifications come about: through inherent capacity or training . . . In many cases . . . talent is fairly abundant in a population, but the training process is so long, costly, and elaborate that relatively few can qualify.

The final argument assumes that education plays a decisive role in the functioning of society. According to this view, relative qualification requirements are caused by changing societal needs. Collins has stated the corollaries of the structural-functional approach to education in three operational propositions:¹⁹

(1) The skill requirements of jobs in industrial societies constantly increase because of technological change. Two processes are involved:

- (a) the proportion of jobs requiring low skill decreases and the proportion requiring high skill increases; and
- (b) the same jobs are upgraded in skill-requirements.

(2) Formal education provides the training, either in specific skills or in general capacities, necessary for the more highly skilled jobs.

(3) Therefore, the educational requirements for employment constantly increase while larger proportions of the population are required to spend longer and longer periods in school.

Before confronting these propositions with the empirical evidence, the other approach on social inequality has to be outlined.

The Conflict Approach and the Role of Education

A socioeconomic class-model has been compared to those based on evaluation and prestige. As Geiger pointed out, a stratification model of three or more classes does not *eo ipso* contradict the two class model of Marxist analysis; the difference lies merely in a change of perspective. While the latter is an analytical model focusing on the dynamics of society, the former represents a model describing its actual composition.²⁰ In a theory of social structural change through revolution as the result of the antagonism between the two major classes, all other social groupings recede into the background as only transitional phenomena. In the description of the actual socioeconomic class structure, however, a large block of middle class people can be distinguished. It consists of the independent medium and small farmers, craftsmen, and entrepreneurs, as well as the higher and middle-level employees, the free professions, and highly skilled workers with supervisory functions. Apart from the similarity of their objective social position, the only

¹⁸ K. Davis, W. E. Moore, "Some Principles of Stratification," p. 49.

¹⁹ R. Collins, "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification," in *American Sociological Review* 36 (1971), pp. 1002-1019, esp. 1004.

²⁰ Th. Geiger, "Zur Theorie des Klassenbegriffs und der Proletarischen Klasse," in Th. Geiger, *Arbeiten zur Soziologie*, pp. 206-259, esp. 224.

bond which unites these diverse groups is the social and political will not to be proletarianized if they cannot rise to upper class status.²¹ While the relations between the two major classes are based on conflict the middle class view of the world and societal structure is in terms of peaceful competition and emulation. From this standpoint, society represents a hierarchical order of differential statuses ranked by occupation, consumption and style of life as well as prestige. These are the typical structural principles of an estate society.²²

It is important, in the present context, to recognize social conflict as the major driving force in society. Crucial in any theory of social conflict is the distribution of power and authority, phenomena which a structural-functional approach handles only peripherally. The latter thus abandons the possibility of tracing social conflicts to structural conditions. They essentially remain random occurrences, with social groupings and issues fundamentally uncertain.²³ Likewise, while the structural-functional theory does not deal with, and seemingly, cannot account for class differences and class-subcultures (based, as it is, on consensus and optimal integration and functioning), the conflict theory considers them as constitutive of any society.

Briefly, the frame of reference of the conflict approach²⁴ is made up of the three categories: norms, sanctions and power. It is argued that society constitutes a system of norms, conformity to which is enforced by positive and/or negative sanctions. Both sanctions and norms point to and originate in structures of power. The first factor leading to inequality consists in the different individual chances for norm conformity. A second one originates in the fact that specific norms only apply to particular positions, as Homans' study of small groups documents. Under this aspect, positional inequality is the result of positional norm differentiation. It becomes structurally determined social inequality when the demand for conformity to particular norms excludes the incumbents of various roles from access to more privileged positions which enforce other norms. Social mechanisms of positional allocation together with specific subcultural interpretations of inequality combine to effect a virtual non-removability of positional inequality thus conditioning the formation of different strata and a stratification system. However, the stability of a particular social system always remains precarious and temporary. The general norms are, in reality, those of the dominant groups

²¹ Th. Geiger, "Zur Theorie des Klassenbegriffs," pp. 235-242.

