

# Unit 1

## The Concept of Education

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### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- distinguish between literacy and education;
- discuss the multiple dimensions of education; and
- explain the interrelationship between education and value system.

### 1.1 Introduction

You must have heard your parents and teachers telling you how important education is for securing a job, receiving honour and respect in society, and above all making you a 'refined' person. Have you ever wondered what the concept of education is? Is education merely a means of securing a livelihood or prestige in society? What is it in education that people think brings about refinement in personality? Is education confined to teaching and learning activities in schools and universities? Often the term education is used synonymously with literacy. We begin this unit by highlighting the difference between education and literacy. We will also explore the meaning and different dimensions of education as also the interrelationship between education and value system in general and in the context of India in particular.

### 1.2 Education and Literacy

The term 'education' is derived from the Latin word, *educare* which means, 'to bring up', 'to lead out', and 'to develop'. In the simplest sense, therefore, education refers to the process of bringing up, leading out, and developing individuals as mature, adult members of society. There is no denying that the meaning and usage of the word were excessively pervasive and generalized till industrialism gained ground. Peters (1977) explains that the coming of industrialism was accompanied with greater demand for knowledge, skill and training which called for formal means of imparting these in specialized institutions that came to be referred to as 'schools'. Consequently, education, in its earliest conception as training or the handing down of knowledge and skills, got associated with schools. Over time, the scope of education got delimited to the development of knowledge or understanding.

In its widest possible sense, education is characterized by the moral, intellectual, and spiritual development of a person. It may be noted that the conception of education as the all-round development of an individual, as

distinct from training, emerged in the nineteenth century. The process of education comprises cultivation of distinct qualities and traits through explicit instructions or through implicit inhibition as part of growing up amidst family members, kin and peer groups. Surely then, the domain of education enfolds both, what children learn in schools as also in families and peer-groups as part of the process of socialization. More specifically, Peters writes (1977:11), "In other words, though previous to the nineteenth century there had been the ideal of the cultivated person who was the product of elaborate training and instruction, the term 'an educated man' was not the usual one for drawing attention to this ideal. They had the concept but they did not use the word 'educated' quite with these overtones. Education, therefore, was not thought of explicitly as a family of processes which have as their outcome the development of an education man in the way it is now".

The Renaissance humanists emphasized learning Latin as also other classical languages. An educated person was described as one who had mastered Latin and classical languages and had studied classical literature. The Renaissance educators believed that the endeavour would instill humanistic, human-centered knowledge in the minds of children. These educators were largely literary figures — writers, poets, translators, and teachers. They encouraged the learners to develop their faculties in a way that they would be able to challenge existing customs and mediocrity in literature and in their own lives. Such education was reserved for the elite (Ornstein and Levine 1993).

The invention of the printing press in the year 1423 was a milestone in the history of education. Books and print material now became readily available. One consequence of this was the spread of literacy. The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries extended literacy among the masses. Vernacular schools brought the curriculum essentially consisting of reading, writing, arithmetic and religion among the masses in the community's own language.

In common parlance, a term that is often used synonymously with education is literacy. Much in contrast to education, the scope of the concept of literacy is delimited to the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic — the so-called three R's. The literacy campaigns of the government bodies, non-governmental organizations, as also international organizations seek to initiate people into the skills of reading and writing with the expectation that literate individuals are better able to secure a livelihood, raise productivity, and safeguard their own and their nation's interests more competently than their non-literate counterparts.

At the time of its founding, UNESCO sought to enable as many people in as many nations as possible to read and write. Mass education campaigns were launched. Over a period of time, however, it came to be realized that literacy programmes did not match the needs of adults. In the 1960s UNESCO adopted a functional view of literacy following which the focus shifted to fostering reading or writing skills that would raise productivity in agriculture, manufacturing and other jobs. The functional approach to literacy was evident in the Experimental World Literacy Programme (EWLP) in which UNESCO was an important participant. It was found that the focus narrowed too sharply on needs of national economic development. Consequently, the socio-cultural and linguistic context in which learners acquired and applied their literacy skills as also the needs of learners in their local context remained largely ignored.

In the 1970s the concept of literacy got widened, particularly after the intervention of Paulo Freire who emphasized literacy as an educational process. The chief concern was with encouraging the people to question why things were the way they were and striving to change them if need be. While earlier

literacy programmes treated the learners as beneficiaries, Freire treated them as 'actors' and 'subjects'. The major fallout of the change in approach was that literacy, which had hitherto been confined to classroom learning found place in the socio-political domain of society. The socio-cultural and linguistic contexts assumed significance. UNESCO bestowed one of its literacy prizes on Paulo Freire in 1975 as recognition of the contribution to what was termed as 'critical literacy'. The term critical literacy was used to refer to the capacity of an individual to participate as an active citizen given to critiquing national and international practices, claiming rights, and challenging power structures. We can now appreciate better the broadening of the concept of literacy and its rising affinity with that of education. In the 1980s, UNESCO recognized the clear-cut distinction between 'autonomous literacy' (referring to a skill acquired with no reference to values and context) and 'ideological literacy' (referring to mediation of literacy by social or political ideologies). Modes of schooling and ways of transmission of knowledge acquired greater importance in the larger framework of consolidation of and expression of power particularly so because it was recognized that literacy was a major means through which power is both, acquired and exercised in society.

#### Box 1.1: Literacy as an evolving concept

"The concept and practice of literacy are in constant and dynamic evolution, with new perspectives reflecting societal change, globalising influences on language, culture and identity, and the growth of electronic communication. In this development, two fundamental notions are clear. First, literacy is ambiguous, neither positive or negative in itself, its value depending on the way it is acquired or delivered and the manner in which it is used. It can be liberating, or to use Freire's term, domesticating. In this, literacy matches the role and purpose of education more broadly. Second, literacy links with the broad spectrum of communication practices in society and can only be addressed alongside other media, such as radio, TV, computers, mobile phone texting, visual images, etc. The massive development of electronic communication has not replaced paper-based literacy, but provides a new context for it; graphics have an increasing place alongside text; computer-based learning and play occupy both children and adults and displace the reading of books — all these phenomena are changing the way we view literacy" (UNESCO 2003).

### 1.3 Education as Preparation for Social Role in Ideal State

Some of the earliest ideas on the concept and meaning of education have treated it as a process by which children acquire moral values that are essential for harmonious existence in society. Both Socrates and Plato upheld that it was morality alone that ensured happiness and a sense of fulfillment in life. Moral existence, they said, was derived from rational understanding of the virtues of human nature as also truth. Cultivation of philosophical reason, therefore, was imperative to 'good life'. Moral reason enveloped all aspects of existence. Plato explained that since the source of intelligibility, nature and the very being of everything is the supreme form, a philosopher aspires to attain knowledge of it as the ultimate objective of life. Plato was convinced of a pre-bodily life in the course of which the soul gets originally acquainted with the supreme form, and by implication, the all-pervasive moral reason.

The task of the teacher in a classroom was limited to reminding the children and enabling them to recollect all that they innately know or are aware of. Cultivation of moral reason comes from the study of mathematics since it fosters abstract, disciplined thinking. When abstract, disciplined thinking develops, an individual is able to transcend mundane, empirical reality. Plato vehemently guarded the idea that education is essentially the training of

character. He was sure that culture (including music, architecture, literature) provided an appropriate learning environment to the child and created an indelible impact on their minds. His concern was with the effect on characters of literature, dramas, and other forms of representation that lay at the core of Athenian education and formed the basic medium for transmission of information and ideas. He was critical of works of literature (including Homer) that failed to display respect and honour for gods, heroes, and great people who would otherwise serve as role models that children could emulate. Furthermore, he did not approve of the idea of young people enacting mean-spirited or otherwise contemptible characters in plays and dramas. He felt that such people would somehow acquire the nature and character of the character they were portraying. Plato was severely criticized for his protective attitude towards cultural education in which the autonomy of children was laid down in favour of totalitarian ideology.

In his widely read, oft-quoted work, *Republic*, Plato divided people in society into different categories based on their intellectual development and acumen. The major classes were: the intellectual rulers or philosopher-kings; the auxiliaries and military defenders; and the workers who produced goods and services. Individuals received education appropriate to the category to they belonged which determined the tasks they were required to perform in the course of their lives. He devised the curriculum in that the educational needs of people in the ideal state were met appropriately.

#### 1.4 Education as Cultivation of Reasoning Ability

In contrast to Plato's belief that all knowledge lies innate within the individual, Aristotle upheld that knowledge was derived from sense perceptions. A child observes the objects and phenomena through the five senses. This observation forms the basis of developing a principle or a set of principles for understanding and explaining them. The process of arriving at general conclusions from specific, or particular observations is known as 'inductive reasoning'. One example of what inductive reasoning means is that of a child who sees the buds turning into flowers over a period of few days and concludes that the rose bud in his/her garden will also turn into a flower over a period of time.

Like Plato, Aristotle believed that the control of education should lie with the state. This would enable the state to employ education as a means for preparing the desired kind of citizens. He felt that the major aim of education was the cultivation of moral values and virtues. His model for moral education centered on the notion that children acquire the traits they practice. In Aristotle's own words (trans 1976: 91-92), "We become just by performing just acts, temperate by performing temperate ones, brave by performing brave ones". Evidently, the guidance that a child receives from parents, elders and teachers is crucial. He said that till the age of 7 years, the focus of a child's education should be on physical training and character building. Between the age of 7 years and 21 years, the education imparted to the child should be state-controlled. In this period gymnastics, reading, drawing, and music are the basic subjects that should be taught. Training in these subjects would prepare the children for the final period of education which would last for their lifetime extending beyond the walls of the school. Unlike Plato, Aristotle did not speak of higher stages of education for women. He referred to the last period of education as one of liberal education that, "frees the mind from ignorance and is also the education appropriate for free men. The subjects to be studied in this period are similar to those that we believe were taught at Aristotle's Lyceum, chiefly mathematics, logic, metaphysics, ethics, politics, aesthetics, music, poetry, rhetoric, physics and biology" (Hobson 2001:18).

## 1.5 Education as Learning What Children Want to Know

Education is commonly understood as confined to information essential for an individual to live intelligently as a useful member of society. This implies the perpetuation of basic information in schools that tends to get monolithic and uniformised. In corollary, educational curriculum needs to be revised regularly in order to cope with social change and all that it needs to enable an individual to be of use to society. It is only natural then that children compete with others and seek to establish their own credentials and potential for learning more rigorously than others. There is much talk about how to universalise education and make it more effective and efficient. Holt attacked the system of compulsory and competitive education entailing the system of compulsory and competitive education which brought with it the system of rewards and punishments. According to him, the conventional practice of education was, “the most authoritarian and dangerous of all the social inventions of mankind. It is the deepest foundation of the modern and the worldwide slave state, in which most people feel themselves to be nothing but producers, consumers, spectators, and ‘fans’ driven more and more, in all parts of their lives, by greed, envy and fear” (Holt 1976: 8). What needs to be done then? Well, following him, the education system in its present form needs to be done away with more so because it constraints an individual to an extent that his/her innate potential and capabilities get curtailed. This means that the basic right to take decisions about oneself, to control the mind and thought, to explore and experience the world and make meaning of one’s life are conveniently handed over to the external agency — the educational system. Such an educational system that exercises complete control over a child prepares the groundwork for raising slaves (rather than vibrant, socially and mentally independent, intelligent adults) driven by greed, envy and fear.

Does this imply that one person should not interact with another or seek to influence another person’s thought and behaviour? Is it possible to live in complete social insulation? Certainly not, because in the course of our daily life we meet and interact with several people and often touch and change them, sometimes marginally and at other times substantially. Alternatively we are also shaped and influenced by others. What is important is the conviction that we should not put others in a situation in which they feel compelled to be influenced by us. In essence, we need to allow an individual to accept or reject our viewpoint and make sure that his/her freedom to choose is not curtailed. In the context of education, the argument is in favour of encouraging the children to learn what they most want to know rather than cram their minds with bits and pieces of essential knowledge that we think would be of relevance to them. Holt refers to this as ‘real learning’ or ‘true education’.

True education is acquired, by way of ‘doing things’ rather than by ‘learning things’ which then cannot be imparted fully in schools which are identified as places of learning. The fact of the matter is that true education comes from experience. We tend to learn i.e., imbibe from what we actually do and experience. We are influenced by the quality of our experiences, the satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) as also the excitement and joy (or unhappiness) that we derive from them. Children who experience humiliation, threat, and unhappiness in school will not be able to learn what the teacher tries to teach. In case such children do manage to learn something, but they tend to forget it in a short span of one or two days. Learning is greatly enhanced when the children are filled with confidence, boldness and the eagerness to learn.

### Reflection and Action 1.1

Visit a nearby school and find out from at least 20 children of classes X and XII what they think the process of education should consist of. Discuss your findings with those of your co-learners at the study centre.

## 1.6 Built-in Value in Education

Some of the earliest ideas on the concept and meaning of education were those of R S Peters for whom the very term education enfolds normative implications. He explains the concept of education in terms of initiation into activities that are worthwhile to pursue for their own sake. These include, among others, the pursuit of sciences, history, literature and philosophy. An educated person is one who has been able to understand the broad perspectives characteristic of these disciplines and their influences on other domains as also on human life. The prominent argument is centered on the imbibing of values and ideas that are worthwhile. Peters (1966:25) maintains that education has the criterion built into it that “something worthwhile is being or has been intentionally transmitted in a normally acceptable manner”. By implication, a person who has undergone the process of education has been essentially transformed for the better.

The critical issue at this juncture is the determination of what constitutes ‘worthwhile’ or what is worth cultivating and pursuing. Peters clarifies that those activities and pursuits are worthwhile which are thought to be valuable. Education, therefore, can be said to have ‘built-in value’. This is a positive view of education which takes a position that if any teaching-learning enterprise is treated as education, then it must necessarily be valuable failing which it cannot be treated as education.

### Box 1.2: Criteria of Education

According to Peters (1966: 45) the basic criteria of education are:

- i) “that ‘education’ implies the transmission of what is worth-while to those who become committed to it;
- ii) that ‘education’ must involve knowledge and understanding and some kind of cognitive perspective, which are not inert;
- iii) that ‘education’ at least rules out some procedures of transmission, on the grounds that they lack willingness and voluntariness”.

More importantly, education is a not a monolithic concept applicable to chalk-and-blackboard teaching within the four walls of a classroom. Getting children to make things, showing them how to do things, making them find out and explore are educative processes. A person may not be called educated simply by virtue of the fact that he/she has mastered a particular skill. A person who is educated in the real sense should have acquired understanding of principles for organization of facts. This understanding affects his/her outlook. More explicitly stated, a person who has specialized in a particular discipline may be said to be knowledgeable but not educated till his/her specialization influences his/her perspective on other dimensions of life. When the knowledge a person has acquired affects the way in which he/she looks at, understands, and explains different aspects of life, the person may be said to be educated. This is what Peters meant when he said that education has a transformative effect on an individual. An educated person (i) places an issue in a larger framework of reality; and (ii) is committed to the standards imminent in his/her field of interest. It is believed that all forms of thought and awareness are characterized by distinctive standards for appraisal. This boils down to the conception of education as all-round development of an individual for which Peters used the expression, ‘Education is for whole man’.

