

2014

## Stratification within the Classroom: An Examination of the Role of Education in the Reproduction of Labour Market Inequalities

Awish Aslam

*University of Western Ontario, aaslam5@uwo.ca*

Follow this and additional works at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/si>

 Part of the [Educational Sociology Commons](#), [Inequality and Stratification Commons](#), [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#), and the [Work, Economy and Organizations Commons](#)

---

### Recommended Citation

Aslam, Awish (2014) "Stratification within the Classroom: An Examination of the Role of Education in the Reproduction of Labour Market Inequalities," *Sociological Imagination: Western's Undergraduate Sociology Student Journal*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 11.  
Available at: <http://ir.lib.uwo.ca/si/vol3/iss1/11>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by Scholarship@Western. It has been accepted for inclusion in Sociological Imagination: Western's Undergraduate Sociology Student Journal by an authorized administrator of Scholarship@Western. For more information, please contact [kmarsha1@uwo.ca](mailto:kmarsha1@uwo.ca).

*“All pedagogic action is, objectively, symbolic violence insofar as it is the imposition of a cultural arbitrary by an arbitrary power.” –Pierre Bourdieu*

## **Introduction**

The relationship between education and social mobility has been of interest to sociologists since the 1950s (Brown, Reay, and Vincent 2013). Formal schooling has significant consequences in determining the stratification and opportunities for the social mobility of individuals in the labour market. Both manifest and latent functions of education reflect the assumptions of what different groups of students need to learn in order to prepare them for the labour market. In this paper I will analyze the role of education in the reproduction of labour market inequalities, along the lines of class, gender, and race-ethnicity.

To begin I will provide a brief history of formal schooling. Next, I will present the theoretical foundations of both functionalist and conflict perspectives on the purposes of education. Following that, I will explain the significance of academic qualifications in the labour market through signaling theory. Then, I will examine the reproduction of inequalities within the institutions of education and of work through the mechanisms of class, gender, and race-ethnicity while considering a number of theories. Subsequently I will engage in a discussion of the findings, and conclude with my final thoughts.

## **Historical Developments in Formal Education**

Historically, the purpose of formal schooling has centred on the transmission of knowledge from one generation to another (Meyer, Tyack, Nagel and Gordon 1979). With the industrial revolution came the complex division of labour, resulting in new skill requirements for occupations (Meyer et al. 1979). At the same time, education was used to transmit a national identity to pupils (Meyer et al. 1979). This notion of “nation-building” helped to develop a

unique Canadian identity through secular public schools (Meyer et al. 1979). More recently, the function of education has shifted its ability to level the playing field for all—regardless of class, gender, or race-ethnicity (Collins 1971). It is assumed that institutions of education promote a meritocratic structure that allows those who work the hardest to succeed and secure the most prestigious positions in society (Collins 1971). Moreover, in an increasingly knowledge-based economy, education is considered instrumental in preparing young people for their transition into the labour market, as well as re-training older generations in search of new careers.

### **Theoretical Foundations of the Functions of Education**

While a number of competing explanations exist concerning the purpose of education, it is important to examine the theoretical bases that these claims are grounded upon. There are two main frameworks from which the functions of schooling are established: functional perspectives, and conflict perspectives. Those in favour of functionalist arguments support the claim that the education system works to prepare students for their transition into the workplace, through the development of the necessary skills and abilities they need to succeed. Arguments made by conflict theorists claim that formal schooling is a means of social control through which the system reproduces social inequalities. In this section I will consider both functionalist and conflict arguments to provide greater insight to the competing theoretical perspectives.

#### **Functionalist Theories**

Functionalist theories take the position that social phenomena and institutions exist to meet the needs of and contribute to the order of society. As such, functionalist theorists maintain there is a strong relationship between what is learned in schools (through both manifest and latent functions), and the application of these skills and abilities in the labour market. Functionalists propose that education creates a level playing field for people of all backgrounds,

as a product of the system's meritocratic structure. Moreover, this perspective suggests that formal education fosters social cohesion and stability among students. Finally, proponents of functionalist theories state that education is essential in providing individuals with the necessary human capital to prepare them for the workplace.