²² M. Weber, "Class, Status, and Party," in R. Bendix, S. M. Lipset (eds.), *Class, Status and Power*, pp. 21-28.

²³ R. Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society*, (London: Routledge, 1959), pp. 106-108. Collins, whose argumentation is, in part, similar to this paper, fails to clarify the foundations of the conflict approach. His reference to status groups instead of classes does not (as this paper shows) permit Collins to free himself from the framework of the functionalists, a task he set out to do. See Collins, "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification."

²⁴ Cf. R. Dahrendorf, "Über den Ursprung der Ungleichheit unter den Menschen," in R. Dahrendorf, *Pfade aus Utopia*, pp. 352-379, esp. 367-369. And R. M. Lepsius, "Ungleichheit zwischen Menschen und Soziale Schichtung," in D. Glass, R. König (eds.), *Soziale Schichtung und Soziale Mobilität*, pp. 54-64.

because structural inequality always benefits some at the expense of others and power and constraint form the fundamentals of any system of social inequality. Since this is true, the protest against inequality is *a priori* embedded. Social conflict, latent or manifest, is omnipresent.

Contrary to the structural-functional approach, the conflict theory does not assign any particular role to education. Nevertheless, the following inferences on the relation between education, stratification and mobility can be drawn:

(1) The extent to which educational systems reflect the inequalities inherent in a stratification system depends on the degree to which it is a necessary and sufficient precondition for the allocation of social positions. The more decisive the allocative power of education, the more exclusive and selective the educative process will be.

(2) As the major social institution of secondary socialization, education will mirror the norms of the ruling groups.

(3) The degree of incompatibility between subcultural and dominant norms and values, together with structurally determined relative deprivation, will reduce the chances of the lower strata for social mobility. The degree of success—quantitatively as well as qualitatively—of members from lower strata depends on the strength of education as an allocative principle. In case of a close link between education and the allocation of positions, it is hypothesized that the number of lower-class students will be small and that they will, as a rule, come from marginal families and/or will be alienated from their class of origin.

(4) The extension of equal rights to all is in conflict with the actual inequality in the allocation of positions and the acquisition of education. This contradiction may provide the rationale for demands for its solution, depending on the perceived and actual importance of education as a prerequisite for mobility.

(5) The more successful the demand for equalization of educational opportunities, the higher the degree of internal qualitative differentiation will be. This reflects the attempts of dominant groups to retain their exclusiveness and the competition for superior status typically carried on among middle class groups. We are now in a position to confront the different models of stratification with empirical evidence and, thus, to compare the relevance and general validity of the two approaches.

The Evidence and the Structural-Functional Theory

As Collins has demonstrated,²⁵ the materials available to test the assumption of a close link between education and socioeconomic demands fail to support this central hypothesis of the structural-functional theory of stratification. Moreover, in a time-lag correlation analysis of 37 countries, Peaslee²⁶ could only conclusively

²⁵ R. Collins, "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification," pp. 1003-1007.

²⁶ A. L. Peaslee, "Education's Role in Development," in *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 17 (1969), pp. 293-318.

correlate the increase in elementary education with economic growth, after an enrollment rate of at least 30 percent of the relevant age group had been attained. Peaslee's attempt to establish an overall association between education and economic development, once universal enrollment on a lower educational level has been achieved, does not hold. In a number of countries such as Russia, the USA, and Japan the enrollment at the postprimary level *exceeded* the rate of economic growth over long periods of time!²⁷ The present overproduction of educated (unemployable) people in many countries of the Third World actually suggests a *negative* correlation between education and development. The association appears negative due not only to falsely placed short-term priorities, i.e. in the areas of resource allocation and economic returns, but also because a disproportionate expansion of secondary and higher education results in the orienting of habits and aspirations towards greater consumption, rather than towards urgently needed investment and savings.²⁸ Similarly, data from the United States illustrate that the increase in the educational qualification of the labor force in the last four decades has been conditioned only to a small extent by changes in the occupational structure. The bulk of educational upgrading occurred within the same job categories²⁹ and was here only marginally necessitated by a rise in skill and training requirements.³⁰ Obviously, the expansion of education at all levels was caused by popular demands rather than by functional ones.