## 1.7 Nature and Scope of Education: Cross-cultural Perspective

We have already read in the previous pages that the concept of education is not monolithic or uniform across cultures and periods of history. Educational

ideas are known to have developed out of the human struggle for survival and enlightenment. The educational heritage of the western civilization has greatly influenced American education. World educational history has, however, also benefited greatly from Mero-American, Africa, and Asian civilization. The Mayans in Mexico's Yucatan peninsula and Guatemala developed expertise in the fields of architecture and astronomy. Equally specialized was a type of writing based on word signs or logographs which the Mayan priests taught their apprentices in religious schools. Similarly, the Chinese developed an elaborate educational system which was based on Confucian philosophy. Civil servants who administered the Chinese empire were those who passed the formal examinations (Ornstein and Levine 1987). Education is, however, not confined to developing expertise in word signs or architecture and/or astronomy (as the Mayans did); or preparing people to rule the state as civil servants through an examination system (as the Chinese did). The indigenous people or tribal communities also develop skills for survival and a way of transmitting the language, skills, knowledge, beliefs and values to their children which prepares them for adult roles. Those who subsist by hunting and gathering teach their boys to make weapons and their girls to collect food from forests. Similarly, those who subsist by cultivating teach their children to prepare the earth, sow, transplant and harvest the grain. These are not isolated activities rather they are interrelated with the entire way of life — knowledge, beliefs, arts, morals and customs of the community. In the absence of written texts and formal schooling the transmission of information and cultural wisdom takes place through oral tradition. It is through songs, legends and stories, proverbs and riddles narrated by the elders that the children learn about the group's history, wars, victories and defeats and heroes. These were the non-formal ways of preparation for adulthood (as a useful member of society) among indigenous people who were not exposed to the formal system of education in schools. Many sociologists believe that they were in no way 'less refined' or inferior to those who pass through the formal education system.

#### a) Education in Ancient Greece

Ancient Greece is treated as the epicenter of western culture. It is important to understand how and what kind of knowledge was transmitted there. As we know, Homer's poems provided Greeks a means of defining their cultural identity since they explain Greeks' origin, portray their struggles and provide a model for the future. Children who study the behaviour of the epic heroes learn (i) the characteristics and qualities that make life worth living; (ii) the behaviours expected of warrior-knights, and (iii) the flaws or weaknesses in human character that brought harm to oneself and one's friends (Ornstein and Levine 1987: 84). Greeks laid greater emphasis on participation of children in culture than on formal schooling. Athenians believed that liberal education was needed by an individual to discharge duties towards the state and for self-development. Since slaves were required to serve the masters, they were kept away from liberal education. Instead, they were trained in skills for specific trades. In Athens women had no legal or economic rights. The vast majority of them were excluded from formal education. Girls in Sparta were, however, more exposed to schooling. Here the thrust was on athletic training that would prepare them for healthy motherhood to future spectrum soldiers.

In the middle of the fifth century BC, the commercial class began to take over the landed as aristocrats. Consequently traditional ideas about education came to be diluted. This led to the rise of a group of professional educators who came to be known as sophists. The sophists were wandering teachers who specialized in teaching grammar, logic and rhetoric. They instructed all those who could afford to pay them. Education no longer remained confined to select groups of people but was made available to a much larger number of people, leading to socio-economic mobility.

**Box 1.3: The Greek Contribution to Western Education**

“Western culture and education inherited a rich legacy from ancient Greece. It included the following:

- 1) A profound conviction of the possibility of achieving human excellence;
- 2) The idea that education had civic purposes related to the political well-being of the community;
- 3) A distinction between liberal education and vocational training, which has led to curricular controversies throughout Western educational history;
- 4) The legacy of the Socratic Method, by which skilled teachers might use dialectical processes to ask universal questions relating to truth, goodness, and beauty” (Ornstein and Levine 1987:93).

**b) Education in ancient Rome**

In ancient Rome education was aimed at raising politicians and able administrators. It was reserved for those who could afford to pay for it and had the time to attend school. Children belonging to poor families could not attend school, rather they were taken as workers. Most of the children of slaves were trained to perform certain tasks. They were denied education. Girls of upper classes learnt to read and write at home while the boys attended primary schools, later secondary schools in which they learnt Latin and Greek Grammar.

The educational ideal in Rome was the orator. An orator was a well-educated man in public life. He could be a senator, lawyer, teacher, civil servant or politician. A good orator was one who won debates and arguments in a forum. Cicero (106-143 BC) was a distinguished Roman senator who was well versed in Greek and Latin grammar, literature, history and rhetoric. He believed that the educational ideal (i.e., the Orator) should have command over astronomy, ethics, geography, history, law, medicine, military science, natural science, philosophy and psychology. Knowledge of these disciplines helped him in many ways e.g., developing and presenting an argument, engaging with the emotions of the audience, and influencing public affairs.

**c) Education in Middle Ages**

In the middle ages or the medieval period, European education was imparted in institutions associated with the church — the elementary parish, chantry, and monastic schools. The knights received training in military affairs and in chivalric code of behaviour in palaces. Monastic and cathedral schools, however, followed the general studies curriculum at the secondary level. There were some schools that provided basic education along with training for a trade. These were maintained not by the church but by merchants and craft guilds. Most of the learners in schools were those who planned to embark on religious life as priests, monks or clerics. The serfs confined their activities to the estate of feudal lords as agricultural workers.

By the eleventh century, the scholastic tradition emphasizing the spirit of inquiry, scholarship and teaching set in. Faith and reason were identified as complementary sources of truth. In effect, the teaching clerics, better known as scholastics, believed that God’s words were revealed in the sacred scriptures and in the writings of church fathers. They also accepted the importance of human reason. In scholastic schools, the disciplines of logic, mathematics, natural and moral philosophy, metaphysics and theology were taught as part of higher education. The education encouraged inculcation of deductive reasoning among learners.



Over a period of time the number of students enrolled in cathedral schools far exceeded their capacity. As a result, universities were established to impart higher education. Since the basic constituent of knowledge was believed to be the authority of the scriptures, medieval universities emerged as centers of theology. A high level of scholarship, however, developed in secular disciplines too. The universities set up professional schools of law, medicine along with theology. These were in addition to the liberal arts. There is no denying that education in the middle ages was formal, organized and institutionalized to a large extent.

#### d) Education in the Renaissance period

In the Renaissance period, the scholastic model was challenged. The cleric who was trained in scholastic logic was no longer regarded as representing an educated person. Instead, the courtier who was liberally educated in classical literature, a capable diplomat, a man of style and elegance was treated as a model to be emulated by children. Education now basically consisted of learning classical Greek and Latin literature. The aim was not merely to teach the nuances of logic but to develop the all-round personality of an individual. It was in Italy that the effect of the Renaissance was most clearly marked because here the revival of commerce generated a financial surplus that was directed towards extending support to the arts, literature, and architecture. The elite of the country established their identity as custodians of knowledge, while the rulers set up court schools that would impart 'new learning'.

The Renaissance humanists identified the study of Latin as the marker of an educated person. An educated person was one who had studied classical languages and classical literature closely. The emphasis was on a human-centered conception of knowledge in which human beings were not studied as objects for scientific inquiry but indirectly through classical literature. It was later that undue emphasis on the study of literature at the cost of experience was questioned by Rousseau, Pestalozzi, Dewey and others.

#### e) Education in the age of Enlightenment

In the age of Enlightenment, the reason governed education as also all other major institutions. Scientists used objective methods to formulate 'natural laws' that established the idea that all the natural processes follow an order. The Enlightenment period encouraged rationality among people particularly for improving their lives and solving their problems. Against this backdrop, school education was designed to develop reasoning ability in students. The major challenge before teachers in schools was to cultivate the spirit to raise questions among students and the willingness to apply scientific and empirical methods of inquiry in understanding social reality. Enlightenment marked the creation of an education system based on equality, individualism and intellectual reasoning.

## 1.8 Cultural Dimension of Education in India

In the traditional sense, education in India was based largely on respect, concern, and sharing. In rural areas, the people would contribute in whatever way they could towards the construction of the school building and meeting the needs of the teacher. It was only later that the government officials exercised control over these institutions to an extent that the people felt alienated. While the villagers were asked to make contributions and take care of the infrastructure, the school belonged to the government. It was the government which would recruit teachers, decide the admissions policy, and frame the curriculum.

Joseph Di Bona wrote *One teacher One School* which dealt with basic education in pre-British India. Now, in this village school there was only one teacher who

was a local person and highly respected by everyone. The villagers provided for all his requirements. The teacher was the custodian of the financial resources of the school. A sum of money would get collected by way of nominal fees or donations. The teacher would keep a token amount for himself and use the remaining amount for providing writing material and playthings to the children. When some amount of money got accumulated, he gave scholarships to children. He was guided by the tenets of *gyan* i.e., knowledge, *seva* i.e., service, and *tyag*, i.e., sacrifice. One can appreciate the one-teacher-one school approach which appears to be governed by concern, commitment and accountability. This may be contrasted with the governmental approach of appointing several teachers in one school and the rising concern about teacher absenteeism, particularly in rural and far-flung areas (see Naik 1998).

According to Coomaraswamy (1983) a meaningful educational system pursues the following ideals: (i) universal philosophical attitude; (ii) recognition of sacredness of all things, which is the antithesis of the Western division of life into the sacred and the profane; (iii) religious toleration based on the awareness that all dogmas are formulae imposed upon the Infinite by limitations of the finite human intellect; (iv) etiquette — civilization conceived as the product of civil people; (v) relationship between teacher and pupil implied by the terms *guru* and *chela*, respectively, in memorizing great literature — the epics as embodying the ideals of character, learning as a privilege never to be used merely as a means to economic prosperity; (vi) altruism and recognition of the unity of all life; and (vii) control not merely of action but also of thought. In the traditional sense, the essence of education lay in realizing one's potential and developing it as an integrated aspect of growing up. It is for this reason that socialization as education assumes greater relevance in the East. This is education for life.

In India several Education Commissions have been set up since Independence with the chief purpose of initiating reforms in the present educational system — the foundations of which were laid by the British. Why were these reforms thought to be important? Well, one of the major reasons has been the discontent with the present system of education. The so well established educational system lays excessive emphasis on literacy, reason and rationality, success, achievement, material progress and competition and all that makes for prosperity, richness and affluence. The content of education is designed in a way that the child acquires the basic information and skill-set that would enable him/her to do well in the global market. What happens in the process is that the child gets alienated from his/her own, local environment and concerns. In this sense, education becomes a process of uprooting and alienating children from the culture(s) to which they belong. Individual creativity, initiative and spontaneity get clipped to a large extent.

Increasing attention is, therefore, being paid to the need to take the cultural dimension of education into cognizance. It is being felt that meaningful education (one that integrates education with cultural values) has to be developed so that the values, ideals and goals of education imparted in schools do not conflict with those imparted to a child at home as part of socialization. Much earlier, Gandhi had advocated a system of education better known as basic education or 'nai talim'. He advocated a kind of education that would develop among children self-reliance, commitment to non-violence, awareness about others' and their own rights, responsibilities, and obligations in society. An important aspect of 'nai talim' was the inculcation of appreciation for manual labour. To this end, he incorporated activities that involved working with the hands or manual labour as a major component of basic education. Gandhi's ideas on education seem relevant as an alternative way of a total development of the body, mind, and soul through self-restraint, self-reliance, self-sacrifice, self-fulfillment, and community participation. Its relevance is greatly enhanced in the present day fraught with tension, conflict, violence

and intolerance. At this juncture two questions assume significance (i) how can education be webbed with ecological concerns; and (ii) how can education ensure peaceful coexistence of people. These are fundamental issues that touch upon the basic philosophy of life in India and in many eastern countries. Of course, we will learn about Gandhi's idea of 'nai talim' as also of other Indian thinkers in the third Unit of this Block.

### Reflection and Action 1.2

Do you think the traditional system of education in India provides a valid alternative to the Western system with emphasis on competition? Discuss.

## 1.9 Sociological Perspective on Education

The sociological perspective on education focuses on both, the process of education and the interrelationship between education and different aspects of society. The chief concern is with understanding how education influences social processes and gets influenced by them. The seeds of sociology of education were laid in the writings of Plato and others (about some of whom we have read in earlier sections) who focused on the role of education in laying the foundation of social order and supporting the state. Sociology of education was, however, carved as a specialized domain of enquiry much later. Emile Durkheim, the French Sociologist, stresses the need for a sociological approach to the study of education.

Jayaram (1990) explains that what was earlier called 'educational sociology' was born out of the need of educators in the United States of America and Canada to integrate the large number of immigrants (around the turn of the twentieth century) with the school and the community at large. The complexity of demands imposed by industrialization confounded the problem. The major questions before them were regarding (i) effective means by which immigrants could be blended with the community; (ii) nature, scope and design of education for rural children who were being initiated into the formal means of education for the first time; and (iii) influence of languages, ethnic identities and religious affiliations on patterns of learning behaviour. In order to address these issues, it was necessary to gauge the social problems of education, to understand the linkage between social factors and education. The result was the coming together of sociologists and educationists and the consequent emergence of 'educational sociology'. The scope of educational sociology was defined in terms of providing the basis for determining the, objectives of education; place of education in society; and interplay between school and the community. Over the years educational sociology failed to keep the interests of both educationists and sociologists alive and gave way to what is now referred to as 'sociology of education'.

Sociology of education surfaced as a legitimate field of enquiry due to the interest of sociologists in the process of education. More and more sociologists endorse the contribution of education in society. In the words of Mannheim (1940: 271), "Sociologists do not regard education solely as a means of realizing abstract ideals of culture, such as humanism or technical specialization, but as part of the process of influencing men and women. Education can only be understood when we know for what and for what social position the pupils are being educated".

The sociological perspective on education establishes the importance of social and cultural context of education. While Durkheim focuses on the role of education in the preservation of society and culture (which happens though the transmission of values, knowledge, beliefs and skills of culture through the family, kinship group and school), Dewey distinguishes between the growth of the individual in accordance with the goals of a specific society and the

natural growth of an individual. We need to understand that the goals, values and skills identified as critical by the social order are transmitted through the process of education. Now, these undergo change as social order itself transforms. It is for this reason that education is spoken of as a dynamic process (see Shukla and Kumar 1985).

From the vantage point of the aims of education, the dynamic character of education may be explained from a historical perspective. The education system in Greece and Rome was designed in a way that children learnt to subordinate themselves to the collectivity. Durkheim (orig.1956, 1985:11) explains this aspect more clearly in the following words, "In Athens, they sought to form cultivated souls, informed, subtle, full of measure and harmony, capable of enjoying beauty and the joys of speculation; in Rome, they wanted above all for children to become men of action, devoted to military glory, indifferent to letters and the arts. In the Middle Ages, education was above all Christian; in the Renaissance, it assumes a more literary and lay character; today science tends to assume the place in education formerly occupied by the arts". The individual identity was merged with the society. Over a period of time there was transformation in the aims of education noticeable in the shift of emphasis from individual's subordination to autonomy. In the present day, the education system seeks to develop autonomy and self-identity in an individual's personality.

Sociologically, the dimensions of education that have a particular salience in society are, the role education plays in the maintenance (or throwing a challenge to ) of social order, social control and power structures on the one hand, and its contribution towards effecting social change on the other. A large part of these are determined by the schooling which includes the pattern of interaction between and among teachers and students, nature and content of teaching, extent of learning and other aspects. Another aspect is the school-community matrix.

**Box 1.4: Areas of Research appropriate for sociologists**

"In order to better explain the social phenomena of education Durkheim identified four areas of research appropriate for sociologists. They are:

- 1) Identification of the current social facts of education and their sociological function.
- 2) Identification of the relationship between education and social and cultural change.
- 3) Cross-cultural and comparative research in various types of educational systems.
- 4) Investigation of the classroom and school as an on-going social system" (Jayaram 1990:2).

According to Carnoy (1974), in the United States and the countries in Latin America which were gripped by industrialization, schooling was geared towards the development of the factory system in the sense that children were prepared to serve the factory system in different capacities. The economic and social change due to the spread of capitalism in the metropole favoured mass schooling which would raise children of the working class in a way that the class structure was maintained. After World War II when the United States emerged as the leader of the capitalist world, its models for controlling social change and assigning economic roles to different groups came to be adopted by the Third World countries. Schooling played an exceptionally important role in the postwar international scenario. It has been employed as an agency of promoting the interests of powerful economic and social groups. The present day debates in the area of society and education are those that relate with

the role of schooling, nature and extent of the role of education in society and human development. In current years, the politics of educational curriculum, medium of instruction, and the role of the school in society are the crucial issues before sociologists. Interestingly, the role of the school in society is being re-examined by sociologists. In fact, the sociologists are questioning the basic premise that education is the sole factor that leads to social and human development. Alternatively, does it lead to social and human development at all?