According to functionalist theories, success in the classroom is largely based on achieved rather than ascribed status. In the past, individuals were able to inherit prestigious positions in society through family lineage; however, in contemporary society there are fewer opportunities for this type of nepotism or inherited success. This shift to a merit based society is made possible through the practices of the education system. As Parsons (1959:301) explains, the classroom allows for an "initial equalization of the contestants". Parsons (1959:309) highlights the principle of "equality of opportunity" within the education system, while comparing schooling to taking part in a foot race. Parsons (1959) states that all participants are required to complete an identical set of tasks, which will be assessed by an impartial arbitrator, who will evaluate each individual's work on the same set of standards. While he acknowledges that students are sorted as early as their elementary years, he cites individual ability and differential performance, over family background, as the main determinant of their stratification along the achievement axis (Parsons 1959). Overall, functionalist theories emphasize the meritocratic structure of the education system in creating equal opportunities for success for all students regardless of the social barriers they may face outside of school.

With the industrial revolution came the division of labour and the development of a complex and highly individualized society. The introduction of formal schooling assumed the role of socialization and the creation of a sense of social cohesion among students as a latent function. While society is composed of many agents of socialization, including the family,

religious congregations, and informal peer groups, the classroom is the primary institution through which individuals are taught and trained to function as contributing members of society (Parsons 1959). Entry into formal schooling is, for most children, their first experience of large-scale socialization outside of the family (Parsons 1959). According to Dreeben (1968), part of the latent function of schooling is to teach students the importance of four basic norms: independence, achievement, comparison, and universalism. For example, Dreeben (1968) uses the model of testing to emphasize the importance of independence. While the institution of the family typically encourages dependent relationships and fosters a collective environment, cooperative efforts on a test would be considered cheating in school, as well is an in the majority of roles taken on by adults in the labour market (Dreeben 1968). As such, the latent functions of formal schooling are vital in teaching students the informal rules of socialization.

The manifest function of schooling is the cultivation of human capital amongst the student body. As society becomes increasingly advanced, it is vital that students ensure they have mastered the required skills, knowledge, and training necessary to remain competitive in the labour market. The technical-function theory of education claims that higher demands on human capital are necessary for three main reasons (Collins 1971). First, skill requirements for jobs are increasing as a result of constant technological advancements. There is an increase in positions requiring highly specialized skills, and a decline in those requiring basic or low-level skills. At the same time, existing jobs demand greater levels of expertise and skills training. Second, highly skilled positions require formal training in either specific capacities or general skills. Third, as requirements for educational credentials in the labour market are constantly on the rise, vast amounts of students are spending extended periods of time in formal schooling. The functional theory of stratification also supports the increasing demands in human capital for

employment purposes (Collins 1971). This theory states that specific positions in the labour market require a particular set of skills, and that these roles can only be filled by those with innate ability, or those who have obtained the necessary training for the job (Collins 1971). Accordingly, technical-function theory and the functional theory of stratification explain that the manifest function of formal schooling is to provide students with the necessary human capital required to fulfill specific positions in the labour market.

### **Conflict Theories**

Conflict theories engage in a critical perspective of social phenomena, paying particular attention to inequality and power differentials between social groups while critiquing dominant ideologies. With regard to the education system, conflict theorists are far more skeptical of the meritocratic structure and operation of the institution. Proponents of this perspective believe that formal schooling functions largely to reproduce existing social inequalities through both its manifest and latent functions. In this section I will discuss two main theories of domination exercised through the institution of education. First, conflict theorists maintain that the curriculum of formal schooling places a higher value on the “cultural capital” of the middle class, through the assumption that the experiences of this group constitute “official knowledge”. Second, conflict theorists believe that the education system functions to indoctrinate capitalist values among pupils through both the day-to-day operations of the institution, as well as through specific methods of teaching and learning.