At the same time, there has been an apparent devaluation of education on the labor market coupled with a "down-grading" of institutions in terms of their subject matter and clientèle. Colleges and universities previously providing the qualifications and training for the higher professions, have increasingly come to include sub-professional and technical professions as well. Empirical findings indicate that even the training for blue- and lower level white-collar occupations has been progressively shifted to higher educational institutions.³¹ Concurrently, employers have tended to raise their demands on minimum qualifications for all occupational categories, including unskilled jobs.³²

And, the final thesis of the functional approach, that education provides required job skills, can hardly be maintained. Education is often irrelevant to "on the job productivity" and has even been, at times, counter-productive, while vocational training is often better acquired through experience rather than formal

²⁷ A. L. Peaslee, "Education's Role in Development," pp. 299.

²⁸ B. Hoselitz, "Investment in Education and its Political Impact," in J. Coleman (ed.), *Education and Political Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), p. 553.

²⁹ J. K. Folger, C. B. Nam, "Trends in Education in Relation to the Occupational Structure," in *Sociology of Education* 38 (1964), pp. 28f.

³⁰ I. Berg, *Education and Jobs—The Great Training Robbery*, (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin Books, 1970), chapter 3.

³¹ W. Sewell, "Inequality of Opportunity for Higher Education," in *American Sociological Review* 36 (1971), pp. 793-869, esp. 793.

³² R. Collins, "Functional and Conflict Theories," Tables 1, 2, pp. 1003f.

schooling. In summary, the structural-functional theory is limited in its power to explain the social-structural role of education.³³

The Evidence and the Conflict Theory

In the conflict approach education is implicitly considered as an institution of the power elite and is not seen in relation to functional requirements based on economic-technical necessities. The relevant supporting evidence on the role of education can be systematized under three headings: (1) expansion of education and recruitment patterns, (2) equal opportunities and the structure of the education system, and (3) equality and class specific subcultures.

Expansion of Education and Recruitment Patterns

Data on the U.S.A., the U.K., the Netherlands, Sweden, France and West Germany, to name only a few countries, show that, despite considerable expansion in secondary and higher education, the social composition of the student body has, on the whole, changed only marginally.³⁴ Generally speaking, the lower strata gained greater representation only after the demands of the middle and upper strata had reached a near saturation point, a phenomenon which Sussmann has called a process of "class succession."³⁵

However, another process occurring simultaneously can be discerned which may be called a process of "institutional differentiation." While class succession leaves room for an eventual equalization of life chances, the educational differentiation as a concurrent phenomenon prevents its realization. Specifically it means that while the lower strata improve upon their proportional share in educational institutions of the post-primary level, the upper strata have already turned to still higher educational institutions, qualitatively better schools at the same level or simply more rewarding subjects in terms of occupational opportunities. Perrucci's follow-up study of engineers from various institutions in the U.S.A., for example, substantiates the latter point. He shows that equal qualifications in terms of subject and degree may have little relevance as far as equal rewards on the labor market are concerned.³⁶ The former argument on the other hand is illustrated by the different employment chances available to graduates from the Indian educational system.³⁷ Furthermore, Sussmann found a degree of democratization

³³ Peaslee can only establish a correlation but no causal link. In historical research the correlation might just turn out to be coincidental.

³⁴ See e.g., the collection of articles in *OECD, Social Objectives in Educational Planning*, (Paris: OECD, 1967). H. Popitz, "Die Ungleichheit der Chancen im Zugang zur höheren Schulbildung," in L. v. Friedeburg (ed.), *Jugend in der modernen Gesellschaft*, (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1967), pp. 392-408.

³⁵ L. Sussmann, "Summary Review by the Rapporteur," pp. 15-27.

³⁶ C. Perrucci, R. Perrucci, "Social Origin, Educational Contexts, and Career Mobility," in *American Sociological Review* 25 (1970), pp. 451-463.