## 1.10 Conclusion

In this Unit we have explored the concept of education from different perspectives. We began by distinguishing between the concepts of education and literacy. We found that in the real sense, literacy is confined to the skills of reading, writing and doing arithmetic while education is a broader concept enveloping the all round development of an individual. Taking off at this point we discussed the concept of education as, preparation for social roles in the ideal state, cultivation of reasoning ability, and learning what children actually want to know (rather than what they ought to know). Thereafter we explored the value component in education. Here we discussed the premise that education has built-in value following which we looked into the values that the traditional education system in India affords. We realized that the education system in India laid emphasis on discipline, honesty, truth, kindness and integrity.

## 1.11 Further Reading

Hobson, P. 2001. "Aristotle". In S.A. Palmer (ed.) *Fifty Major Thinkers on Education from Confucius to Dewey*. Routledge: London

Naik, Chitra. 1998. "Prologue". In B. N. Saraswati (ed.) *The Cultural Dimension of Education*. IGNC and DK Printworld: New Delhi

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# Unit 2

## Theoretical Approaches

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### Contents

- 2.1 Introduction
- 2.2 Functionalism
- 2.3 Conflict Theory
- 2.4 Interactionism
- 2.5 Postmodernism
- 2.6 Conclusion
- 2.7 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- explain the role of education in society; and
- discuss the major theoretical approaches towards the understanding of education.

## 2.1 Introduction

In any society, there is an in-built mechanism to socialize the individual and to transmit its culture to the young. As a simple society transforms itself into an industrialized and a modernized state, instruction for the young becomes increasingly differentiated, complex and closely connected with other features of the society (Clark 1968). The resulting demands of the learning process are fulfilled by establishing a formal educational system. This system prepares the young for the transition from the confined and concentrated relationships of the family to the impersonal and diversified relationships of the larger society (Anderson 1968).

With the rise in importance of the educational system and related institutions in society, various scholars initiated their investigations on education as a legitimate field of study. The scholars are not from the discipline of sociology alone, but from different disciplines. As a result of the extensive input of scholarship and expertise from diverse disciplines, the boundaries between sociology of education and other participating disciplines are greatly blurred (Bidwell 1982).

In this Unit we will discuss the major theoretical approaches towards the understanding of the sociology of education. The Unit deals with education as a field of study and provides a broad overview of research and methods used by sociologists. It explains four major theoretical approaches used in the sociology of education: functionalism, conflict theory, interactionism, and postmodernism. The unit concludes with an analytical comment on theoretical developments.

## 2.2 Functionalism

Functionalism treats society as a self-regulating system of interrelated elements with structured social relationships and observed regularities. Functionalists perceive society as similar to a biological organism which is composed of many distinct but interdependent parts with each part contributing to the functioning or survival of the whole system. All the parts are not only interdependent but also coordinated and complementary to each other. A change in one part is believed to affect other parts; the malfunctioning of one part is dealt with by

other parts in a coordinated way so as to maintain the equilibrium of the whole system.

Functionalists do not give weightage to abrupt changes in the whole system. They lay emphasis on the absence of disruptive internal factors that disturb the overall stability of the system. Various components or units of the society operate in consonance with common perceptions, sentiments, values and beliefs of the system. This agreement or consensus is achieved through the socialization of individuals by guided principles of the society (Abraham 1982). In simple or folk societies, the family is the primary agent of socialization. In modern or industrialized societies, socialization is often mediated by educational institutions apart from families. Against this basic understanding, we will explore the approaches of two functionalists, Durkheim and Parsons.

According to Durkheim (1956) the major function of education is to transmit society's norms and values. The survival of society or collective life is possible only with a sufficient degree of homogeneity among various members of the society. Homogeneity among members is reached by adhering to rules and regulations laid down by the society. Education preserves and reinforces these homogenising principles of society in a child from the beginning. Durkheim (1956:17) writes, "Education is the influence exercised by the adult generation on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both political society as a whole and the social milieu for which he is specifically destined." He highlights the role played by education in instituting 'social being' in the 'individual being.' The individual being is made up of mental states that apply only to himself/herself and to the events in his/her personal life. The social being embodies a system of ideas, sentiments and practices of the group of which he/she is a part. The process of socialization of a newborn differentiates human beings from animals. In his own words, "Of what an animal has been able to learn in the course of his individual existence, almost nothing can survive him. By contrast, the results of human experience are preserved almost entirely and in detail, thanks to books, sculptures, tools, instruments of every kind that are transmitted from generation to generation, oral tradition etc." (Durkheim 1956:22). The role of the educational system becomes important in complex societies in which families or other primary groups are not fully equipped to prepare the young for adulthood in a way that is expected by the larger society. School operates as a model of micro social system in which a child learns to cooperate with other children who are not part of their primary group. The training acquired by children in school forms the basis of their behaviour outside the school.

**Box 2.1: Nature and Role of Education in Society: Emile Durkheim**

"In fact, however, each society, considered at a given stage of development, has a system of education which exercises an irresistible influence on individuals. It is idle to think that we can rear our children as we wish. There are customs to which we are bound to conform; if we flout them too severely, they take vengeance on our children. The children, when they are adults, are unable to live with their peers, with whom they are not in accord. Whether they had been raised in accordance with ideas that were either obsolete or premature does not matter; in one case as in the other, they are not of their time and, therefore, they are outside the conditions of normal life. There is, then, in each period, a prevailing type of education from which we cannot deviate without encountering that lively resistance which restrains the fancies of dissent" (Durkheim orig. 1956, rpt. 1985: 12-13):

According to Durkheim, specific skills imparted in the educational institutions are necessary to maintain the division of labour in society. As society shifts from simple to complex form there is a corresponding increase in the complexity of division of labour and the emergence of more specialized occupations. In simple societies, division of labour demands generic skill sets that can be passed on easily through families. In complex industrial societies, however, families find themselves at a loss to impart complex and specialized skill sets. Maintaining equilibrium among various layers of occupational structure or divisions of labour is important in maintaining social order. Educational institutions give the required specific skills to their members according to the demands of the society and prepare them to play role sets offered by the society. Durkheim explains that the state holds the responsibility of governing the educational system and it decides the nature of moral principles taught to the members. Teachers at the schools are representative of the state. There is an underlying assumption that nature of norms, values, and skills imparted by the educational systems are decided without any bias or discrimination to any unit of society aiming at social solidarity.

Parsons's views (1959) on educational system are similar to those of Durkheim. According to Parsons, two critical issues are paramount in the context of education in society. The first is that of the internalization of commitments and capacities among children in classrooms for adult roles. Here, the school class may be treated as an agency of socialization through which children are motivated and trained to perform adult roles. The second is the allocation of human resources within the role-structure of the adult society. He recognizes the role played by various socialization agencies like family, informal peer groups and others in moulding the young by the society. He lays importance on school class as a focal agency of socialization that begins with entry of children to first grade (standard) and lasts till their entry into the labour market or marriage. According to Parsons (1959:51), the school develops commitments and capacities in individuals that are required for future role-performance of individuals. Commitments include "commitment to the implementation of the broad values of society and commitment to the performance of a specific type of role within the structure of society". Capacities include "competence or the skill to perform the tasks involved in the individual's roles", and "role-responsibility or the capacity to live up to other people's expectations of the interpersonal behaviour appropriate to these roles."

Parsons maintains that the school also serves as an allocation agency that prepares human resources and allocates them within role-structure of the society. He observes that completion of high school is increasingly becoming a norm of minimum satisfactory educational attainment by any individual in society. Also, the performance or achievement of a child in elementary school determines the nature of college courses. Thus the educational system works as the 'first socializing agency in the child's experience which institutionalizes a differentiation of status on non-biological bases' (Parsons 1959:51). In early stages of schooling, the achievement of a child is measured through assessment of two components: cognitive and moral. Cognitive component is related to the intellectual ability of the child in terms of written language and mathematical skills. Moral component is related to responsible citizenship behaviour within the school community. This includes respect for the teacher, cooperative behaviour with classmates, and good work habits etc.

During early days at the school, children do not understand that achieved rather than ascribed characteristics are the proper bases for most societal rewards. School convinces them that they would be evaluated on the basis of achievement, and makes them understand that there is basic consensus on what constitutes achievement in the larger society. In early years of schooling, children often deal with a single teacher who takes the place of mother or parental figure for them in school. The teacher often remains affectively neutral,



treats all children as equal and follows the rules and regulations of the school. Parallel to the socialization process experienced at the school, students tend to develop relationships among their own peer group. The socialization process among peers is different from the family and the school and offers "a field for the exercise of independence from adult control" (Parsons 1959:59), and also provides alternative sources of reward.

Functionalists are criticized for their perception that the educational systems operate as an integrative mechanism of the society and treat children equal. These criticisms arise from critical theorists who argue that the educational system is a medium of the ruling elite and not representative of entire society. According to Collins (1972), the functional role played by education in fulfilling the needs of division of labour is criticized as an exaggeration. There is no evidence to prove that education supplies knowledge and skills necessary for occupations. Only a minor part of the expansion of the education in advanced industrialized countries directly serves the demands of industry in terms of skills, training and knowledge. Most of the occupations involve training in the job itself and employing organizations provide their own training. Further discussion along similar lines by conflict theorists is presented in the next section.

#### Reflection and Action 2.1

Compare and contrast the ideas of Durkheim and Parsons on education.

### 2.3 Conflict Theory

Conflict theorists stand out in sharp contrast to the functionalists in terms of the basic approach. According to conflict theorists, society is in a state of perpetual disequilibrium, yet it is maintained as a body by powerful social groups that coerce cooperation from the less powerful. They treat society as divided into dominant and subordinate groups that are characterized by a constant power struggle between themselves. It is not necessary that different units would operate in a way that solidarity of the whole society is maintained. There is an impending possibility of social instability. Society and its units are continuously changing. This dynamism needs to be accepted as a normal characteristic of any society. An interaction between two units involves some form of conflict which is essential for the continuity of society. Factors of conflict are both internal and external and range from individual to national levels. The impact of conflict on society could be varied: positive and negative; latent and manifest; and gradual and violent. Conflict theorists tend to be more specific and limit their analysis to the interrelationship between two or more units within society (Abraham 1982).

Haralambos and Heald (1980) discuss the contributions made by Louis Althusser, Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis, and Ivan Illich from a conflict perspective. According to Althusser whose ideas are derived from Marxism, society is divided into the capitalist class (which owns the modes of production and exercises control) and the labour class (which renders service in the production systems and remains subordinate to the former). The capitalist class requires continuous supply of labour power the exploitation of which generates profits. Educational systems are used by the capitalist class to produce the required labour power. Workers are socialized to accept the ideology of the ruling class which legitimizes the capitalist system and submits to the exploitation of the capitalists. Bowles and Gintis (1976) explain that the capitalist system requires surplus amount of labour power to enhance its bargaining potential while employing the workers. The educational system raises surplus of workers whose skill set is suited to cater to lesser-paid menial jobs. Unemployment and availability of replaceable labour brings control over the workers and keeps the wages to minimum. The governing structure and curricula of the educational

systems are determined by the capitalist class. Social relationships in the school replicate the hierarchical division of labor in work place. Students' lack of control over work of importance (e.g. decision and policy making) in school, for example, is similar to the situation they encounter at work place when they grow up.

The proposition that the dominant class determines the nature of educational system is presented by Apple and King (1979). According to them schools pursue a hidden agenda (through the curriculum) that seems uniquely suited to maintain the ideological hegemony of the most powerful classes in the society. They write, "Schools seem to contribute to inequality in that they are tacitly organized to differentially distribute specific kinds of knowledge. This is in larger part related both to the role of the school in maximizing the production of technical cultural 'commodities' and to the sorting or selecting function of schools in allocating people to the positions 'required' by the economic sector of society" (Apple and King 1979: 295). They also argue that educational knowledge is a form of the larger distribution of goods and services in a society. Social meanings that constitute educational knowledge imparted to the children do not relate with the vision and meanings of all groups of the society. Apple and King suggest that the historical process involved in curriculum designing has legitimized the social meanings of the dominant class in schools. Curriculum specialists were predominantly drawn from the school of scientific management that supports the capitalist class. Their concern for social meanings in schools was invariably linked to the notions of social control. Using the case of kindergarten, they demonstrated that teachers thrust social meanings on the minds of the children. The children often are not in a position to bring about any change in the course of daily events in the classroom. Children are made to undergo the process of socialization which consists of learning norms of social interactions. The socialization process includes segregation of activities into work and play by the children. Work activities are mandatory, teacher-directed, and time-specific. These activities may include drawing an object as specified by the teacher, waiting in the line etc. whereas play activities are performed only during free time. They are not necessarily directed by the teacher.

Though not exclusively included under the conflict school, theories particularly of Bourdieu's cultural reproduction (see Majoribanks 1985) strengthen the views of the conflict theorists. In the words of Giddens (1993: 438), "Cultural reproduction refers to the ways in which schools, in conjunction with other social institutions, help perpetuate social and economic inequalities across the generations. The concept directs our attention to the means whereby, via the hidden curriculum, schools influence the learning of values, attitudes and habits. Schools reinforce variations in cultural values and outlooks picked up early in life; when children leave school, these have the effect of limiting the opportunities of some, while facilitating those of others." According to Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) the major role of the educational system is the reproduction of culture of dominant classes. Dominant classes are able to impose their own meanings as legitimate the basis of the educational system. They maintain that educational systems tend to hide their objective function, by which is meant masking the objective truth or its relationship to the structure of the class relations. Children from dominant culture who already possess the cultural capital tend to achieve higher grades and perform well, more so because the educational system transmits social meanings that are familiar to them. Children from non-dominant cultures encounter an in-built barrier in the educational system as they are made to learn social meanings that are alien to them. They are predominantly from a working class background and often get eliminated from the educational system as they fail to understand the dominant culture. This educational failure in turn reinforces their underprivileged position in the society. In this way the reproduction of the relationship of power and privilege is perpetuated among social classes. The educational system, however,

continues to project itself as a neutral body based on meritocratic principles providing equal opportunities to all.

Kumar's discussion (2004) on what is worth teaching provides a critical analysis of the educational system. Though his discussion is rooted in the Indian context, it provides ample insights for a critical look at the world educational system. He agrees that the nature of knowledge available in schools for distribution of knowledge represents overall classification of knowledge and power in the society. Education in early India, for instance, resisted science teaching due to its struggle against colonialism. School curriculum remained confined to knowledge associated with the dominant castes. He points out that participation of children in curriculum development is nearly impossible as they lack the capability to articulate their ideas. Furthermore, their preferences change as they grow up. He highlights the need for deliberations while designing the curriculum providing space for non-dominant castes to voice their opinions.

## 2.4 Interactionism

Interactionism emerged as an alternative perspective to understand the relationship between individual and society. In its unit of analysis, interactionism shifts importance from the larger society to the individual. Drawn largely from a social psychological perspective, interactionism starts by examining the nature of interaction itself and thenceforth explores the nature of interaction between members of the society. Opposing the role of external conditions to explain an individual's action in relation with the larger society, interactionism tries to understand how an individual constructs meaning in the process of interaction (Abraham 1982). An individual in his/her interaction with others interprets and defines situations, develops meanings which direct his/her action and so constructs his/her own social world (Haralambos and Heald 1980: 208).

Interactionists focus on easily observable face-to-face interactions rather than on macro-level structural relationships involving various social units. They study social interaction through qualitative methods like participant observation, rather than surveys and interviews. Interactionists insist that close contact and immersion in the everyday lives of the research subjects is important for understanding the meaning of actions, and the process by which individuals construct the situation through their interaction. They are, however, criticized for being overly impressionistic in their research methods and possible bias in their observations. Developments in interactionism led to the birth of various sub-theories or perspectives like phenomenology, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology. Some of the significant contributors to this perspective are Cooley, Mead, Blumer, Schutz, Garfinkel, and Berger and Luckmann. Cooley's concept of the looking-glass self shows how an individual develops the meaning of self by reflecting others' perception of who he is. This process of one mind responding to other minds involves how we imagine our appearance to others; how we imagine others' judgment of that appearance; and our personal feeling about that judgment (Haralambos and Heald 1980). According to Mead, individuals construct the self through the process of role-taking. Role taking involves the individual imaginatively taking the role of the other person with whom he is interacting. Goffman equates social world with theatrical drama in which actors present their self in everyday life through impression management.