By identifying the selective knowledge of the middle-class as “official knowledge” within the classroom, students from middle-class backgrounds are at an immediate advantage when compared to their working-class peers. Bourdieu uses the notion of “cultural capital” to explain this phenomenon. He claims that society is divided on the basis of social class, where

individuals subconsciously internalize specific class dispositions resulting from their socialization in the home (Bourdieu 2006). Based on their class disposition, individuals develop a particular form of cultural capital, which guides their choices and actions. He states that teachers, who are typically from middle-class backgrounds, reward children for exhibiting middle-class behaviours, attitudes, and knowledge, while punishing those who fail to embrace these values (Bourdieu 1996). Thus, those students who lack the middle-class disposition feel a sense of alienation and discouragement (Bourdieu 1996). Moreover, he finds that teachers who encounter students from middle-class families often misinterpret their cultural capital for natural scholastic ability, in comparison to working-class students who they observe as having to work harder to achieve the same level of success (Bourdieu 2006). By translating class hierarchies into academic hierarchies, Bourdieu maintains that the education system functions to reproduce social inequalities.

In *Schooling in Capitalist America* (1976), Bowles and Gintis make the case that the latent function of schooling is, fundamentally, the reproduction of social inequality. They state that all students are subject to the indoctrination of the capitalist structure through what they have termed, correspondence theory. Correspondence theory rests on the premise that the structure of formal schooling is set up to mirror the capitalist workplace (Bowles and Gintis 1976). There are hierarchies in place that shape school interactions in the same way in which social relations occur in the workplace (Bowles and Gintis 1976). For instance, the role of the school principal is equivalent to the manager in the workplace, the teacher to the supervisor, and the student to the worker. As a result, all students learn to respect the ordered structure of the capitalist workplace (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Moreover, the educational experiences of students from different classes reinforces their place in the social structure, and their future

workplace roles (Bowles and Gintis 1976). Accordingly, middle-class students learn to be managers, while working-class students absorb the responsibilities of blue-collar workers. Therefore, schools work to reinforce class differences among pupils through stratification in the classroom, which allows for the reproduction of these inequalities in preparing students for the workforce.

### **The Significance of Educational Credentials in the Labour Market**

While the functions of education are widely debated, both functionalist and conflict theories acknowledge the importance of earning credentials through formal schooling to leverage as capital in the labour market. After examining both functionalist and conflict perspectives, I have found the conflict perspective most convincing and will use it to guide the rest of the discussion. While functionalists cite the importance of human capital gained through formal schooling, conflict theorists emphasize the acquisition of credentials as a form of symbolic capital. As Bourdieu (2006:88) states,

With the academic qualification, a certificate of cultural competence which confers on its holder a conventional, constant, legally guaranteed value with respect to culture, social alchemy produces a form of cultural capital which has a relative autonomy vis-à-vis its bearer and even vis-à-vis the cultural capital he effectively possess at a given moment in time.

He explains that by obtaining a diploma or degree, individuals are able to signal to employers that they possess the capacity to fulfill the requirements of a given position. He goes on to say that once an individual is awarded a particular qualification, it provides assurance of a lifetime of competency, regardless of advancements of knowledge in the field (Bourdieu 1996).

In *The Credential Society* (1979), Collins makes arguments similar to those of Bourdieu through his discussion on the myth of technocracy. Based on his findings, Collins refutes the majority of claims made by functionalists. He states that empirical datum provide little support

for increasing credential requirements in the workplace. In fact, Collins (1979) actually found a rising trend of over-education especially among those with post-secondary credentials. Additionally, research has shown that workers with higher levels of education, particularly those with college or university level credentials, are actually less productive when compared to those with lower levels of education (Collins 1979). In terms of vocational schooling, he finds that the training provided for manual positions is essentially futile in preparing students for the labour market (Collins 1979). Moreover, existing datum suggest that schools are actually ineffective institutions for learning, and that the majority of skills used in the workplace come from on-the-job training, rather than formal schooling (Collins 1979).