³⁷ Cf. Ministry of Labour and Employment, Government of India, *Report on the Pattern of Graduate Employment*, (New Delhi: 1963), chapter 6.

in Puerto Rican high schools equal to that of the United States—despite the fact that only 32 percent (compared with 87 percent in the U.S.) of the relevant age group is enrolled. However, after controlling for educational standard, she found that institutional differentiation in private and public schools performed the decisive function of social segregation. Data from a case study in India generally support the Puerto Rican findings, even though in India only 17 percent of the age group attend the secondary school.³⁸ These illustrations suggest the need for a comprehensive frame of reference in studies of the impact of education on social stratification. They also show that democratization of access is no proof at all for greater social mobility or reduction of social inequality. The American findings mentioned earlier—stating the vast expansion of educational opportunities resulting in a devaluation of education combined with higher demands on qualifications despite their irrelevance for job performance—allow the projection that a totally democratic education system will minimize the importance of formal education rather than ushering in a more equal society.

Equal Opportunities and the Structure of the Education System

The second set of data concerns social selection as a product of the structure of the educational system. The traditional European system of dual education and its effects of ability selection and tracking as well as the comprehensive school will be considered here. The comprehensive school and late selection were introduced to avoid premature choice of curriculum, facilitate switching between branches of study, and bring about greater social cohesion by enrolling students from diverse social backgrounds in the same institutions. However, owing to the ecology of social class and the local character of the high school's recruitment, the image of the comprehensive school as a microcosm of the whole social structure has not been borne out by empirical research.³⁹ According to Ford's investigation,⁴⁰ all objectives of the comprehensive school have remained unfulfilled. After controlling for ability, she found no greater development of individual talent, equality of opportunities, interaction across class lines, or differences in social perceptions. The notion of late selection, finally, misses the point. Competitive selection is only postponed, not eliminated, and with it survives the predominance of social, instead of purely academic, selection criteria.

While undoubtedly superior to a dual system of education, an organizational rearrangement at the level of a social sub-system, such as the education system, exemplified by the comprehensive school, cannot remove the basic contradictions and structurally determined inequalities in a society. The claim for equality by some clashes with the desire for segregation by others. The flight of the middle

³⁸ Cf. references 5 and 6.

³⁹ N. Rogoff-Ramsøy, "The Clientèle of Comprehensive Secondary Schools in the United States," in OECD, *Social Objectives in Educational Planning*, pp. 67-83.

⁴⁰ J. Ford, *Social Class and the Comprehensive School*, (London: Routledge, 1969).

class to suburbia and the private schools of the upper class only symbolize that the final decision in this struggle is determined by the distribution of power.⁴¹ While peers exert a strong influence on students' aspirations, thus confirming the basic idea of the comprehensive school, the latter is rendered essentially inoperative in the present societal setting. In its actual importance, the school remains secondary to the family as a socializing and allocating agency.

Equal Opportunities and Class Sub-Cultures

The whole problem of equalization of educational opportunities concerns especially the lower strata. Differential motivation and values, together with a differential use of language work to the disadvantage of the lower strata in academically oriented institutions.⁴² The specific mechanisms of sub-cultural diversity are operative at every stage of education, independent of academic ability. Thus, the influence of parents, i.e., of their class background, was found to be twice that of teachers with regard to educational and occupational aspirations of the students and, ultimately, their attainment of a college education.⁴³ And the Coleman report concludes that many lower class children enter school with a deficiency in learning skills which tends to increase throughout their years in school.⁴⁴

However, the influence of class sub-culture extends not only to educational aspirations and actual school success; the various studies on mobility (controlling for education) bear out a "delayed effect" of parental class position on son's occupational achievement. In Carlsson's terms, the influence of social class not only determines the pre-educational step, i.e., kind and length of schooling, but also the post-educational step, i.e., the later occupation.⁴⁵ Recent West German data support this result.⁴⁶

To overcome the barriers of social origin, which stand in the way of an equalization of opportunity, two possible solutions come to mind: (1) a change in the culture of the school, and (2) an intervention in the early socialization process. If the norms and values of a society are those of its dominant groups, as one of the main theses of the conflict approach maintains, the formal school system, being society's most important agency of secondary socialization, should reflect this power relationship. Lütken traces the establishment of the German school system to the turn from an estate to an industrial society.⁴⁷ The new school system, sponsored by the burgess, had the specific purpose of securing a position of equality

⁴¹ C. W. Mills, *The Power Elite*, (New York: Oxford University Press: 1956), pp. 63-68.