Employing the interactionistic perspective, sociologists of education seek to explore the ways in which teachers and students interpret and assign meaning to their interactions. Interactionism suggests that the status of the students in an educational system is decided by the nature of interactions with teachers where meanings are constructed beyond academic parameters. A study by Howard Becker (1971) delineated meanings by which teachers evaluated the

students. The study demonstrated that teachers constructed the image of an 'ideal student' as one who came from non-working class and of 'problematic student' as one who came from working class. Another study by Cicourel and Kitsuse (1971) confirms that students were classified based on their class background rather than academic performances and other non-academic factors like their appearance, and manners etc.

Apart from evaluation, teachers' perception about students also affects the nature of knowledge imparted. Keddie (1971) finds that the social class is an important factor in defining and classifying students. Though students were supposedly divided in terms of ability, students within each group exhibited similar socio-economic background. In other words, in classification of students into various groups, students who belong to upper socio economic background formed the higher level, and lower level was occupied by students from lower socio-economic background. Though teachers were expected to impart similar knowledge, they modified their methods and nature of information imparted to different categories of students. Students who belonged to different groups also responded differently to the nature of the knowledge imparted to them. For instance, what is an 'ideal family' as told by the teacher was accepted by higher-class students, not by lower-class students. Keddie reasons that lower class students' non-acceptance was due to their different construction of meaning for family based on their own socio-economic background.

#### Reflection and Action 2.2

Visit a government school and a public school in your area. Discuss the nature and content of education with at least two teachers of primary classes in each school. Do you find a difference between the two schools in this context?

### 2.5 Postmodernism

Postmodernism is emerging as an alternative theoretical framework to modernism in understanding the real world, but has not yet developed as a single coherent thought or theoretical perspective. Practitioners have appropriated, transformed and transcended ideas from various theories and there is lack of consensus on the nature of ideas that can be covered (Ruttan 1993). In sociology, ideas of postmodernism are related to the emergence of the post-industrial society. Postmodernism rejects grand theories in understanding society and lays importance on local identities. A postmodern society is dominated by the market-oriented world of consumption with decentralized production systems. Society itself is a fragmented and pluralistic community of heterogeneous groups with diverse cultures and lifestyles, where nation-state is shrunk by privatization, globalization and new forms of citizen and civil rights. The traditional ruling class is rejected in favor of micro-political activities or social movements (Thomas and Walsh 1998).

Echoing postmodern concerns, Illich (1973) questions the notion of compulsory education followed almost all over the world mentioning that in the process traditional skills of self-sufficient people were being discarded. Schools work as repressive systems that induce students to passively consume whatever is taught to them. They are not allowed to think critically. They are made to conform to the rules laid down by the ruling class. Students are expected to follow whatever is taught of education. They by have no control over what they learn or how they learn it. Illich proposes the idea of de-schooling society (which is also the title of his widely acclaimed book) that rejects the existing educational system. He suggests that mechanisms should be built in a such way that allows direct and free involvement of the students in any part of the learning process. In other words, young in the society will retain control over what they want to learn and how they want to learn. Illich's idea of de-

schooling society appears as a utopian one. It may seem to be realistic when a student's performance in the educational system loses link with its status attainment in the larger society. In other words, decline of paid employment is a central concern of society (see Giddens 1993).

A similar argument is evident in the work of Freire (1970) who suggests replacement of curriculum based education with dialogue based informal education. He criticizes the existing educational system in being akin to the banking process in which the student is viewed as an empty account waiting to be filled by the teacher. He seeks to abandon the teacher-student dichotomy and favours introduction of reciprocity in the minds of teacher and student.

#### Box 2.2: Dialogue based education: Freire

“Only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. Thus the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets the student-teacher in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks himself *what* he will dialogue with the latter *about*. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education” (Freire 1970:153).

## 2.6 Conclusion

In discussions related to theoretical developments in sociology of education, there is disagreement among scholars with broader theoretical schemes under which various contributions fall. For instance work of Bourdieu, and Bowles and Gintis can be discussed under conflict school as well as under a separate scheme of theories of reproduction. Lewis (1977) reviews the nature of research studies conducted by sociologists of higher education that can be generalized for sociology of education. According to him, there are three levels of analysis, macro, micro and middle. At the macro level, relationship between systems of higher education and wider social structure is considered. One example of this could be a study of how curriculum is modified or changed according to the changes in the occupational structure. There is also a cluster of studies that focus on education from a social stratification point of view. Here, attempts were made to understand sources and consequences of inequality within educational system and how they are related to the class position one holds in the society and other variables like race, religion, ethnicity and gender.

At the micro level, social relations within the education process are examined to understand learning outcomes of different teaching styles and strategies; the difference between formal instruction as against informal settings with faculty members or peers; mode of instruction; characteristics of the instructor; and system demands on the student. In between these two ends, there is middle level analysis that looks at the structure and function of institutions of educational institutions as organizations. Some of the issues focused by this analysis are: distribution of power and status, value system, disparity and tension between the formal and informal systems and organization of social roles and norms in the institutions.

Brookover (1982) identifies three areas of research undertaken in the field of sociology of education: (i) education and society – which deals with purposes and functions of education in the society, education in the process of social change, education and stratification of the society, and relationship between education and other units of society; (ii) education as a social system – which

analyzes organization and structure of the educational system from school district to classroom, and informal structure and culture of these units; and (iii) outcomes of education for students that examines the impact of education on various aspects of students from aspirations, career, further education and social status. Brookover further comments that methods followed are also varied and different. Broadly, both quantitative and qualitative methods are used including cross-sectional surveys, longitudinal studies, case studies, ethnographies, and experimental studies. However, there is a preponderance of research studies that investigate activities related to learning within the context of schools in comparison with colleges and universities (Feinberg 1996). Studies that compare out-of-school and in-school subjects in understanding of the impact of schooling vis-à-vis other social factors are inadequate.

Rubinson and Ralph (1986) suggest that there are three widely researched topics in the study of educational change: contribution of education to economic output; technological change and the expansion of schooling, and educational expansion as individual utility. They highlight the methodological problems related to inferences across levels of analysis in studies irrespective of nature of theoretical approach followed. There is also criticism that existing theoretical models in sociology are inadequate to bring about a scientific understanding of education (Carr 1990; Lewis 1977). Theories of sociology of education are reflective of times. Different theoretical approaches dominate different periods of time. There is a need for the development of a theoretical perspective to integrate the macro and micro analysis of education sociologically.

## 2.7 Further Reading

Freire, Paulo 1997. "Pedagogy of the Oppressed." In David J Flinders and Stephen J Thornton (ed.) *The Curriculum Studies Reader*. New York: Routledge

Haralambos, M and R. M. Heald. 1980. *Sociology: Themes and Perspectives*, New Delhi: Oxford University Press

Kumar, Krishna. 2004. *What is Worth Teaching*. New Delhi: Orient Longman

# Unit 3

## Thinkers on Education - I

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- 3.1 Introduction
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- 3.7 Conclusion
- 3.8 Further Reading

### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit, you will be able to:

- explain the perception of Indian thinkers on education;
- compare and contrast their viewpoints; and
- articulate your own point of view on education.

### 3.1 Introduction

In this unit we will explore the viewpoints of Indian thinkers on education. Against the backdrop of the growing discontent with western education in India, there is an impending need to understand how Indian thinkers have conceptualized the education system particularly in terms of its nature, extent, and scope. They represent indigenous thought with which both students and educators are able to relate. The purpose here is to look for viable alternatives that would play a transformative role in society and create a just and humane social order.

### 3.2 Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941)

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Kolkata to a deeply religious family of landowners. His father Debendranath was a man of integrity, spiritual acumen, and strength of character. He cast a deep impact on Rabindranath in the formative years of life. Like many other children of aristocratic families of that time, the major part of Rabindranath's childhood was spent in servants' quarters under the care and authority of those who served his family. His first lessons were from the Bengali primer, *Varna Parichaya*. Later, he joined the Oriental Seminary, then the Normal School (which followed the teaching-learning pattern of English schools). He sought admission to the Bengali Academy in order to gain a grounding in English. He remained far from happy in school. The rooms were dismal, in fact, the entire building was unsuitable for human habitation. There were no pictures, not a stroke of colour, nothing that would motivate the students to attend school. Naturally, many of them played truant; those who did attend school regularly would remain filled with depression (Tagore 1966). The grim, monotonous, unhappy experience in school compelled him to consolidate his ideas on meaningful education and revolutionize the whole process of education.

Tagore was opposed to the western system of education that emphasized learning from books with the sole objective of developing the intellectual potential of the child. He believed that education should be aimed not merely to develop the intellect but the complete personality of the child. An education

system should cultivate and nurture among children the ability to learn directly from nature and life as such. Students should lead a simple, self-disciplined life based on the virtues of sociability, compassion, and the spirit of brotherhood. According to him, moral and spiritual values constituted the most important aspect of education. He criticized western education for treating the child as a receiver of packaged information in a way that did not awaken his/her own creativity and innate abilities. The children, in turn, pick up bits and pieces out of the information thrust upon them and present themselves for examination of their ability to retain the information. According to Tagore it was not enough to pass on information. What was important was the ability to put to use what one has learnt and to develop curiosity and alertness of mind. The child should be able to appreciate a sense of freedom acquired by free movements of the body in the midst of the natural environment. It may be understood at this stage itself that for Tagore, education stood for freedom from ignorance and from passion and prejudice.

He upheld that the child learns the first lessons on freedom from nature which is the basic source of knowledge. According to Tagore, the ideal school should be established in the midst of fields, trees, and plants, under the open sky and far removed from human settlements. This would keep the children away from the turmoils of daily life. More importantly living in the forest was associated with austere pursuits and renunciation. Firm on his ideas, Tagore set out to develop an appropriate system of national education for India. He founded the Ashram school at Santiniketan in 1901 with emphasis on non-duality (*advaita*) in the domain of knowledge, friendship for all, fulfilment of one's duties without concern for the outcome(s). Here education was combined with disciplining of the senses and one's own life. In talking about education for life, Tagore did not ignore the significance of science teaching. He did value inventions and discoveries in so far as they made life less burdensome. What he condemned, however, was the race for material prosperity at the cost of creative genius and dignity. He expressed the view that the current education system was not geared to inculcate the ability to think independently. According to Tagore, teaching through a foreign language was both difficult and unrealistic. He was opposed to borrowed knowledge that distanced pupils from their own social and cultural fabric. He said that education which imparts knowledge but bears no relevance to life situations is of no avail. He said that the curriculum should be developed by teachers and students together. It should be based on their needs and requirements. He laid stress on discussion as a mode of delivery of knowledge. The books should serve as mere supplements to knowledge acquired through life situations and independent thinking. Learning should proceed from familiar situations to unfamiliar situations. This meant that children should be made familiar with their own environment before exposing them to alien ones. They should be encouraged to learn from and about the natural phenomena that they encounter in their daily lives.

Salkar (1990) wrote that Tagore was aware that children store in their brains the images of all that they observe. This was more marked in the early period of childhood when curiosity is sharp. He favoured teaching of history and geography through field exposure by way of educational tours to specific places for learning and widening of horizons. He wanted to set up a school based on his ideals for which he travelled far and wide. Tagore settled at Santiniketan where he founded the Brahmacharya Ashram with only five students. The emphasis here was on a personalized relationship between teachers and pupils. Tagore himself taught English in the Ashram School. He would narrate stories from Indian history in the evening to the children. Having prepared the ground for school education, he diverted attention to higher education and established the Visva Bharati.



**Box 3.1: Tagore on Visva Bharati**

“In every nation, education is intimately associated with the life of the people. For us, modern education is relevant only to turning out clerks, lawyers, doctors, magistrates and policemen.... This education has not reached the farmer, the oil grinder, or the potter. No other educated society has been struck with such disaster.... If ever a truly Indian university is established it must from the very beginning implement India’s own knowledge of economics, agriculture, health, medicine and of all other everyday knowledge from the surrounding villages. Then alone can the school or university become the centre of the country’s of living. This school must practice agriculture, dairying and weaving using the best modern methods.... I have proposed to call this school Visva Bharati” (Tagore 1963, cited here from Jha 1997: 610).

He believed that the basic task of education was to produce, gather develop, and disseminate knowledge to the younger generation. In the Visva Bharati, two autonomous institutions survive: the Kala Bhawan (the school of fine arts) and Sangeet Bhawan (the school of music and dance). Tagore is no more but the ideals of education he laid down and the institutions he established keep him alive in the minds of the people.

**Box 3.2: Major Works of Rabindranath Tagore**

*My Reminiscences*. 1917. London: Macmillan

*Nationalism*. 1917. London: Macmillan

*Ashramar Roop O Vikas* [The Form of the Ashrama School]. 1941. Santiniketan: Visva Bharati

*Siksha* [A Collection of Essays on Education]. 1990. Santiniketan: Visva Bharati

**3.3 Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi (1869-1948)**

Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was born in Porbandar situated in Kathiawar, Gujarat. His father and grandfather were chief ministers in Kathiawar. After completing school education he went to London to study law. He came back to the country and practised law in Mumbai and Rajkot. He did not get much success in the profession and went to South Africa on an unexpected offer. His experiments in education started when he returned to South Africa in 1897 with his two sons and a nephew for whom he searched for an appropriate school. He could have sent them to the school for European children but did not think that English as a medium of instruction employed in those schools was worthwhile. He used to run the ‘Tolstoy Farm’ which could not afford to pay the wages that qualified teachers would demand. So, he took upon himself the task of teaching the children. He decided to live among the children and lay the foundation of character-building and self-dependence in them. Gandhi encouraged the children to undertake all the chores ranging from cooking to scavenging themselves. Certainly, a teacher would cooperate and guide them throughout the endeavour. Apart from physical training he engaged in spiritual training of students (Prasad 2001). He returned to India in 1914 where he was destined to play a major role in the freedom struggle and importantly, in the educational reconstruction of the country. There is no denying that colonial rule had eroded the traditions and values of the education system as people were imparted western education that prepared them for minor positions in the government machinery of the British. This class of people educated in the western system easily gave in to the lucrative offers of the colonialists at the expense of their own dignity. He tried hard to overthrow colonial education and present an alternative that people could relate with and find useful.

Gandhi was concerned with the rising trend of people giving up their vocation after acquiring western education. Cobblers, carpenters, blacksmiths, masons, tailors tended to surrender their vocations treating them as inferior. They would take pride in joining the position of clerk in offices.

**Box 3.3: Gandhi on alternative pedagogy**

“As against this, take the case of a child in whom the education of the heart is attended to from the very beginning. Supposing he is set to some useful occupation like spinning, carpentry, agriculture, etc., for his education and in that connection is given a thorough and comprehensive knowledge relating to the theory of the various operations that he is to perform and the use and construction of the tools that he would be wielding. He would not only develop a fine, healthy body but also a sound, vigorous intellect that is not merely academic but is firmly rooted in and is tested from day to day by experience. His intellectual education would include knowledge of mathematics and the various sciences that are useful for an intelligent and efficient exercise of his avocation. If to this is added literature by way of recreation, it would give him a perfect well-balanced, all-round education in which the intellect, the body and the spirit have all full and develop together into a natural, harmonious whole” (cited here from Fagg 2002:9).