While it is evident that formal schooling and the qualifications that students achieve are not true indicators of academic ability or vocational skills, employers are unlikely to dispute the legitimacy of their credentials (Bourdieu 1996). This is due to the fact that their own power over their subordinates and in society in general, is founded on the same type of qualifications (Bourdieu 1996).

What, exactly are employers able to identify through the academic qualifications of their workers? The significance of educational credentials in the labour market can be explained through signaling theory. Essentially, the acquisition of these credentials signal that an individual possesses certain capacities and qualities that employers find meaningful (Arkes 1997). In most cases employers make inferences on an individuals' qualifications and cognitive ability based on their decision to go to school, their field of study, and the institution attended (Arkes 1997). Moreover, academic qualifications can signal unobserved abilities, such as the motivation to learn, or perseverance to work towards a goal, both of which lead to greater productivity (Arkes 1999). Education also reflects group identity or membership (Collins 1979). Considering that one

of the main functions of formal schooling is to teach students to assume a particular set of values, employers use credentials to serve as an indication of the acceptance of certain principles and beliefs (Collins 1971). For instance, the top corporate firms in the United States limit their recruitment to individuals who obtained their credentials from a selection of highly ranked colleges (Useem and Karabel 1986). Attendance at these institutions signals to employers that applicants possess certain characteristics, such as an upper-class upbringing, that will allow them to quickly assimilate into the workplace culture (Useem and Karabel 1986). Moreover, educational requirements are increasingly used as a form of social closure (Collins 1971). In the same way that occupations professionalize their work through regulatory bodies in order to preserve their prestige, employers are also demanding higher educational requirements to maintain the respectability and elite status of their organizations (Collins 1971). Thus, the pursuit for academic qualifications has become a form of social stratification used to reproduce social inequalities in the labour force.

### **The Reproduction of Inequalities: From the Classroom to the Workplace**

While students experience stratification in the classroom, these experiences do not operate in a vacuum; in fact, the inequalities that marginalize certain groups are perpetuated once these individuals enter the labour force. At this point I will examine inequality along the lines of class, gender, and race-ethnicity within the institution of education, and explain how they are reproduced in the labour market while considering the theoretical perspectives of cultural capital, corresponding theory, and signaling theory.

### **The Reproduction of Inequality Through Class**

There is much research examining the relationship between social class, education, and the workplace. The majority of empirical research supports the claim that class origins have a

direct effect on occupational success, even after the completion of education (Collins 1971). This type of stratification is perpetuated through the role of streaming and tracking in schools, as well as specific teaching methods. Anyon's (1980) research on the hidden curriculum demonstrates a clear example of correspondence theory, through which students of different class backgrounds experience vast distinctions in school learning and practices. For example, whereas working-class students are rewarded on the basis of their compliance and conformity, middle-class students are rewarded for their creativity and personal assertiveness (Anyon 1980). As a result, students from lower social-class backgrounds are less likely to possess the cultural capital of the middle-class that is valued by white-collar employers. Thus, it is evident that students from different class backgrounds are streamed early on to occupy particular roles in the labour market. Accordingly, students from lower social-class backgrounds are not given an equal opportunity to learn the official knowledge, attitudes and behaviours that would allow them to increase their social mobility. Rather, they are simply left to reproduce their own class position while engaging in the same blue-collar employment as their parents.

Although working-class students arrive at school with an early disadvantage, this does not mean that it is impossible for them to succeed. In fact, after witnessing the rewards associated with middle-class values, some working-class students learn to achieve school success by managing their social identity. These students learn to imitate the cultural capital of the middle-class by way of socialization in the classroom, and the indoctrination of these values through the education system. In Granfield's (1991) study on the upward mobility of working-class law students, the implications of signaling theory are quite evident. The study reveals that students are encouraged and assisted in concealing their working-class backgrounds by professional career councilors hired by the school. Councilors teach students to downplay their

working-class backgrounds, because recruiters are focused on attracting students that can easily assimilate within the firm's elite culture (Granfield 1991). Signals of a working-class disposition work against a candidate's likelihood of employment, even when the candidate holds similar or higher qualifications than others from more elite backgrounds (Granfield 1991). Though some students are able to succeed and obtain prestigious positions within these firms, they continue to struggle to manage their new middle-class identity with their working-class roots, and eventually come to experience identity ambivalence (Granfield 1991). These individuals battle feelings of guilt, uneasiness, and a sense of betrayal in adopting their new identities, and are never able to fully transcend their working-class upbringing.