⁴² Cf. e.g., the collection of articles in B. Bernstein, et al., *Lernen und Soziale Struktur*, (Amsterdam: Schwarze Reihe, 1970).

⁴³ W. Sewell, "Inequality of Opportunity for Higher Education," p. 800.

⁴⁴ J. Coleman, et al., *Equality and Educational Opportunity*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Office of Education, 1966), pp. 20f.

⁴⁵ G. Carlsson, *Social Mobility and Class Structure*, pp. 136-138.

⁴⁶ W. Müller, "Bildung und Mobilitätsprozess—Eine Anwendung der Pfadanalyse," in *Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 1 (1972), pp. 65-84.

⁴⁷ Ch. Lütken, "Die Schule als Mittleklasseinstitution," in P. Heintz (ed.), *Soziologie der Schule*, (Kölner Zeitschrift: Sonderheft 4, 1969), pp. 22-39.

with the old prestige groups. The emphasis on the use of classical education and technical-rationalistic knowledge was but an instrument in the struggle against the dominant groups of the estate society, whose position of power and preeminence rested on ascription. In this situation, the foundation of the modern school system represented the attempt to legitimize the claims of the burghers to an elite position. By doing so, it questioned not only the formal principles of positional allocation, but also the basis of the feudal order itself and with it the beneficiaries of its power structures. However, when Lütkenes calls the school system a middle class institution, she fails to take notice of the historic transformation process the estate society was undergoing. With the victory of the third estate (the burghers) the structural principles of the old order were superseded, with the result that the first and second estate (nobility and clergy) ceased to exist. The ascendancy of the third estate to power signaled the end of the estate society altogether. From then on, the former burghers, together with the remnants of the two other estates, formed the bourgeoisie.⁴⁸ Consequently, the modern school system is not an institution of the middle class, but of the bourgeoisie, a fact which confirms the validity of the thesis of the conflict theorists asserting that social institutions are conditioned by and dependent on the specific power relations in a society.

Two proposals described as "job-related adult education"⁴⁹ and "recurrent education"⁵⁰ seek to minimize the influence of social background on mobility. Empirical findings established that job-related education during work-life represents the most important variable intervening in the linkage between social origin and occupational career. This type of education proved superior in its equalizing potential to the "second educational path," which offers another opportunity to qualify for college and university entry for those who dropped out of school and had to take less rewarding jobs. However, from the viewpoint of the establishment of an egalitarian society, it has to be understood that: (1) the number of people going through this process will always remain small, since it requires a large amount of motivation and stamina, and (2), while positively influencing the attainment of a higher occupational status, it is hypothesized that the frequency of intra-class as compared to inter-class mobility (which alone is of importance in our context) will be much higher. As a special branch and not as a substitution for the existing education system, it provides a means for individual rather than collective mobility which alone can bring about changes in the basic pattern of inequality. It puts a premium on high achievement motivation, i.e., precisely on that property in which the lower classes markedly differ in comparison to the other strata. Similarly, the rate of success of those availing themselves of the "second educational path" was found to be closely correlated with high social origin.⁵¹

⁴⁸ Th. Geiger, "Zur Theorie des Klassenbegriffs," pp. 226f.

⁴⁹ W. Müller, "Bildung und Mobilitätsprozess," p. 82.

⁵⁰ Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, *Equal Opportunity—A Statement of the Problem with Special Reference to Recurrent Education*, (Paris: OECD, 1971).

⁵¹ W. Zapf, "Der nachgeholte Aufstieg—Untersuchungen über Absolventen des Zweiten Bildungswegs," in *Neue Sammlung* 11, (1971), pp. 149-174.