Gandhi proposed ‘nai talim’ or basic education which emphasized the introduction of productive handicrafts in the school curriculum and in doing so bestowed honour and dignity to those who are adept at them. In the words of Kumar (1997: 508), “It implied a radical restructuring of the sociology of school knowledge in India, where productive handicrafts had been associated with the lowest groups in the hierarchy of castes. Knowledge of the production processes involved in crafts, such as spinning, weaving, leather work, pottery, metal-work, basket-making and bookbinding had been the monopoly of specific caste groups in the lowest stratum of the traditional social hierarchy. Many of them belonged to the category of ‘untouchables’. India’s indigenous tradition of education as well as the colonial education system had emphasized the skills (such as literacy) and knowledge of which the upper castes had a monopoly. In terms of its epistemology, Gandhi’s proposal intended to stand the education system on its head.” The basic education, hence, favoured the children belonging the lowest rungs in society. This facilitated the process of social transformation. According to Gandhi, schools should be self-sufficient so that the poorest of the poor could educate themselves. This could happen only if the schools could generate enough resources for themselves. Further, schools that are self-sufficient do not fall prey to the whims and interference of the state. Teachers should not be made to give in to the dictates of bureaucracy and teach out of the curriculum laid down by it. Learning was not confined to memorizing contents in the textbooks. Gandhi believed that in India where more than 80 per cent of the population subsists by agriculture and about 10 per cent by industries, delimiting the scope of education to literacy was not appropriate. Boys and girls should be encouraged to value manual labour. In fact, carpentry, spinning and other crafts may be used as a means of stimulating the intellect. This can be made possible by explaining the underlying mechanism. When a child interested in spinning, for instance, is explained the mechanism of the working of the wheel, the history of cotton, the method of determining the strength of the yarn, his/her intellect gets sharpened. This was true education. He was in favour of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction, for English creates a divide between those who are ‘highly educated’ and the many uneducated people. Moreover, comprehension is faster and better when children are taught in their mother tongue. Gandhi clearly stated that if English were removed from the curriculum of primary and secondary or high school education then it would be possible to make the children go through the whole course in seven years instead of eleven years.

**Reflection and Action 3.1**

Compare and contrast Gandhi's and Tagore's ideas on education

Gandhi stayed with Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan for about a month. In the course of close interaction between the two thinkers emerged consolidated ideas on the future of education in India. Gandhi set up his ashrama in Sabarmati in which he also established a school for children. He proposed the following scheme for education: (i) adult education of the whole community, including the parents of newborn babies; (ii) pre-basic schooling from 2 to 7 years; (iii) basic schooling from 7 to 14 years; (iv) post-basic education from 14 to 18 years; and (v) university and teacher training institute education. The schedule consisted of rendering morning prayers, cleaning of the campus including lavatories, engaging in productive work (e.g., spinning, weaving, cultivation and others), preparing meals, and studies (that related to the day's work and its scientific, mathematical and other aspects). Students were taught to think before doing and think after doing. All of them were imparted training in music and art. Stagecraft and management were an important part of education. In the afternoon, before dinner, they played games. The evening prayer was ecumenical. In the scheme of *nai talim*, there was no place for textbooks, but the students were encouraged to use the library to enhance their knowledge. Over a period of time *nai talim* schools were set up throughout the country (Prasad 2001). *Nai talim* schools did not succeed as institutions. They were thought to be meant for villagers so the political elite did not support them. Gandhi's ideas on education, however, continue to inspire many intellectuals and humanists.

**Box 3.4: Major Works of Gandhi**

*An Autobiography or The Story of my Experiments with Truth*. 1963. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House

*Basic Education*. 1951. Ahmedabad: Navajivan Publishing House

*Education for life*. 1937. Rajamundry: Hindustan Publishing Co.

**3.4 Sri Aurobindo (1872-1950)**

Sri Aurobindo was born in Kolkata. His father, Dr. K. D. Ghose, acquired a medical degree from the West and had developed deep appreciation of its lifestyle. In fact, his values of life and lifestyle were largely westernized. Sri Aurobindo's mother was Swarnlata Devi – the daughter of Rajnarayan Bose who was often referred to as 'rishi' which means ascetic and as the 'Grandfather of Indian Nationalism'. Rajnarayan Bose could not exercise much influence on Sri Aurobindo because he was sent to Darjeeling for schooling at the age of five. The school was known for imparting western-style education. It was meant for European children. Two years later his parents sent him to England. He, along with his brother, stayed in Manchester in the care of a Latin scholar. In 1890, he was admitted to the Indian Civil Services as a probationer but was later disqualified due to certain reasons. Anyway, he came back to India and joined as Professor of English and French in Maharaja College, Vadodara. This marked the beginning of his deep insight into the ancient lore, mastering Sanskrit and Bengali languages (see Das 2000). In 1910 he went to Pondicherry with the objective of devoting his entire time to the practice of yoga and spirituality. In the course of forty years there, he evolved a method of spiritual practice that came to be known as Integral Yoga. In 1926 he founded the Sri Aurobindo Ashram in collaboration with his wife who is better known as the Mother.

According to Sri Aurobindo, any system of education should be founded on the study of the human mind. The reason is simple: while the material with which artists deal is inert, that of educators and educationists is highly sensitive. The major defect in the European system of education is precisely its insufficient knowledge of psychology. The means through which education could be made meaningful was to acquire an understanding of the instruments of knowledge and develop a system of teaching which was natural, easy, and effective. The teachers need to accept their role as that of a helper and guide not as an instructor who imparts knowledge, trains the mind of the children, and makes impositions on them. At best, the teacher can make suggestions and encourage the children to acquire knowledge for themselves. Admittedly, children of younger age need greater help and guidance than older children. The children should be given the freedom to choose their own qualities, virtues, capacities, capabilities, and career. It is improper to impose one's ideas on them. Education needs to be geared to drawing out the innate abilities in children and perfecting them for noble use. Furthermore, the children should be made familiar and aware of all that surrounds them and which meets them on a day-to-day basis, e.g., natural-physical environment, sounds, habits and customs, nationality. The purpose here is to foster free and natural growth, for these are the prerequisites of genuine development.

Sri Aurobindo proposed complete education of a subject(s) encompassing teaching/learning about its/their different aspects and dimensions. This stood out in contrast to the modern teaching system wherein children are taught portions of several subjects. Consequently, they are not able to master any subject. The older system was to teach fewer subjects but delve deep into each one. Sri Aurobindo felt that the practice of teaching lesser number of subjects with great thoroughness was more appropriate in so far as it built 'real culture'. He believed that the mother-tongue served as the appropriate medium of instruction. Children should acquire competence in the medium first not by making them spell words, read books but by familiarizing them with interesting parts of literature. A large part of their study should be devoted to the development of mental faculties and moral character. The foundation for the study and appreciation of art history, philosophy and science could be laid at this stage itself. Often, the idea of universal education is pursued as a mission with complete disregard of what education is or what it should ideally be. The problem gets confounded when there is demand for enforcing a national type of education in the Indian subcontinent which has witnessed clash of the Asiatic and European consciousness political subjugation that placed the control of education in the hands of foreigners. In such a situation the call for national education is likely to raise disconcerting confusion till the ideas on the basic concept of education are made clear. It is also not appropriate to decry the education imparted in schools and universities in that they are denationalizing, degrading, and impoverishing to the national mind and character only because it is governed and controlled by the British. It is important to determine by ourselves the alternative, the principle or practice we propose to replace it with. Just taking over from the foreigners the control over education and resting it with an indigenous agency that at best changes the medium of instruction and curriculum is not adequate for meeting the demands of the present much less of the future. What is called for is development an education system proper to the need, culture, and temperament of the people themselves. Does this mean return to the astronomy and mathematics of Bhaskara or return to the ancient chariot and bullock cart in the name of Swadeshi? Sri Aurobindo (1920-21, cited here from 2000: 208-209), stated "It is the spirit, the living and vital issue that we have to do with, and there the question is not between modernism and antiquity, but between an imported civilization and the greater possibility of the Indian mind and nature, not between the present and the past, but between the present and the future. It is not a return to the fifth century but an initiation of the centuries to come, not reversion but a break forward away from a

present artificial falsity to her own greater innate potentialities that is demanded by the soul, by the shakti of India." The central aim of national education is to strengthen the powers of the human mind and evoke the will and the ability to use knowledge, character, and culture. Sri Aurobindo explains this through the simple example of learning science. It is not enough to acquire competence in the discipline and to have the entire knowledge at one's fingertips. The major issue is not what is learnt but what one does with that learning, the use that the knowledge is put to and the way in which it is put to use.

Sri Aurobindo upheld that one way to get to the very core to culture in India is by acquiring knowledge of Sanskrit or any other indigenous language by whatever means is natural and stimulating to the mind. When this happens, it would be possible to establish continuity between the still living power of our past and the yet uncreated power of our future, and how we are to learn and use English or any other foreign language so as to know helpfully the life, ideas and culture of other countries and establish own right relations with the world around us" (ibid, pp. 209). This is the aim of national education.

#### Box 3.5: Major Works of Sri Aurobindo

*The Life Divine*. 1939. Calcutta: Arya Publishing House

*The Synthesis of Yoga*. 1955. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo

*The Human Cycle*. 1949. Pondicherry: Sri Aurobindo Ashram

### 3.5 Jiddu Krishnamurti (1895-1986)

Jiddu Krishnamurti was born in the small town of Madanapalli in Andhra Pradesh to middle-class Telugu-Brahmin parents. His father joined the Theosophical Society in 1881 and in 1901 the family came to stay in the Society's headquarters at Adyar. When he was still fourteen years old, Annie Besant and C. W. Leadbeater recognized in him the potential to be the world teacher and proclaimed him to be the vehicle for Christ in the West and of Buddha in the East who would bring salvation to humankind. Mrs. Besant adopted Krishnamurti and took him to England where she educated him and in the process prepared him for a bigger role in world society. In 1911 she proclaimed him the head of her religious organization, The Order of the Star in the East. Between the years 1911 and 1929, he questioned himself on the need for operating through an organization in order to coerce people to follow a particular path. In the year 1929, Krishnamurti dissolved The Order of the Star in the East. He felt convinced that Truth cannot be approached through a laid out path. Humanity had to free itself from the shackles of caste, religion, sect and all that through which people feel bound. His concern was to set human beings absolutely and unconditionally free. He travelled all over the world delivering talks and discourses on the nature of truth, sorrow, and freedom. One of the themes on which he deliberated extensively was education. In fact, he established the Rishi Valley Education Centre in 1928 in Andhra Pradesh.

Krishnamurti believed that the scope of education did not consist solely of reading and learning from books, clearing examination and using the academic qualification to secure a job. In the present day, education has been used to develop conformity to society and culture by being sucked into the social, economic and political streams. It is widely believed that the only way to solve the problems of the people is to provide them education, make them read and write. More important than filling one's mind with information was developing a perspective, going beyond the words in the book in order to comprehend and appreciate what is contained in them as also to determine whether what the books say is true or false. He wrote (1963: 163) "When you go on the street you see the poor man and the rich man; and when you look around you,

you see all the so called educated people throughout the world. They have titles, degrees, caps and gowns, they are doctors and scientists; and yet they have not created a world in which man can live happily. So modern education has failed, has it not? And if you are satisfied to be educated in the same old way, you will make another howling mess of life.” Krishnamurti agreed that it is necessary to be able to read and write, and learn engineering or some other profession but mere competence in these cannot build the capacity of life. One who has undergone the process of real education could excel in mathematics, geography, history and other disciplines but would never be drawn into the stream of society primarily because it is corrupt, immoral, violent and greedy. The basic concern then is with working out the right kind of education that would develop the capacity in the mind to resist all negative influences and bestiality of the civilization. There is a need to create a new culture not based on consumerism and industrialization but on real quality of religion on the one hand and an education system that would prepare minds not given to greed or envy on the other. Right education, therefore, is one that brings about inner transformation, and awakens intelligence.

Krishnamurti (1974:20) clearly stated that intelligence is the “capacity to think clearly, objectively, sanely, and healthily.” Intelligence is a state bereft of personal emotions, opinions, prejudice, or inclination. Now, it is possible to think clearly only if one is sensitive. Intelligence implies that one is able to appreciate the beauty of the earth, the trees, sky, sunset, stars and all that envelops him/her. When that happens, the development of a child is total which means that he/she acquires not only inward understanding, the capacity to explore and examine his/her inward self and inner state, but is good at whatever he/she does outwardly. The two aspects, i.e., of inward development and outward excellence need to go hand-in-hand. Krishnamurti was opposed to the idea of competition and competitive spirit. The basis of competition is making comparison, judging and evaluating their performance. This leads to conflict, fear, and feeling of helplessness among them. In fact, he believed that one could live happily in this competitive world only if one is not competitive. More importantly, when a mind has understood the futility and absurdity of drawing comparisons and does not engage in it can a foundation from which it can start to learn in the true sense of the word be established. Then, there is no frustration, and no hankering after success. In place of competition, confidence (without the element of self-importance) should be instilled in children (Thapan 2001).

Krishnamurti was deeply interested to keep in touch with the schools in India, Brookwood Park in England, the Oak Grove School at Ojai, California. He proposed to write a letter to them every fortnight explaining what an ideal school should be, to convey that schools are not the centres for academic excellence but much more in that they are to remain engaged in cultivation of the total human beings. They are to encourage the students and educators to flower naturally, bring out their innate abilities in an environment not plagued with fear, pressure of authority, or competition. After Krishnamurti's death, a few more schools were established, like the Sahyadri School near Pune. It is a boarding school which caters to children belonging to upper class families. Two other schools are the Bal Anand in Mumbai and the Bhagirathi Valley School in Uttar Pradesh which is attended by children belonging to lower-middle class families. Krishnamurti's ideas on education found manifestation in the Rishi Valley Education Centre in Andhra Pradesh set up under the auspices of Krishnamurti Foundation India. The Rishi Valley Education Centre was set up with the mission to usher in a different kind of education that would provide the children with knowledge and at the same time make them understand that acquisition of knowledge was not the ultimate objective of life and that it was equally necessary to be sensitive to trees, birds, to know what it is to love, and to be generous. This is possible when the educators are themselves able to reach out to realms beyond words in the

books and are able to draw out the best in children. Certainly, authority is destructive. Care has to be taken that children learn from themselves. It is a fruitful process in the sense that it leads to wisdom. Children learn to depend on themselves more than on anybody else. When a person depends on certain people for safety, for money, for pleasure, there is a strong possibility that one feels frightened, irritated, angry, jealous and frustrated when they do something that upsets him/her.

### Reflection and Action 3.2

Do you think Krishnamurti's ideas on education are practical in the present day? Discuss with your co-learners at the study centre.

In the Rishi Valley Education Centre and other schools established by the Krishnamurti Foundation India, learning takes place through exploration and discovery, and interaction between teachers and students. Despite the fact that they follow a clearly laid out curriculum (because they are affiliated with a centrally or state-level administered education board that conducts examinations at the class X and XII stages), there are co-curricular activities that apart from the focus on arts, are intended to creatively engage the students in their immediate environment. The students are guided to understand their inner self, psychology process, emotions thoughts, and problems. The Krishnamurti Foundation India school in Chennai has developed a well-drafted curriculum for Environmental Studies which has been adopted by the Indian Council for Secondary Education (ICSE) Board for schools affiliated with it (Thapan 2001). There is no denying that Krishnamurti continues to survive through his ideas, writings and institution to inspire both students and educators alive. What awards greater significance to his works is the integration of education with individual and society.