Just as they are forced to mimic the middle-class values of their classmates, these working-class individuals must continue to imitate the class disposition of their co-workers if they hoped to advance their career in the firm (Useem and Krabel 1986). If these individuals choose to assume their own working-class backgrounds, they are likely to face backlash, similar to the way in which students who embrace their working-class upbringing in school are marginalized by their peers (Granfield 1991). While distinctions between social class are not nearly as visible as those of gender or race, as Reay (2005:924) states, class is "deeply embedded in everyday interactions and institutional processes, in the struggle for identity and recognition; whether it is acknowledged or not." Consequently, while working-class students may appear to have succeeded in the quest for upward mobility, they continue to feel like outsiders while guarding their class background, and struggling with their identity ambivalence in the labour market.

## **The Reproduction of Inequality Through Gender**

While women have gained many rights over the past few decades, sexual stereotyping favouring the work of men continues to be prevalent in the labour market (Demaïter and Adams 2009). However, the marginalization of women in the workplace actually stems from educational inequality within the school system. In their research on gendered classroom interactions, Jones and Myhill (2004) found that the large majority of teachers held extremely gendered stereotypes for students in their classes. Expectations for boys included aggressive, disobedient, and competitive behaviour, whereas girls are assumed to naturally act in a submissive, and cooperative manner (Jones and Myhill 2004). Stereotypical gender identities are also employed as signals for natural achievement or underachievement in particular subjects. For example, teachers hold assumptions of male success in the fields of math and science, and female achievement in social sciences and humanities (Jones and Myhill 2004). In general, however, underachieving males receive more attention than underachieving females because it is assumed that girls naturally enjoy schooling, while boys struggle in the classroom setting (Jones and Myhill 2004). Consequently, resources dedicated to increasing engagement and achievement among students in schools are disproportionately aimed at male students, while female students are left to flounder on their own (Jones and Myhill 2004).

Similar to the acceptance of middle class attitudes and behaviours of official knowledge, students are forced to accept normative gender roles, or risk being labeled as deviant. While students largely internalize these gender norms through the latent functions of schooling such as peer interactions and social cues from teachers, gender norms are also perpetuated through the manifest functions of learning such as school curricula.

Gendered expectations are often conveyed through learning materials used in class. In their analysis on children's reading materials in schools, Jackson and Gee (2005) examine the availability of classroom resources that children may use to reflect on and understand gender. They found that the majority of illustrations and texts in books and readers in classrooms perpetuate traditional gender behaviours (Jackson and Gee 2005). For example, girls are often depicted taking part in domestic activities, wearing dresses, and playing with dolls. Boys, on the other hand, are illustrated playing sports, going camping, and playing with cars, boats, and trucks. Additionally, participation in stereotypical behaviour often results in positive consequences for children (Jackson and Gee 2005). For instance, femininity is typically demonstrated through characters that embody beauty and kindness. These individuals are then rewarded for conforming to societal standards of femininity with male attention (Jackson and Gee 2005). As a result of the indoctrination of these gender norms on female students, women are more likely to associate passive and submissive characteristics as positive and look to reproduce these characteristics in their employment.

The repeated exposure to these gender norms condition children to assume and accept these representations of masculinity and femininity to be definitive and universal. Furthermore, correspondence theory would make the argument that the internalization of these norms leads students to seek out employment in fields where they are able to naturally carry out these characteristics, thus reinforcing gendered occupations. This helps to explain why the majority of women continue to work in pink-collar jobs, and face hostility when they attempt to transcend these stereotypes and gain employment in male-dominated fields (Demaiter and Adams 2009). Moreover, even when women are employed in non-traditional fields, they often occupy lower-status positions, and continue to face a wage-gap in their earnings (Demaiter and Adams 2009).

