

Lesson Plan - Chapter 5: “Social Structure and Interaction”

Textbook: Witt, Jon. 2009. *SOC*. McGraw-Hill Humanities/Social Sciences/Languages

Written assignment instructions

Reading: Clark, Kim. 2010. “Rich Students Will Get More College Acceptance Letters in 2010.” *U.S. News & World Report*. Website accessed January 24, 2010.

Permalink: <http://www.usnews.com/articles/education/2010/01/15/rich-students-will-get-more-college-acceptance-letters-in-2010.html>

1. From a functionalist perspective, explain why the educational institution exists. (1-2 sentences)
2. From a social conflict perspective, explain why the educational institution exists. (1-2 sentences)
3. From your reading of the USNews.com article and Chapter 5 in the text, what might be some ways that more “wealthy students” will provide an opportunity for society? (1-2 sentences)
4. From your reading of the article and the chapter in the text, why might more “wealthy students” maintain or exacerbate inequality? (1-2 sentences)
5. List at least 3 statuses you occupy. (1 sentence)
6. Which are achieved and which are ascribed? (1-2 sentences)
7. How do you think one or more of your statuses (of those you listed above or list others) have either helped you or hurt you in your college career? (1-2 sentences)

Lesson Plan:

Explain that we are discussing **Social Structure and Interaction** today.

Explanation to the class (just a guideline for the TAs): “The social structure refers to the framework that surrounds us -- the relationships of people and groups to one another. These interactions give direction to and set limits on behavior. You may also think of the social structure in terms of patterned relationships. For example, relationships between people in a college classroom are not random but rather structured. Within a classroom, a set of spoken and unspoken rules define the relationship between instructors and students. The different **statuses** that exist within a college classroom and the different **roles** associated with those statuses are part of the social structure, the framework that governs behavior in different social situations. This very social structure gives social life a routine and repetitive quality.” (Source for this helpful illustration: www.continuinged.ku.edu)

“So, let’s take a closer look at the social structure surrounding us and how our statuses and roles help determine how we interact with one another.”

Note to TAs: I like to run my recitation as mostly a led discussion group. If you have another way of getting across the general answers to the writing assignment and the key terms – go for it. I also tend to write key terms on the board – often before class and use the terms as my roadmap. (A list of terms included at the end of this lesson plan). This Lesson plan may appear long, but it’s mostly guided discussion.

ACTIVITY:

I’ve found that this energy and the willingness to talk then spill over into the rest of the class.

Start the discussion. Get the students free-for-all talking with each other about the assigned USNWR article. Get them going by asking something like, “Do you generally think this is good thing or a bad thing? Do you think it can have positive ramifications for education and for society? Do you think it could be detrimental to education and to society?” After about 5 minutes bring it back to the structure of the teacher-led discussion by asking questions and by clarifying and challenging questions (some examples below).

Institutions

A question based on their opinions from the free-for-all discussion is a good way to get them going...

Q: Ask for a show of hands, “How many think more affluent students being accepted into schools is generally a good thing for society?” “How many think it may not be such a good thing?”

Q: “Why good?”

Q: “Why not so good?”

You can engage them here and/or write some of their suggestions on the board to build the conversation or to refer back later. Whether the class (or you!) agree, there are probably ways to see the good and the bad – each will probably draw from the functionalist and/or conflict perspective (this is a nice way to reinforce these perspectives).

Q: Someone tell me what a “social institution” is and how the education system is an institution?

A: Definition: An organized pattern of beliefs and behavior centered on basic social needs. (p 101). In other words, institutions are established or standardized patterns of rule-governed behavior. The education system serves a need of society (whether positively or negatively) and it involves fixed patterns of behavior encouraged by strong norms and sanctions. Other examples: family, religion, and economic and political institutions.

You may use examples from the board/discussion (but don’t have to) - continue with leading questions like:

Q: OK, so in general and from lecture what is the **functionalist perspective** again?

A: Emphasizes the way in which the parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability. A functionalist perspective sees society as an organism in which each part serves a function. (p 13)

Q (follow-up): So, from a functionalist perspective, why does the educational institution exist?

A: A functionalist might say that education serves the need by society by passing skills and knowledge on to the next generation. Education may also offer a way for the transmission of core values and social control. Students learn hierarchy and are provided with sanctions (rewards or punishments) while learning to follow directions, follow schedules, meet deadlines, and obey authority.

Q: And what is the **conflict perspective**?

A: Social behavior is best understood in terms of tension between groups over power or the allocation of resources, including housing, money, access to services, and political representation. (p 15)

Follow-up Q: So, from a social conflict perspective, why does the educational institution exist?

A: Conflict perspective might say the purpose of education is to maintain social inequality and preserve the power of those who dominate society. While functionalists see education as a beneficial contribution to an ordered society, conflict theorists see the educational system as perpetuating the status quo by molding the lower classes into obedient workers.

THOUGHT QUESTION (you don't have to use this, but if you have time and/or your discussion is dragging it might be interesting to pose): "Objectively, there is nothing you can learn in higher education that you cannot learn on your own given enough motivation and access to information with the exception of some advanced scientific fields that require access to expensive equipment. So what is it that continues to proliferate higher education over individual initiative?" (<http://www.mikealrogers.com/archives/481>)

Status, Ascribed and Achieved:

Definition: a **status** refers to any of the full range of social defined positions within a large group or society. Everyone has statuses – these determine your “place” in groups and in society. For example in a family, you may be a daughter or a mother, or both. In school you have a status as a student, as an athlete, etc.