### Box 3.6: Major Works of Jiddu Krishnamurti

*You are the Word*. 1972. Madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India

*The Wholeness of Life*. 1978. London: Gollancz & Harper Row

*Letters to the Schools*. 1981 madras: Krishnamurti Foundation India

## 3.6 Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan (1888-1975)

Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan was born in Tiruttani near Chennai. He specialized in the understanding of the ethics of Vedanta. In fact, he wrote a dissertation on the ethics of the Vedanta and its metaphysical presuppositions. His interest and study of Indian philosophy developed a great deal after he was offered a position in the Department of Philosophy at the Madras Presidency College following which he joined as Professor of Philosophy at the University of Mysore. Radhakrishnan was subsequently appointed to the King George V Chair of Mental and Moral Science in the University of Calcutta. Later, representing India, he addressed the Philosophical Congress at Harvard University. He was invited to join the Manchester College, Oxford. He severed as Spalding Professor of Eastern Religions and Ethics at Oxford University and Fellow of the British Academy. Back in India, he remained Vice Chancellor (between 1939 and 1948) of the Banaras Hindu University, Leader Of Indian delegation to UNESCO (between 1946 and 1952), Ambassador of India to the USSR (between 1949 and 1952), Vice President of Indian (between 1952 and 1962), President, General Conference of UNESCO (between 1952 and 1954), Chancellor, University of Delhi (between 1953 and 1962), and President of India (between 1962 and 1967). Radhakrishnan believed that an education system should be geared to both train the intellect as also instill grace in the heart and in doing so bring about balanced growth of an individual. The students should not only be intellectually competent and technically skilled but also

civilized in their emotions and refined in their purpose because their worth as members of society desires not solely for intellectual ability or technical skill but devotion to a great cause. This was crucial in the present age marked with greed anxiety, defeatism, and severe constrain on independent thinking. People in the modern age are given to accepting whatever the society and its channels of expression (e.g. the film, radio, television, newspaper) put into circulation. Intellectual integrity remains at stake. A significant way to free oneself from the debilitating effects and strain of modern life was the study of literature, philosophy, and religion that interpret higher laws of the universe and provide a philosophy and an attitude to life. Hence, one must learn to read the classics that deal with life and destiny of humankind. Quiet study of classics develops independent reflection. Individuals master philosophy, acquire more knowledge in universities – places of higher learning.

In an address at Moscow University on June 18, 1956 Radhakrishnan (cited here from print version 1992 : 10 ), “ But buildings do not make a university. It is the teachers and the pupils and their pursuit of knowledge, these make the soul of a university. The university is the sanctuary of the intellectual life of a country. The healthy roots of national life are to be found in the people. They are the wellsprings of national awakening. They are the spirit behind revolutionary movements of society. When we give education, we start a ferment of debate and discussion of first principles. The educated youth will voice their thoughts and find fault with things as they are. We train in this university not only doctors and engineers but also men and women who think for themselves. They will not judge everything by the party line. If we destroy the initiative, the freedom of the people we do so at our peril. If men lose intellectual vigour, the future of civilization is bleak indeed.” The students of a university need to be trained to fight ignorance, injustice, oppression, and fear. Indiscipline among students rises when they are not trained to deal with the problems of life with fortitude, self-control and sense of balance. Those serving in universities are in a position to prepare mindset that would accept the idea of establishment of a world community with a common consciousness and common conscience. An important function of the university was the advancement of international understanding and international peace. Radhakrishnan reiterated the role of the university in establishing and affirming peace in several speeches. In an address at the Calcutta University, he said that universities of the world form a great fraternity binding together their members all over the world. Again, in another context he stated that the university fraternity transcends caste, class, creed, and nationality. It honours achievements and scholarship in art and literature, and science.

According to Radhakrishnan, an attempt should be made to draw the best minds into the teaching profession. What often happens is that the teachers are paid low salaries. They do not fully appreciate the intellectual value of their service and take to writing textbooks and seeking examinerships. In order to avoid such tendencies, the teaching profession has to be made more lucrative. Apart from disinterested teachers, the higher education system is fraught with the problem of inadequate opportunities for conversation and debate. Radhakrishnan believed that true education calls for free and fearless exchange of opinions, thoughts, and ideas between and among students. Occasions and situations in which this would be possible are hardly made available to students. Furthermore, there is no adequate provision for games and other activities in which a large member of students may engage together. He favoured the idea of students joining the National Cadet Corps in large numbers because its membership posts discipline, teamwork sprit, and sense of dignity of labour. He drew attention to the fact that education of the youth does not find a place of significance in the schemes of development adopted by the centre and the states. He cautioned that the experiment in democracy would suffer if education was not accorded high priority and that future leadership would be imperiled if the level of university education was allowed to deteriorate.



On November 4, 1948, the Government of India appointed the University Education Commission under the chairmanship of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan. This commission, therefore, came to be referred to as the Radhakrishnan commission. The major task before this commission was to suggest improvements in higher education. The Commission clearly stated that the teachers occupy a crucial place in the education system. It is their responsibility to inculcate right values and truth in students along with generating interest in the field of study. Apart from others the Commission recommended that vocational institutions should be established in order that students could choose to pursue vocational courses after schooling of 10-12 years.

It is widely accepted that Radhakrishnan's vision of higher education in general and in the context of India in particular was grounded in the conviction that it should provide leadership in politics, administration, industry, and commerce at one level while at the other it should lead to self development, fearlessness, and integrity.

**Box 3.6: Major works of Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan**

*The Essentials of Psychology*. 1912. Oxford: The University Press

*The Hindu View of Life*. 1927. London: George Allen and Unwin

*Indian Philosophy*. 1923. London: Allen and Unwin

### 3.7 Conclusion

We have come to realize that Indian thinkers on education weave strands from philosophy and pragmatism together as warp and woof. According to them, the scope of education extends beyond letters and words to encompass the totality of being. Meaningful education, they laid down, is preparation for life, for meeting challenges squarely, and for self-enrichment. Education is freedom from fear and ignorance leading to liberation. In this sense it is both the means as also the ultimate objective of life.

### 3.8 Further Reading

Jha, Narmadeshwar. 1997. "Rabindranath Tagore." In Zaghoul Morsy (ed.) *Thinkers on Education*. Vol. 4. New Delhi: UNESCO/Oxford & IBH Publishing

Kumar, Krishna. 1997. "Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi." In Zaghoul Morsy (ed.) *Thinkers on Education*. Vol. 4. New Delhi: UNESCO/Oxford & IBH Publishing

# Unit 4

## Thinkers on Education-II

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### Learning Objectives

After going through this unit you will be able to:

- discuss the contribution of major thinkers on education; and
- critically assess the influence and impact of the thinkers on the basic understanding of education on the one hand and policies on education on the other.

### 4.1 Introduction

After careful reading of the first two Units of this Block, you are familiar with the concept of education, the major sociological theories as also the broad perspective on sociology of education. Against this background, we will now explore the views and intellectual contribution of thinkers on education. The chief purpose here is to understand the development of educational thought from the earliest times to the present day. The critical thinking that marks the intellectual contribution has a profound impact on policy and the practice of education in society. In this Unit, we will study the contribution and influence of prominent thinkers on education in a chronological sequence. We have already familiarized ourselves with the ideas of some thinkers such as Durkheim, Parsons as also a few others in earlier Units hence we will not repeat them in this one.

### 4.2 Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910)

Leo Tolstoy was born at Yasnaya Polyana in the region of Tula, Russia. His parents died when he was still very young. Tolstoy pursued the study of law and Oriental languages at Kazan University. He was not an outstanding student. Most of the teachers found him unable and unwilling to learn. He returned to Yasnaya Polyana without completing studies. Here, he indulged in gambling and incurred a heavy debt. Later, he joined the Russian army. Over a period of time, he developed interest in literature and took to writing himself. He became the doyen of Russian literature in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Some of his more widely acclaimed works are, *War and Peace*, *Anna Karenina*, *The Death of Ivan Ilyich*, *What Then Must We Do* and several others.

Apart from his contribution to the field of literature, Tolstoy is remembered for his dynamic ideas on education. His concern with education found expression, apart from others, in his first book, *The Four Periods of Development* in which he sought to explain the development of human character from the early phase of childhood. He established a child-centered

approach to education wherein children's spiritual growth, feelings, process of learning find a place of significance. This formed the substratum on which his later thought on education was embedded. Tolstoy established a school on his ancestral estate for peasant children in the year 1849 when he was barely 21 years of age. He firmly believed that it was important to do well to those whom one encounters and among whom one leads one's life. He was sure that one's own well-being was not possible till the peasants, and the majority of the people in one's nation, remained poor and unhappy. It was with the sole intention of being able to provide respite to the poor peasants from poverty, ignorance, and superstition through education that he set up a school for them. Over a period of time, he gave up school teaching and joined the armed forces. After the Crimean war between 1853 and 1856, he retired from the army and pursued his passion of teaching peasant children once again. With the objective of drawing from the experience and practice of education in other countries, Tolstoy visited Germany, France, and Switzerland. One identifiable impact of his visit to these countries was a significant rise in his educational activity back in Russia between the years 1859 and 1862. It was in this period that educational reforms were being planned in Russia. Tolstoy was convinced that education in the hands of civil servants could not be used to serve the interests of the country. He suggested that national education should be entrusted to an association that would ably educate the people, establish schools, develop the content of education, train teachers, provide the equipment and infrastructure to schools and contribute to the democratic management of education. He planned an association that would fulfill the above-mentioned objectives.

According to Tolstoy, unequal access to education in Russian society was the root cause of antagonism between the privileged class constituting only a small group and the remaining population. The solution to the rising antagonism and the other social problems (such as despotism, violence, superstition and injustice) lay in providing equal education to all sections of society. More importantly, he expressed that the fruitfulness of education should be measured in terms of its success in serving the needs of the people. His ideas acquired greater social importance in the light of the fact that they were put forth at a time when capitalist development was all set to preside over scientific and technical knowledge that would jeopardize the interests of the masses and generate hostility and antagonism between classes. Tolstoy demanded democratization of education which in effect meant liberating it from the clutches of those who controlled power and harnessing it in favour of the society at large.

Tolstoy argued for freedom in school and in education. He believed that children are inherently innocent and perfect. It was not proper to interfere with the natural development of children in the name of education. But, does this mean that children should be left completely to themselves? How can education be imparted to them? Tolstoy explained that the role of the teacher had to be minimal, limited to guiding them gently and certainly not by force coercion. Freedom in education needed to be treated as a counter practice of authoritarian teaching through which children would develop independent cognitive abilities. Unless this happened, knowledge loaded on children would not bear fruit. He perceived distinct opposition between community activity in the field of national education on the one hand and red tapism and bureaucracy on the other. According to Tolstoy, freedom in education was opposed to authoritarianism in teaching. It was of utmost importance in developing a humane attitude in children and inculcating self-esteem and respect for their dignity as human beings. He believed that since the main concern of education was with children, the study of the child was crucial to formulating strategies for educating them. He experimented with different methods of teaching, reading and writing in terms of their efficacy. Tolstoy, as mentioned earlier, treated the child as the subject of education. He established

that a teacher deals with the entire personality of a child, hence the need of a holistic perspective integrating sociological and psychological aspects. Yegorov (1997:652) expresses this clearly, "Reading Tolstoy's educational writings, one has almost physical perception of a living child, presented not in a frozen photographic pose but in the manifestation and development of its individual characteristics, the unfolding of its personality and in mental states which fluctuate in accordance with the many and varied influences to which he or she is subject".

The other aspect that Tolstoy emphasized in his doctrine of education was the empowerment and freedom of the people to set up schools for their children that were based on the wishes of the parents and community. This would lead to the development of genuine culture among the people. The agencies for deciding the content and method of education would be the parents and the community at large. Here, children are regarded as the subject of education which calls for developing their individual characteristics, personalities, and mental states (that are known to vary according to situations). Education, therefore, cannot remain divorced from a child's cognitive capacities in different stages of growth. He demonstrated that in the first stage of education, children's thinking and comprehension are guided by pictures, colours, and sound rather than logical thought. Information conveyed through pictures rather than through logical conclusions is better understood and retained by children (see Yegorov 1997). He believed that elementary education laid the foundation for a child's intellectual and moral growth and state of happiness or unhappiness throughout life. Elementary education determined whether a child would enjoy studying or would regard it as a burden, whether he/she would lay more emphasis on spiritual values or on material well-being. Spirituality could be impressed upon the child only in school. The *Primer of Count of Tolstoy* published in 1872, "consisted of a set of teaching materials in four volumes: a) the alphabets proper; b) texts for elementary study; c) Slavonic texts; and d) material for learning arithmetic" (cited from Yegorov 1997: 656-657). It comprised basic concepts of physics, chemistry, botany, and zoology in a way that would be comprehensible to children. Tolstoy's ideas as also his publications triggered debates and controversies when they were first launched. Later, however, his perspective on education was accepted and adopted not only in Russia but in many parts of the world.

**Box 4.1: Major works of Leo Tolstoy**

*The Kingdom of God and the Peace Essays*. 1951. London: Oxford University Press

*Educational Writings*. 1951. Moscow

### 4.3 John Dewey (1859-1952)

John Dewey was born in 1859 in Burlington, Vermont. He completed graduation from the University of Vermont in the year 1879 and took to teaching Latin, algebra and sciences in a school located in Pennsylvania. Thereafter, he joined a rural school near Burlington in which he was the only teacher. He pursued research for the award of a doctoral degree. In 1884, the University of Michigan appointed him as instructor in philosophy and psychology. Later, he led the combined department of philosophy, psychology, and pedagogy at the University of Chicago as its Chairman. It was around this time (i.e., in the late nineteenth and early part of the twentieth century) that the economy in the United States was in a phase of transition from agriculture-based to industry-based. Evidently, the shift in the economic situation was accompanied by significant changes in society. Widespread turbulence marked the transition from the

simple agricultural type to the complex urban-industrial type. The Pullman strike, the impact of President Cleveland's decision to send federal troops to support corporate interests, and his association with social activists and educators consolidated Dewey's ideas on progressive reforms. His principal concern was with maintenance and expansion of democracy in all spheres of life (see Apple and Teitelbaum 2001). It is commonly believed that the democratic form of government is successful only when those who elect and those who obey the governors are educated. Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest that can be created only by education.

He sought to enhance the relevance of democracy in society which, he felt, had not to do just with governance but also with the percolation of democratic ideals in the processes of daily life. There is no denying that Dewey's approach was pragmatic and based on real life situations. He upheld that the practical circumstances provided the bases from which ideals, values and social institutions develop and receive legitimation. The worth of an ideal, value, and institution lies in its potential to serve public and personal interests. He accepted that change in societal elements was inevitable; hence it was not appropriate to attach immutable validity or worth to any ideal, value or institution. There could be no absolute criteria for evaluating these. A particular social ideal constitutes a criterion for educational criticism and construction. The worth of a form of social life could be measured in terms of the extent to which the interests of a group were shared by all its members and the fullness and freedom with which it interacts with other groups. A society which encourages participation of all its members on equal terms for their betterment and allows readjustment of its institutions through interaction of different forms of associated life is, to that extent, democratic. Such a society would develop an education system that makes provision for nurturing individuals' interest in social relationships and control as also dealing with social change in a way that situations of disorder do not occur. It was, however, possible to accept the significance of social experimentation based on objective criteria and rational criticism intended to create a humane and just social order.

One of the means through which these ideas could be instilled in the minds of children was education. He believed that education focused on the improvement of the quality of experience and provided the succor to social life. As societies became more and more complex in terms of structure and resources the need of formal teaching increased. When teaching becomes intentional and formalized, a possibility of split between experience gained by children through direct association as part of daily life and that acquired in schools develops. This is often caused by the rise in knowledge and technical mode of skills. Schooling, therefore, emerges as basic to social progress and democracy. According to Dewey, the ultimate objective of a school and the process of schooling were to foster the growth and expansion of democracy. This objective was particularly important because in the emerging industrial society in which Dewey consolidated his ideas on education, democracy was largely jeopardized. The schools were given to raising children who would follow the dictates of the teachers, undergo repetitious methods of teaching unquestioningly. The understanding was that as adults, they would be able to join the industry as an asset. Dewey opposed both the prevalent perspective and the method of teaching-learning in favour of student's alertness, focusing on their experiences and the ability to determine the course of life themselves. According to Dewey, schools would do well to develop a curriculum that was integrated with social experiences. He strongly criticized public schools for their learning ability that led to disjunction between knowledge and lived experiences.