Thus, the oppressive gender norms that are impressed upon children early in their schooling work to reproduce inequalities in the experiences of women in the labour market.

### **The Reproduction of Inequality Through Race-Ethnicity**

Discrimination against visible minorities in employment practices is widely documented and evident across organizations (Swidinsky and Swidinsky 2002). According to Collins, “case studies show that the operation of ethnic and class standards in employment are based not merely on skin colour but on name, accent, style of dress, manners, and conversation abilities” (Collins 1971:1008). Serving as a master-status, race-ethnicity dominates the lived experiences of these marginalized populations. In line with the official knowledge of the middle-class, and the pressure to conform to traditional gender norms, empirical studies have found that many students feel the pressure of having to “act White” or adopt White values in order to succeed in school (Ogbu 1992).

Visible minority students experience social exclusion through a number of factors including: migration stress, cultural differences, family disorganization, domestic responsibilities, dialect interference, low self-esteem, and racial hostility (Dei, Mazzuca, McIsaac, Zine, 1997). The participation of these youth in formal education is negatively influenced as a result of these factors, and the lack of their recognition in school curricula. According to Dei's (1996) work, minority children are better able to connect and learn from schooling if it relates to their lived experiences. Unfortunately, dominant pedagogical approaches in school today do not include multicultural or ethnocultural approaches because they are thought to demonstrate alternative, rather than official knowledge (Dei et al. 1997). For example, one student is quoted as saying, “all those who have done something worth mentioning in the school books are White” (Dei 1996: 173). While Canada is often referred to as a multicultural

society, the oversight and omissions in representing an array of cultural identities in school curricula is detrimental to the chances of success for these individuals. The lack of recognition of the diverse needs of students results in the disengagement of these individuals, pushing them to the margins of the classroom and leading to detachment from productive learning (Dei 1996).

Differences in teaching and learning styles may also play a role in the disengagement of these students as they face difficulty crossing cultural and language barriers (Ogbu 1992). The minority student often faces difficulty identifying with authority figures in school, as the majority of teachers and administrators continue to reflect the existing unequal power relations in wider society (Dei 1996). For instance, teachers often hold inferior expectations for students from minority backgrounds, whose master-status is often used as a signal for inability and incompetence, further contributing to their stratification into the lower level of the achievement spectrum (Dei et al. 1997). Moreover, as a result of the various factors contributing to their exclusion mentioned earlier, racialized individuals often face social stigmas, particularly incidents of racism, when participating in the socialization function of schooling (Dei 1996). Due to feelings of disconnect from their school curricula, authority figures, and their peers, these students are overcome with a sense of isolation and detachment, thus preventing them from achieving their full potential, and maintaining existing social inequalities (Dei 1996).

In Ogbu's (1992) *Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning*, he discusses the experiences of involuntary minorities (those minority groups who were brought to a society against their will, such as through colonization, slavery, or forced labour). In response to the oppression that these students face within the classroom, these involuntary minorities engage in "cultural inversion", meaning that they refuse to mirror the attitudes and behaviours of their oppressors (Ogbu 1992). Although they acknowledge that acting White may potentially lead to

success, they also recognize that engaging in the behaviour expected by teachers is detrimental to their social identity and feelings of self-worth (Ogbu 1992). Moreover, these individuals recognize that racial/ethnic minorities who are willing to act White are never fully accepted by Whites, nor do they receive equal treatment in wider society (Ogbu 1992). Involuntary minorities do not consider their racial/ethnic differences as a barrier to overcome in the way that working-class students may look to transcend their social identity; rather, these students interpret their differences as unique to their group identity—something to be celebrated and displayed (Ogbu 1992).