Q: What are your statuses (write these on the board) – daughter, son, student, athlete, musician, etc.

Q: Which of these are ascribed and which are achieved? (somehow mark each – maybe a circle/square)

Ascribed: a social position assigned without regard for unique talents/characteristics (age, kinship, gender, appearance, race, group, class, citizenship) – class may be confusing, as class can be achieved, but at this age, most of the students will have an ascribed status (they were born into it).

Achieved: a social position that is within your own power to change (“good” student, athlete, professor, criminal – doesn't have to be something “good”).

Are there any **Master Statuses** listed? Give examples and explain that a Master Status is a status that dominates other statuses of a person and thereby determines a person's general position in society. “In perception, an individual's master status supersedes his other identifying traits; for example, if a woman feels that her role as a mother is more important than her role as a woman, a daughter, a wife, an American, and a novelist, she is more likely to label herself first as a mother and to identify with other women who label themselves as such. Unlike other aspects of the status set, the master status affects how the individual behaves in almost every given situation.” (Wikipedia)

Role

Explain the difference between a **status** and a **role**.

Definition: A **role** is a set of expectations for people who occupy a given social position or status. (p 92)

Think of status as your position (like a job position or title). And the role as the expectations of that position (like a job description, the things you're expected to do while in that status).

Groups

“Let's talk about this group right here in this classroom.”

Q: Are we a group? What is a group?

A: Yes, we are a group. A group a number of people with similar norms, values, and expectations who interact regularly. (p 95). Statuses combine in various ways to form social groups – you are a group of students with shared expectations, norms, etc.

Q: Are we a **primary group** or a **secondary group**?

A: We're a **secondary group** – we probably aren't shaping our identities through this group; we're not forming close bonds or friendships, but...

Q: How might we become a **primary group**?

A: What if we spent the entire year in this room together locked in this classroom, or what if we took this class for the rest of our lives, or what if we decided to all live and work together toward a goal to save the world – we might come to associate ourselves closely to this group.

Q: Who is in our **in-group**? (those that belong)

Q: Who is in our **out-group**? (those we feel don't belong or a group to which we don't feel we belong)

Q: How might this change? Is a different recitation in SOCY 1001 an out-group? What about when we all get together in lecture – then are we all part of the in-group?

Reference group: any group we individuals use as a standard for comparing ourselves. (p 97)

Q: Who do you use as a standard for evaluating your own behavior?

THANK THEM!



Some of the key terms from Witt, Chapter 5 are:

Social interaction -- *the ways in which people respond to one another*

Social structure – *the way in which a society is organized into predictable relationships*

Social institution – *an organized pattern of beliefs and behavior centered on basic social needs*

Status – *any of the full range of socially defined positions within a large group or society*

>Ascribed status – *a social position assigned without regard for unique talents/characteristics*

>Achieved status – *a social position that is within your our power to change*

>Master status – *a status that dominates and thereby determines a person's position in society*

Social role – *a set of expectations for people who occupy a given social position or status*

Group – *a number of people with similar norms, values, and expectations who interact regularly*

>Primary group – *small group characterized by intimate, face-to-face association/cooperation*

>Secondary group – *formal, impersonal group in which there is little social intimacy*

>In-group – *group or category to which people feel like they belong*

>Out-group – *group or category to which people feel they do not belong*

>Reference group – *any group individuals use as a standard for comparing themselves*

SOCY1001

Spring 2010: Assignment 2 "Culture": Answer/Review

How graded: Looking for 6 key answers (noted below).

7-8 correct = "check-plus" (5 points)

4-6 correct = "check" (4 points)

0-3 correct = "check-minus" (3 points)

TA's discretion: add or subtract a point for writing/grammar

1. From a functionalist perspective, explain why the educational institution exists. (1-2 sentences)
 - a. A functionalist might say that education serves the need by society by passing skills and knowledge on to the next generation.

2. From a social conflict perspective, explain why the educational institution exists. (1-2 sentences)
 - a. Conflict perspective might say the purpose of education is to maintain social inequality and preserve the power of those who dominate society.

3. From your reading of the USNews.com article and Chapter 5 in the text, what might be some ways that "more rich students" will provide an opportunity for society? (1-2 sentences)
 - a. USNWR is generally conservative (much to my dismay), but the basic rationalization is that this economic downturn will make schools more competitive with one another and that not-so-bright rich kids will now have an "opportunity" because they don't have to do so well on college admission scores. And the attraction of international students (albeit rich international students) – a false diversity.

4. From your reading of the article and the chapter in the text, why might "more rich students" maintain or exacerbate inequality? (1-2 sentences)
 - a. Answers may vary, but might include something about if only rich students attend school, it will perpetuate classism – the rich will get the better jobs. The rich get richer while the poor get poorer. No opportunities for the less-well-off.

5. List at least 4 statuses you occupy. (1 sentence)
 - a. Open answer, must have at least 4, examples may include student, athlete, daughter, etc.

6. Which are achieved and which are ascribed? (1-2 sentences)
 - a. Use your judgment on whether or not you feel they understand the difference.

7. How do you think one or more of your statuses (of those you listed above or list others) have either helped you or hurt you in your college career? (1-2 sentences)
 - a. Open answer. Must tie at least one status to a realistic help or hindrance.