In his widely acclaimed book, *Democracy* (1916) Dewey wrote that the measure of the worth of the administration, curriculum, and methods of instruction of the schools is the extent to which these are animated by a social spirit. In the first place, “the school must itself be a community life in all which that implies” (pp.358). He believed that social perceptions and interests could be developed only when there is give and take in the building up of a common experience. Education becomes effective through constructive activities that integrate study, growth, and shared experience. The perception of connections and social adherence is nurtured in playgrounds, schools, workrooms and laboratories. Here, natural, active tendencies of youth find full expression. Dewey maintained that learning in school should not be separated from that outside the school. The continuity in learning within and outside school can be maintained when there are numerous points of contact between their social interests. A school should safeguard and perpetuate the spirit of companionship and shared activity. Now, while a school may take upon itself the responsibility of developing social concern and understanding among children, it cannot be said with certainty that these would be available outside it. Yet, it may be accepted that till such time as learning which accrues in the regular course of study affects character, it is not appropriate to posit moral end as the unifying and culminating point of education. An educational scheme in which learning is accompanied with activities or occupations that have a social aim is worthwhile. When this happens, the school becomes a form of miniature community which remains in close interaction with other modes of associated experience beyond its four walls. Education which develops the ability to share in social life makes for continuous readjustment which is essential for growth.

#### Box 4.2: Major Works of John Dewey

*The School and Society*. 1899. Chicago: University of Chicago Press  
*The Child and The Curriculum* 1902. Chicago: University of Chicago Press  
*How We Think*. 1910. Chicago: University of Chicago Press  
*Democracy and Education*. 1916. New York: Macmillan  
*The Public and Its Problems*. 1927. New York: Henry Holt  
*Experience and Education*. 1938. New York: Macmillan

### 4.4 Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937)

Antonio Gramsci was born in the region of Sardinia, Italy. He joined the university for higher studies in Turin (from which he had to withdraw later because of severe health problems and want of money). Turin was the hub of growth and development of industries, hence also of the Italian working class. For this reason, Gramsci witnessed the first industrial and economic development of Italy from close quarters early in life. His political and educational career began with the position of journalist and theatre reporter during the First World War. After the war, he launched two journals, *Ordine Nuovo* and *Uinta* with the sole purpose of educating the new working class that had emerged as fallout of industrialization and the war. Under the new fascist government, the Italian school system was re-framed in the year 1923. This time the emphasis was on perceived dichotomy between preparation for work (entailing technical and vocational training) and preparation for spiritual development and political leadership (entailing inculcation of cultural and scientific temper). Gramsci did not agree with this kind of dualism nor did he commit himself to accepting that science and technology afforded a solution to human problems or that intellectual and cultural affairs were independent of economic and political concerns. He proposed the idea of ‘professional culture’ to refer to “the new technical and vocational preparation needed by manpower (from the skilled worker to the manager) to control and to lead industrial development, as well

When the fascist regime gripped Italy between 1922 and 1943, and Mussolini dissolved the Italian Parliament, Gramsci (who was a member of the Parliament and Secretary of the Italian communist Party) was jailed. It is interesting to note that in the period of confinement, Gramsci planned to explore the relationship between education and politics under the broader framework of hegemony. His writings, *Letters from Prison* and *Prison Notebooks* remain the major source from which several ideas on education and state have been developed by later thinkers. The core idea in Gramsci's writing was the role of intellectuals in society viz., providing technical and political leadership to a group which is in a dominant position or is near it. According to him each person is an intellectual but not all the people perform the role of an intellectual in society. He identified different kinds of intellectuals. The first kind referred to as 'organic intellectuals' comprise capitalist entrepreneurs equipped with managerial and technical skills under whose leadership industrial technicians, specialists in political economy, in a new legal system develop. Organic intellectuals combine technical and political leadership. They are known to develop from the dominant social political group. Organic intellectuals serve the interests of the ruling class and in doing so reinforce their hegemony over the masses. The second kind are the 'intellectuals of the traditional type' who comprise administrators, scholars, scientists, theorists, and others who represent historical continuity that is unfazed even by radical political and social changes. They regard themselves and are regarded by a vast majority of population as autonomous and independent of the dominant social group. Gramsci maintained that the role of informal educators was comparable with that of an intellectual in society for the simple reason that both strive for inculcation of awareness on critical issues and human well-being in totality. The educators in local communities have an advantage in that often they have much in common with the people, are able to develop relationships with them easily, and are regarded as part of the community. This facilitates acceptance of what they seek to educate and develop in the people.

The question that assumes significance at this stage is, what distinguishes intellectual work from manual work? In fact, this distinction is crucial to Gramsci's ideas on education. He maintained that the distinction between intellectual work and manual work is largely ideological. Classical education catering to the pursuits of the dominant classes raised individuals given to undertaking intellectual work while vocational, technical education for the working classes raised individuals given to performing manual labour. Gramsci rejected the dichotomy outright. He advocated that there was no human activity from which intellectual activity would be pulled out completely. This is to say that intellectual activity pervades all the actions of human beings. He, however, added that new intellectuals belonging to the working class needed to participate in practical life actively and develop socialist consciousness that could effectively counter hegemony. In his words (cited here from Monasta 1997: 602), "The mode of being the new intellectual can no longer consist of eloquence... but in active participation in practical life, as constructor, organizer, 'permanent persuader' and not just a simple orator...; from technique-as-science and to the humanistic conception in history, without which one remains 'specialized' and does not become 'directive' (specialized and political)." The social division between intellectual and manual work seems to be reflected in classical and technical education respectively. The real division is, however, between 'directive' and 'subaltern' rules in society notwithstanding the nature of the job i.e., whether it is intellectual or manual. In a strict sense, the basis of the new type of intellectual should be technical education that was closely bound to industrial labour even of the most unskilled kind. One implication of this assertion is the understanding of close links between school and work, and between technical and humanistic education.

The new type of intellectuals may easily be identified among administrators and managers of industry and services; in upper rungs of state administration, central and local bureaucracy; within teaching profession and the growing sector of vocational and occupational training. Traditional 'academic' intellectuals still seem to be opinion leaders through whom political and cultural operations are effected (see Monasta 1997).

He believed that the school system prevalent in Italy at that time was given to reinforcing the ideological foundations of hegemony and in this way perpetuating the current social and political domination of the ruling class. He critiqued the increasing specialization afforded in the Italian school system and proposed a more comprehensive form of education. Gramsci felt that it would be appropriate to develop a school system that would be committed to imparting common basic education, balancing the inculcation of capacity for working manually and the capacity for intellectual work. This would prepare the students adequately to engage in productive work or pursue education in specialized schools. He explained that modernizing education should chiefly consist of creating a simple type of formative school (primary-secondary) which would take the children up to the threshold of their choice of job, forming them during this time as persons equipped with the faculty capable of thinking, studying and ruling or controlling those who rule. In order that this type of school achieves its objectives, it was important that it related with the daily lives of the people so that more and more students participate in it with vigour. The student had to be an active participant and not a passive recipient in the teaching - learning process. Gramsci challenged the notion of spontaneous development of the child. He maintained that right from birth, the child is 'educated' to conform to the environment; the school represents only a small part of life. Education, in effect, is the struggle against the basic instincts (i.e., those related with biological functions); and against nature, to dominate it and create the 'actual' human being. He used the term 'conformity' to refer to the instrument for interpretation of those processes through which the people follow tradition and adhere to the rules. Education, therefore, consists of a struggle for one or the other type of conformity (e.g., socialization) proposed or imposed within a society. Monasta (1997:609) sums up Gramsci's basic approach to education in the following words, "Finally, as far as the visible education system is concerned, Gramsci's approach does not mean that school and university education are irrelevant within the strategy of educating for critical thought. It suggests that innovations in methods, content and organization of study which should be consistent with the following main points tighten links between school and work, as well as between theory and practice; a growing attention to the history of the organization of work and of the organization of culture, and therefore, more interest towards the study of 'fortune' namely, the different interpretations, of classics and theories; and, last but not least, an open debate on the aims of education and the values on which educational action is based in a given society." Education has to be set free from the clutches of both conformity and hegemony so that children who undergo it are able to achieve personal independence.

**Box 4.3: Major Works of Antonio Gramsci**

*Lettere dal carcere* [*Letters from Prison*] edited by S. Caprioglio and E. Fubini. 1965. Turin: Einaudi

*Quaderni dalcarcere* [*Prison Notebooks*] edited by Valentino Gerratana 1975. Turin: Einaudi

## 4.5 Paulo Freire (1921-1997)

Paulo Reglus Neves Freire was born to a Catholic middle class family in Recife (the capital of north-eastern province in Brazil). His father was a military officer who brought up his children with both authority and understanding. Freire first received education in the traditional Catholic way from his mother.



The family lived in one of the most impoverished regions of the nation and often encountered difficulty in making both ends meet. His parents did, however, try hard to maintain the standard of living that characterized the middle class families of that time. Paulo Freire studied law following which he taught Portuguese language in a secondary school in Brazil. He also served as a trade-union lawyer. He would inform trade-union members on legal matters. Freire was engaged in a wide variety of activities that included teaching a language course, and lecturing on legal matters to trade union workers. The experience of dealing and with illiteracy among Brazilian poor peasants and workers moved him. He came to realize that educational policies and practices had far-reaching implications.

In 1989, Freire was appointed Secretary of Education. He took this opportunity to initiate several programmes for educating the adults, and re-casting the curriculum. According to Freire, as society becomes excessively technology oriented with emphasis on specialization, people become increasingly passive, dehumanized, and fearful. While mass production of commodities does call for extensive participation of people, it reduces their capacity for critical assessment. The way out, then, is not to reject the use of machine but to humanize people, to bring them out of the alienation of routine, of repeating things bureaucratically and taking lives into their own hands, at their own risk and responsibility, and exercising control. Freire was once asked how he thought it was possible to talk about the cultural appropriation of the dominant culture by the dominated people. He replied that those who dominate seek to lull the self-consciousness of those they dominate and instill in them a sense of inferiority about their own culture. When the dominated people come to realize the strategy of the dominators, they mobilize themselves with tremendous rigour. They unite, grow, struggle to overthrow the indoctrination, and liberate themselves (see Freire 1985). Those who champion the cause of liberation are, unfortunately, gripped by the banking concept of education because of which they are not able to understand its dehumanizing influence. You may read Box 5.2 in Unit 5 to understand Freire's banking concept of education. The seekers of liberation need to adopt the concept of people as conscious beings. This consists of devising learning situations based on dialogical relations in which the duality between the teacher (as the repository of knowledge) and the student (as completely ignorant and bereft of knowledge) is snapped. Teaching and learning then becomes a two-way process in which teachers and students engage on equal terms.

#### **Box 4.4: Freire's Method of Literary Training**

Freire's method of literacy training chiefly consisted of the following steps (cited here from Gerhardt 1997:445).

"The educators observe the participants in order to 'line in' to the universe of their vocabulary.

An arduous search for generative words and themes takes place at two levels: Syllabic richness and high degree of experiential involvement.

A first codification of these words into visual images, which stimulated people 'submerged' in the culture of silence to 'emerge' as conscious markers of their own culture. Introduction of the 'anthropological concept of culture' with its differentiation between man and animal.

The decodification of the generative words and themes by a 'culture circle' under the self-effacing stimuli of a coordinator who is not a 'teacher' in the conventional sense, but who has become an educator-educatee in dialogue with educatees- educators.

A creative new codification, which is explicitly critical and aimed at action, wherein those who were formally illiterate now began to reject their role as mere 'objects' in nature and social history. They undertake to become 'subjects' of their own destiny."

More importantly, he invited participation of the community in educational programmes that led to decentralization of control and democratization of schools. What came out clearly was the thrust on praxis in education that refers to developing a sense of critical reflexive action and critical reflection based on action.

This assumes greater relevance in the light of the fact that Freire believed that capitalist societies might be identified with oppression that pervades all social relations and social processes including education. More specifically, Brazil was plagued with intense political, social, and economic inequalities. The stark opposition between the affluent and the impoverished, the oppressor and the oppressed, deeply influenced Freire's thought. The oppressed or the dispossessed were deliberately kept 'submerged' in ignorance and in situations that would curtail their critical awareness and active response to their condition of social, economic, and political domination by the oppressors. Freire described this as the 'culture of silence.' He believed that those who are oppressed, dispossessed, and marginalized tend to remain ignorant and lethargic because of the overpowering social, economic, and political domination. The educational system supports and maintains the domination.

He came to realize that the then current system of education would continue to perpetuate the divide. The alternative before him was to present a conception of education in which the culture, knowledge, and social, economic, and political conditions of the oppressed were in the forefront. His book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* was born out of the urge to empower the oppressed through education. He believed that often the process of education gets reduced to deposition of knowledge by the teachers in the students who patiently receive, memorize, and repeat from the deposits. This is the banking concept of education proposed by Freire. In the banking concept of education, teachers treat themselves as knowledgeable and bestow the gift of knowledge to the students whom they treat as completely ignorant. Evidently, such students are given to adapting to the social situation in whatever form it appears before them. The solution lies in humanizing pedagogy in which a permanent dialogue between revolutionary leadership and the oppressed is established. Here the critical consciousness and the awareness of the students are ignited. The oppressed are encouraged to transform their destiny by way of struggle for their liberation. Freire's basic assumption was "that man's ontological vocation (as he calls it) is to be a subject who acts upon and transforms his world, and in so doing moves towards ever new possibilities of fuller and richer life individually and collectively" (Shaul 1972:12). Here, 'world' may be understood as consisting of dynamic and ever-changing social order. It is, hence, possible to look at the world critically with the ambition to overthrow the oppression. What is required, however, is appropriate outlook and training which education can impart. When an illiterate peasant or oppressed sections of society are initiated into critical thinking and the process of transformation, it takes upon itself the task of changing the oppressive structures of society. Freire believed that education either serves as an instrument that integrates the younger generation into the existing social system and makes them conform to it or else it serves as an instrument through which freedom is achieved. He accepted that those who profess the notion of freedom through education are often influenced by the banking concept and give in to its dehumanizing power. Unfortunately, they use this very instrument of alienation in an effort to liberate the masses. They tend to brand those who challenge them on this count as innocent, dreamer or reactionary. The truly committed have to reject the banking concept of education in its entirety. Instead of furthering the goal of deposit-making in education, they have to pursue problem-posing education (i.e., posing of the problems of people in their relations with the world) that would put teacher and student contradiction to rest so that teacher-of-the student and student-of-the-teacher cease to exist. New terminology viz., teacher-student and students-teachers emerges in which

authority is on the side of freedom, not against it. People teach each other. The process is mediated by the world, by cognizable objects.

#### Box 4.5: Major Works of Paulo Freire

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1970. [trans. M.B. Ramos, 1982]. New York: Seabury Press

*Cultural Action for Freedom*. 1970. Cambridge, M.A: The Harvard Educational Review Monograph Series, no. 1.

*Education for Critical Consciousness*. 1973. New York: Seabury Press

*Pedagogy in Process: The Letters to Guinea-Bissau* [trans. C. St. John Hurter]. 1978. New York: Seabury Press

*The Politics of Education*. [trans. H. A. Giroux] 1985. Massachusetts: Bergin and Garvey

*Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. 1994. [trans R.R. Barr]. New York: Continuum

*Teachers as Cultural Workers: Letters to Those who Dare Teach*. 1998. Boulder, Co: Westview Press

## 4.6 Basil Bernstein (1925-2000)

Basil Bernstein was the son of a Jewish immigrant family in London's East End. He served as an underage bombardier in Africa in the Second World War following which he worked in the Stepey settlement boys' club for underprivileged Jewish children. As a child, Bernstein's mind was occupied with simple, basic questions the answers to which were not part of the curriculum. The questions that filled his mind related to issues that were talked about at home. In his own words, "Why did my father work so hard? Why did I not see him in the mornings, or until late in the evening? Why did my mother go to work 'to support me'? Why were all the fields I played in being developed by more and larger council estates? Why did we have to walk (or later, ride) more than three miles to school? Why were the children from my village treated differently from the children from the immediate school locality" (1995, cited here from Goodson 2001: 162). After completing 11+ Bernstein joined the grammar school in which he felt completely alienated because he could not relate with the structure of content. He found the content dull and the form of its transmission as excessively bewildering. His own experience of learning in school laid the foundation for his ideas on education. Bernstein studied sociology at the London School of Economics which at that time encouraged students to explore the influence of social inequality on education, health, and welfare. He chose to focus on education. For a period of about six years, he taught in the City Day College. His students were people who had remained unsuccessful in the formal school system. Later, he developed interest in the use of language and its relationship to social class. He explored this domain in the course of a two-year stay in the Department of Phonetics, University College, London. He was appointed Senior Lecturer in the Sociology of Education some time in 1963 and spent the rest of his life conducting research, and supervising doctoral and post-doctoral research (see Goodson 2001).