While the disengagement of racial/ethnic groups, particularly among involuntary minorities, is often the result of structural forces (such as a lack of an inclusive curriculum), it is commonly misinterpreted as the result of individual failure. Subsequently, low achievement levels further perpetuate stereotypes of their inferiority from the educator to the employer. Moreover, opposition to the oppressive curriculum taught in schools is interpreted as resistance against authority figures. Correspondingly, the stigma attached to the behaviour of these students in school and their low-levels of achievement serve as negative signals to employers as they enter the job market. Additionally, the social exclusion of visible minorities in schooling leaves them ill prepared for their transition into the dominant White culture of the workplace, where those who hope to succeed must participate in the performance of acting White. Moreover, involuntary minorities who refuse to assimilate and conform to the expectations of the dominant group limit their opportunities in the labour market. Thus, the marginalized position of visible minorities in school is reproduced in the workplace, where they continue to face discrimination on the basis of their race-ethnicity, while navigating their way through a system that works to oppress them.

## **Discussion**

The reproduction of social inequality from education to work is made apparent through the empirical research on class, gender, and race-ethnicity, coupled with the theoretical perspectives of cultural capital, correspondence theory, and signaling theory. Each theoretical approach is able to capture different elements of the reproduction of inequality, yet no single model is able to encompass its entirety.

Certain theories are better able to capture the experiences of particular groups, while others are less applicable. For example, Bourdieu's notion of cultural capital easily demonstrates the power of the dominant group resulting from their official knowledge within all three mechanisms of inequality (middle-class values, traditional gender norms, and acting White). On the other hand, correspondence theory is more difficult to interpret, as the indoctrination of capitalist values is often more discrete, especially in the case of race-ethnicity. Furthermore, signaling theory is better able to capture the experiences of visible minorities, in comparison to those who experience marginalization on the basis of class. This is due to the fact that while an individual may attempt to pass as White, race-ethnicity is signaled to educators or employers immediately by appearance. Conversely, someone from working-class origins may be able to pass as middle-class if they are able to successfully imitate the desired class disposition.

Additionally, some theories tend to overlap, and go hand in hand with others. For instance, with regard to gender, girls and boys learn to assume traditional gender norms through official knowledge of gendered behaviour provided to them in classroom materials and resources. At the same time, teachers signal approval to those students who successfully adopt these norms, and penalize those students who fail to perform gender accordingly. Consequently, one process is reinforced and assisted by another practice. This intersection helps to establish a

stronger case for the hidden curriculum of schooling. The examination of multiple viewpoints leads to an enhanced understanding of just how deep-seated and widespread the perpetuation of inequality from school to work is. For this reason, it is important to take a holistic approach and consider the perspectives of all three theoretical approaches.

With regard to future research, more attention should be dedicated to the influence of administrator and teacher bias, the effectiveness of alternative pedagogy, and understanding the success of marginalized groups in the labour market. One way to reduce the reproduction of inequality in schools is to examine the perspectives of those who possess power and authority in the classroom. Since how administrators and educators create and uphold the norms and expectations of schooling, it is practical to consider and critically analyze their perspectives on the situation, and to examine their efforts to improve the status of disadvantaged groups. Moreover, while many alternative forms of pedagogy exist, there are few studies on the implementation and evaluation of these schools. Collaborative education or increased representation of diverse perspectives in the curriculum, and progressive reforms in teaching methods are likely to increase student engagement and achievement for habitually underperforming students. Finally, more work can be done to understand the experiences of students who are traditionally disadvantaged in schools, yet succeed in the labour market. While these students are considered to be the exception, it may be worthwhile to examine the factors that contribute to their success.

Future research aside, lingering questions about the reproduction of inequality remain. While changes can be made within the institution of schooling, inequalities within the labour market will persist. In order to bring any lasting and authentic change to the institution of schooling, it would be necessary for the wider social and economic structure to adopt similar

transformations. As such, one must consider the practicality of preparing students for a fictional moral world that does not exist outside of the classroom. At the same time others might argue that a reform in educational paradigms may lead to a fundamental restructuring of society. By shifting the values and official knowledge of education away from those of the capitalist structure, and introducing a social-justice based model that considers the diverse perspectives and experiences of class, gender, and race-ethnicity, the institution of education may be able to improve, or at the very least lessen, existing social inequalities.