"Recurrent education," on the other hand, which proposes an educational process linked to intermittent employment, appears doomed even before put into practice. The effects of positionally determined relative deprivation cannot be canceled out by simply interposing work experience into the period of formal education. What "recurrent" or "lifelong" education eventually amounts to is a test for the ability of the middle class to achieve under conditions of deferred gratification rather than a means for the attainment of an egalitarian society.⁵²

The other alternative, i.e., intervention in early socialization, recognizes the futility of mere institutional changes. Not equalization of opportunity but equalization of ability is the keyword. Not a change of the unequal positional structure of society but a discontinuation of the typical patterns of recruitment to social positions is the goal of this proposal. As such, it is concerned with raising the lower strata to middle class standards. However, without going into greater detail, by far the most important impediment to its realization is the financial dilemma, the solution of which would shake the foundations of the existing structures of economic and political power:⁵³

The idea of compensatory education for the culturally deprived implies not merely immense spending but spending more on the schooling of the disadvantaged than on that of the advantaged . . . The social distribution of income and political power makes such a course of action highly improbable.

In conclusion, the materials presented corroborate the overall validity of the conflict approach to education. The latter has to be seen in the total social structural context. It is but one of the institutions which reflect existing power structures and social inequalities; despite all potential for modification, in the final analysis, it is an inappropriate instrument for the establishment of social equality.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Our observations on education, mobility and social equality may be summarized as follows:

- (1) Studies on social mobility can arrive at valid conclusions only within the framework of a dynamic and comprehensive social structural analysis.
- (2) The fact that education is a necessary prerequisite for positional allocation and social mobility is determined by the functional demands on role performance in industrial societies. In order to assess its relative importance and actual social structural role, a comprehensive investigation into the selection as well as allocative function of education is required, taking into account the various educational levels as well as institutional differences.
- (3) By virtue of the particular stratification model used, any study of social

⁵² For a critical appraisal see M. Blaug, *Education and the Employment Problem in Developing Countries*, (Geneva: International Labor Office, 1973), pp. 72-76.

⁵³ L. Sussmann, "Summary Review by the Rapporteur," pp. 25f.

mobility is related to a theory of social inequality. Prestige and occupational-functional models can be traced to the structural-functional theory, while a socioeconomic class model was found to be based on a theory of conflict.

(4) The social function of education is conceptualized differently in the two theoretical approaches. While the structural-functional approach of stratification explicitly assigns to it the decisive role of providing the skills required for the proper functioning of society, the conflict approach does not attach central importance to education, at least as far as its inherent innovative structural potential is concerned.

(5) The main structural-functional hypothesis that functional demands determine the educational process can be substantiated only to a limited extent. A positive association was found for the transition from an illiterate to a literate society. Its application to higher levels of education, however, does not appear to be warranted by empirical data. Inequality in the allocation of positions is, by implication, conditioned by imperfections of existing selection mechanisms. Protagonists of this approach, consequently, will think in terms of ameliorative measures at the institutional level, such as, the elimination of material impediments to equalization of opportunities, the postponement of competitive selection, and the diversification of education. On the whole, the functional approach and related prestige models proved unsatisfactory as a theoretical frame for studies on education and mobility.

(6) The conflict approach, on the other hand, views social inequality as structurally determined and constitutive of society. Accordingly, society operates between the poles of power and constraint, privilege and deprivation with conflict at the root of social relations. Formal education, consequently, reflects the norms and values of the ruling groups and has essentially the function of confirming and stabilizing existing class differences. Confronting the conflict approach with empirical findings, it was found to be far superior to a functional approach in its explicability of social facts related to the education system. Class succession, institutional differentiation, and, finally, devaluation of education appeared to be the main devices to maintain social inequalities. All measures to reduce social class differentials via the education system appeared to be either impractical or piecemeal resulting in only marginal improvements. Cross-national empirical data apparently verified the theoretically derived inferences that studies on education and mobility, from the point of view of equality, are rather irrelevant and even misleading, since they suggest basic potentials for structural changes in an institution that performs but an executive and affirmative role.