Bernstein is widely acclaimed for his contribution to the theory of education. He distinguished between two forms of speech patterns: the restricted code; and the elaborated code. Restricted codes, as the term itself suggests are a kind of shortened speech characterized by short, grammatically simple, often unfinished sentences. One may wonder how communication is possible through restricted codes. Despite the fact that, apart from others, one of the features of restricted codes is unfinished sentences. Communication is made possible because the conversing parties have shared-experiences which make detailed

explication of meanings and intentions redundant. Meaning and intention, however, are conveyed through gestures, voice intonation, and context in which the communication takes place. There is no denying that communication through restricted codes is (i) limited to those who are largely familiar with each other; (ii) confined to a specific social group and specific social context.

An elaborated code, is based on verbalization of meanings and details (many of which are taken for granted in the restricted code). Here, meanings are not delimited to a specific social content, rather, they are universalistic and available to all. This is possible because the principles and operations are, in large part, made explicit. Bernstein explained the relationship between speech codes and social class with an example of stories told by two five-year-old children one belonging to the working class whom we will refer to here as A and the other belonging to the middle class whom we will refer to here as B. Both A and B were given four pictures based on which they were asked to develop a story. Out of these, the first picture depicted several boys playing football; the second picture depicted the ball breaking a window; the third picture depicted a woman looking out of the window and a man making a threatening gesture to the boys; and the fourth picture depicted boys retreating from the scene. It was found that A used restricted code to narrate the story. The children left many meanings unspoken so that the story was tied to a particular context shown in the picture. In fact, the story could not be understood without the help of the picture. Bernstein explained that this was so because in the working class families (to which A belonged) position of members was clearly defined in terms of age, gender, and relationships within the family. There was no need for verbal elaboration. By virtue of their authority in the family, the fathers would give a command such as 'shut up' which others would obey. B, on the other hand, used elaborated code to describe and analyze the relationship between events in an integrated way. The story was comprehensible without the aid of the pictures. Bernstein explained that in contrast to the working class, in middle class families (to which B belonged) decisions are negotiable and less rigid. Consequently, it was crucial that meaning and intentions were made explicit. He contrasted the working class and middle class in terms of skill set and participation in decision making. According to Bernstein the use of restricted code by people of working class is also because most of them are engaged in occupations that demand precision in manual rather than verbal skills. They are often not engaged in making decision. The manual worker is discouraged from developing an elaborated code. This contrasts sharply with the position of the middle class people many of whom are involved in white-collar jobs that entail decision making, expertise in verbal skills. Hence, they are able to develop elaborated speech code.

#### Reflection and Action 4.2

What are the major differences between restricted code and elaborate code?

It is pertinent to understand that formal education is conducted through an elaborated code in which universalistic orders of meaning are transmitted to many students at the same time. This works out to the disadvantage of children belonging to working class families who are given to communicating through restricted code. Bernstein did accept that the restricted code has 'warmth and vitality' and 'simplicity and directness', but it is not compatible with the formal education system. According to Bernstein (1973), the way in which a society classifies, distributes, transmits, and evaluates educational knowledge that it considers to be public, i.e., available to the masses reflects the distribution of power as also the principles of social control. Formal educational knowledge may be considered to be passed on through curriculum (which defines what knowledge is considered valid and appropriate for transmission), pedagogy (which defines what counts as a valid transmission of

knowledge), and evaluation (which counts as a valid realization of this knowledge code' to refer to the principles that shape curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation).

Goodson (2001) explained Bernstein's coding theory stating that strong classification (i.e. rigid boundaries between curriculum categories) denotes a curriculum that is differentiated and separated into traditional knowledge subject to whereas weak classification denotes an integrated curriculum with weak boundaries. These two types of curriculum are characterized as collection code and integrated code. Framing is the transmission of what is identified as valid school knowledge through pedagogic practices. Frame, in effect, is employed to refer to the specific pedagogical relationship of the teacher and the pupil. It refers to the strength of the boundary that separates what may be transmitted from what may not be transmitted in the pedagogical relationship. Strong framing implies the presence of sharp boundary; weak framing implies the presence of blurred boundary. Bernstein analysed the interrelationship between educational codes and the structure of power and principles of social control.

Bernstein (1973, rpt. 1985: 279) maintained "The stronger the classification and the framing, the more the educational relationship tends to be hierarchical and ritualized, the educant seem as ignorant, with little status and few rights. These are things that one earns, rather like spurs and are used for the purpose of encouraging and sustaining the motivation of pupils. Depending upon the strength of frames, knowledge is transmitted in a context in which the teacher has maximal control or surveillance, as in hierarchical secondary school relationships". Further, in early childhood, the frames of the collection code socialize children into knowledge frames that overlook connection with everyday realities. What happens as a consequence is that educational knowledge comes to be treated as esoteric, away from the mundane and the ordinary. Those who possess it, therefore, are accorded special significance. It is only when this frame is relaxed to incorporate the everyday realities will educational knowledge cease to be a signifier of power and prestige.

#### Box 4.7: Major Works of Bernstein

*Class, Codes and Control: Theoretical Studies towards a Sociology of Language.* 1971, Vol. 1. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

*Class, Codes and Control: Applied Studies towards a Sociology of Language.* 1973, Vol. 2. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

*Class, Codes and Control: Towards a Theory of Education Transmission.* 1975, vol. 3. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

*Class, Codes and Control: The structuring of Pedagogic Discourse.* 1990, vol. 4. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

*Pedagogy, Symbolic Control, and Identity: Theory, Research, and Critique.* 1996. London and Washington: Taylor & Francis

## 4.7 Ivan Illich (1926-2002)

Ivan Illich was born in Vienna, Austria, in the year 1926. In the early years of life Illich was served by different governesses from whom he learnt many languages. He read extensively from his grandmother's library and got the opportunity to interact with intellectuals many of whom were friends of his parents. This kind of exposure in the formative years sharpened his intellectual skills. He studied theology and philosophy at the Gregorian University, Rome. Later, he pursued doctoral research in the philosophy of history at the University of Salzburg. He served as a parish priest (to a New York church with an Irish and Puerto Rican congregation), administrator and professor at Fordham University. Illich founded the Centre for Intercultural Documentation (CIDOC)

in Cuernavaca, Mexico which provided a platform for American and Latin American intellectuals to discuss and debate on issues of education and culture. He is known for radical ideas (apart from those on Church and its reform, medicine, and transport in modern societies) on education that ignited several controversies. He condemned the school as a system for not being able to keep pace with social change and for reinforcing the *status quo* and protecting the structure of society from which they are born and within which it functions.

His book, *Deschooling Society* is perhaps one of the most widely read works in the disciplines of education in general and sociology of education in particular. He explained that universal education cannot be imparted through the process of schooling. He believed that often the people's right to learn is curtailed by the obligation to attend school. Illich saw an opposition between schooling and education. He denounced institutionalized education as also the institution of school on the ground that it raised people as, "producers of merchandise with a specific exchange value in a society where those who already possess a certain cultural capital derive the most benefit" (Gajardo 1997:714). He maintained that the prestige of a school rested on the myth of (i) institutionalized values which is rooted in the conviction that schooling produces learning which is of value. According to Illich meaningful learning is not dependent on manipulation by others or on instruction but derives from participation of learners in meaningful settings that are least provided in schools; (ii) measurement of values based on the understanding that the values imparted in schools are quantifiable. Illich, however, upheld that personal growth cannot be measured in terms of schooling. Those who employ personal growth tend to constrain themselves a great deal in order to match those standards; (iii) packaging values emphasizing the clear-cut curriculum produced as a modern staple product. This finished product is presented to the students by the teachers and modified subsequently on the basis of their reactions and responses. The entire process simulates the production and delivery of an object; and (iv) self-perpetuating progress assessed in terms of the degrees, diplomas, and certificates. Larger number of these generates larger confidence of the possibility of securing a good job. Pupils (who are treated like consumers) are taught to conform their aspirations and desires in accordance with marketable values. It may be appreciated that people's perception of reality is not determined solely by the schools but also by the family, media, informal, socialization networks and society at large.

#### Reflection and Action 4.1

In your opinion what is the role of school in society? Discuss with your co-learners at the study centre.

It was possible to undertake the mission of universal education successfully through alternative institutions that could be developed on the style of the present schools. Further, the need was to (i) expand and enlarge the responsibility of the teacher in a way that it extended beyond the teaching-learning engagement in institutions to enwrap the lifetimes of pupils; (ii) enhance opportunities for learning, sharing, and caring in the course of education; and (iii) deschool the ethos as also the institutions. Illich argued vehemently against institutionalised education as also the institution of the school for privileging those who already possess some measure of cultural capital. He explained that schooling, in essence, is the production and marketing of knowledge. The people are made to believe that knowledge that is taught in schools is respectable and worthwhile. This implies that those who are self taught but do not or have not been able to attend school are discriminated against. The fact of the matter, however, is that the institutionalised values instilled in schools constitute the yardstick for measuring personal growth. People try hard to follow the standards laid down before them in schools. For Illich, personal growth could not be measured by the yardstick of schooling.

It may be understood that Illich did not argue for elimination of schools. Rather, he asked for their disestablishment. The difference between the two situations is that while the former calls for closing down of the school system as such, the latter calls for plugging the use of public funds to support schools. He believed that schooling should be treated as an auxiliary item. Schools should be made to pay taxes. When that happened, those who had not undergone schooling would not be discriminated against or despised. Schools and state need to get de-linked much like the Church and the state under the U.S. Constitution. A crucial outcome would be that schooling would no longer be compulsory. In such a situation, teachers would impart education with more passion and students would pursue it without any ulterior motive (Gabbard and Stuchul 2001).

Ivan Illich has been criticized for his radical ideas on schooling. It has often been said that his ideas and assertion were based on intuition and remained far from socio-educational or learning research. Illich has debated with Freire on education, schooling, and awareness. He has also discussed basic issues with other thinkers engaged in search for ways and means of transforming life into a learning experience outside the school system. Notwithstanding the criticism, Illich will be remembered for initiating a debate on education and schooling in which several thinkers participated with tremendous sense of commitment. There is no denying that his ideas do exhibit universal validity and have influenced a large number of educators.

#### Box 4.6: Major Works of Ivan Illich

*Deschooling Society*. 1970. New York: Harper & Row

*Tools for conviviality*. 1973. New York: Harper and Row

*In the Vineyard of the Text*. 1993. Chicago: University of Chicago Press

## 4.8 Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002)

Pierre Bourdieu was born in Denguin, France. His father was a sharecropper. Later, he joined the position of postman. He studied philosophy in Paris and later worked as a teacher for about a year. Bourdieu served in the French army during the Algerian War of Independence between 1958 and 1962 in the course of which he undertook ethnographic research. From the year 1964 he held the position of Director of Studies at the E'cole des Hautes E'tudes en Sciences Sociales; in 1968 he founded the research center, Centre de Sociologie Europeenne; in 1975 he launched an interdisciplinary journal through which he revisited the well established canons of sociology; in 1981 he held the Chair of Sociology at the College de France. It is evident that Bourdieu sought to integrate theoretical ideas with empirical research grounded in everyday life. Bourdieu is known for his theoretical and empirical contributions in the fields of anthropology and cultural studies, education, politics, and sociology. The core idea in his writings revolves around the means by which the educated social groups employ cultural capital as a social strategy to distinguish themselves in society by acquiring status and respect. He explained the concept of social strategy in terms of conscious rational choices that people make in order that their own beliefs come true. Social strategies may be consciously or unconsciously adopted. Bourdieu's ideas are rooted in empirical research that he carried out in France for about four decades. He also used the concept of social strategy in order to explain the way in which individuals engage themselves in the struggle over symbolic capital. He explored the relationship between the relative autonomy of the educational system and its dependence on the structure of class relations. Much like Marx, Bourdieu accepted that the relationship between the ruling class and the subordinate working class is one of conflict and hostility. He agreed that the gap or the difference between the two classes derives from inequities in the possession of capital. For

Bourdieu, capital lies in the group's or an individual's potential to fit into society through shared knowledge, beliefs, values, and virtues. The role of education assumes significance in that it serves as a source from which the privileged and the elite draw not only academic credentials but also propagate an ideology that constitutes the rules of society most of which are to their own advantage. He maintained that intellectuals spread their knowledge judiciously and allow the people to compete for cultural capital within the framework of rules in society. There is no denying that this competition for cultural capital perpetuates class distinctions (Brimi 2005).

According to Bourdieu, education serves to perpetuate the culture of the dominant classes— a phenomenon often referred to as 'cultural reproduction'. The dominant classes tend to project their own culture as superior and worthwhile to an extent that they establish it as the basis of knowledge in the educational system. Bourdieu referred to 'cultural capital' in the framework of culture of the dominant classes more so because through the agency of the educational system it can be translated into wealth and power (meaning that those who pass through the educational system which derives largely from the culture of the dominant classes are able to acquire both wealth and power in society). What is interesting to note is the fact that diversity in educational achievements of students belonging to different classes emanates from uneven distribution of cultural capital in the class structure. This means that students who belong to the upper classes find themselves in a familiar educational environment (because they are socialized into the culture and have internalized the skills and knowledge from which the educational system is derived) while students belonging to lower classes find themselves alienated from the educational environment. Students belonging to the middle class are able to perform better than those of lower classes because their culture is close to the culture of the dominant class.

The performance of the students, therefore, depends on their access to cultural capital. Bourdieu explained that in operational terms, children of the upper classes are able to comprehend the content of knowledge better than their counterparts belonging to lower classes for the simple reason that the range of meanings, the grammar, tone, and delivery of the content is more comprehensible to them. Furthermore, they are able to articulate and present the knowledge in a way that is appreciated and rewarded by the teacher-evaluator. The students of lower classes fall short on this count. Often, they are penalized when their style of presentation does not conform to that of the dominant culture. Now, while the former are inherently in an advantageous situation, the latter are at a loss right from the beginning. One consequence of this practice is the systematic elimination of people of the working class from the area of education. Elimination of those belonging to the working class takes place because of the failure in the educational system and an understanding of their own position vis-à-vis those belonging to the ruling class. This, in turn, leads to social reproduction— perpetuation of the power of the ruling class.

**Box 4.8: Major Works of Pierre Bourdieu**

*Outline of Theory of Practice*. 1977. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

*Distinction: A social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul

*Homo Academicus*. 1988. Cambridge: Polity Press

*The State Nobility: Elite Schools in the Field of Power*. 1966. Cambridge: Polity Press



## 4.9 Conclusion

In this unit we have familiarized ourselves with the basic viewpoints of seven major thinkers on education. It is interesting to note that despite the fact that they were born and brought up at different places at different times, they seem to converge on the fundamental understanding that meaningful education was not one that was based on transmission of information in schools but one that led to personal growth and development. Several of them believed that the scope of education needs to be broadened to address issues of social and political hegemony. They argued for setting education free from the state and dominant sections of society. They envisaged the purpose of education as self-enrichment and, more importantly, liberation from the clutches of domination and hegemony. What comes out clearly from their writings is the vast potential of education to usher in and sustain social transformation.

## 4.10 Further Reading

Freire, P. 1972. *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*. England: Penguin Books

Illich, I. 1970. *Deschooling Society*. New York: Harper and Row

Morsy, Z. (ed). 1997. *Thinkers on Education*. Vol. 1-4. New Delhi: UNESCO Publishing/Oxford & IBH Publishing



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