### **Conclusion**

In this paper I have analyzed the role of education in the reproduction of labour market inequalities along the lines of class, gender, and race-ethnicity. While the purpose of education was historically centred on the transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next, the introduction of capitalism led to the expansion and increased access to education. At the same time it ushered in the hidden curriculum of schooling. The examination of these mechanisms of inequality through the notion of cultural capital, correspondence theory, and signaling theory support the claim that the education system, in its current form, lends itself to the reproduction rather than the upward transmission of social mobility. The ruling class maintains its privilege in the labour market through a system that falsely promotes the ideas of equal opportunity and meritocracy in education.

## References

- Anyon, Jean. 1980. "Social Class and the Hidden Curriculum of Work." *Journal of Education* 162(1): 67-92.
- Arkes, Jeremy. 1999. "What do Educational Credentials Signal and Why do Employers Value Credentials?" *Economics Education Review* 18(1): 133-41.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1996. *The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. Bourdieu, Pierre 2006. The Forms of Capital. Pp. 83-95 in Alan R. Sadovnik (Ed). *Sociology of Education: A Critical Reader*. New York & London: Routledge.
- Bowles, Samuel and Herbert Gintis. 1976. *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Brown, Phillip, Diane Reay and Carol Vincent. 2013. "Education and Social Mobility." *British Journal of Sociology of Education* 34(5-6), 637-643.
- Collins, Randall. 1971. "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification." *American Sociological Review* 36(6): 1002-1019.
- Collins, Randall. 1979. *The Credential Society: A Historical Sociology of Education and Stratification*. New York: Academic Press.
- Dei, George. J. S., Josephine Mazzuca, Elizabeth McIsaac and Jasmin Zine. 1997. *Reconstructing 'Dropout': A Critical Ethnography of the Dynamics of Black Students' Disengagement from School*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Dei, J. S. George. 1996. "The Role of Afrocentricity in the Inclusive Curriculum in Canadian Schools." *Canadian Journal of Education*, 21(2), 170-186.
- Demaiter, Erin. I., and Tracey Adams. "I really didn't have any problems with the male-female thing until ...': Successful Women's experiences in IT organizations." *Canadian Journal of Sociology*, 34(1), 31-53.
- Dreeben, Robert. 1968. *On What is Learned in School*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Coompany.
- Granfield, Robert. 1991. "Making It by Faking It: Working-Class Students in an Elite Academic Environment." *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, 20(3), 331-351.

- Jackson, Sue and Gee, Susan. 2005. "'Look Janet', 'No you look John': Constructions of Gender in Early School Reader Illustrations Across 50 Years." *Gender and Education*, 17(2), 115-128.
- Jones, Susan and Debra Myhill. 2004. "'Troublesome Boys' and 'Compliant Girls': Gender Identity and Perceptions of Achievement and Underachievement." *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 25(5), 547-561.
- Meyer, John W., David Tyack, Joane Nagel, and Audri Gordon. 1979. "Public Education as Nation-Building in America: Enrollments and Bureaucratization in the American States, 1870-1930." *American Journal of Sociology*, 85(3), 591-613.
- Ogbu, John U. 1992. "Understanding Cultural Diversity and Learning." *Educational Researcher*. 21(8): 5-14.
- Parsons, Talcott. 1959. "The School Class as a Social System: Some of its Functions in American Society." *Harvard Educational Review* 29(4): 297-318.
- Reay, Diane. 2005. "Beyond Consciousness? The Psychic Landscape of Social Class." *Sociology* 39(5): 911-28.
- Swidinsky Robert and Michael Swidinsky. 2003. "The Relative Earnings of Visible Minorities in Canada: New Evidence From the 1996 Census." *Relations Industrielles*, 57(4), 630-659.
- Useem, Michael and Jerome Karabel. 1986. "Pathways to Top Corporate Management." *American Sociological Review* 51(2): 184-200.