

"There is no God," the gunman retorted, as he placed a gun against her head and squeezed the trigger.

Before the boys turned their guns on themselves, they killed twelve of their fellow students and one teacher. They wounded another twenty-three students.

—Based on Bai 1999; Gibbs 1999.

The events at Columbine High School are etched into the nation's consciousness. School shootings have confused just about everyone. No one has the full explanation for why they happen, or what we can do to prevent them. When we return to this topic, we are going to find a surprise, but, first, let's take a broad look at education.

The Development of Modern Education

To provide a background for understanding our own educational system better, let's look first at education in earlier societies, then trace the development of universal education.

Education in Earlier Societies

Earlier societies had no separate social institution called education. They had no special buildings called schools, and no people who earned their living as teachers. Rather, as an integral part of growing up, children learned what was necessary to get along in life. If hunting or cooking were the essential skills, then people who already possessed those skills taught them. *Education was synonymous with acculturation*, learning a culture. It still is in today's tribal groups.

In some societies, when a sufficient surplus developed—as in Arabia, China, Greece, and North Africa—a separate institution developed. Some people then devoted themselves to teaching, while those who had the leisure—the children of the wealthy—became

In hunting and gathering societies, there is no separate social institution called education. As with this Bushman boy in South Africa's Kalahari desert, children learn their adult economic roles from their parents and other kin.



their students. In ancient China, for example, Confucius taught a few select pupils, while in Greece, Aristotle, Plato, and Socrates taught science and philosophy to upper-class boys. Education, then, came to be something quite distinct from informal acculturation. **Education** is a group's *formal* system of teaching knowledge, values, and skills. Such instruction stood in marked contrast to the learning of traditional skills such as farming or hunting, for it was intended to develop the mind.

Education, which flourished during the period roughly marked by the birth of Christ, slowly died out. During the Dark Ages of Europe, monks kept the candle of enlightenment burning. Except for a handful of the wealthy and some members of the nobility, only the monks could read and write. Although the monks delved into philosophy, they focused on learning Greek, Latin, and Hebrew so that they could study the Bible and writings of early church leaders. The Jews also kept formal learning alive as they studied the Torah.

Formal education remained limited to those who had the leisure to pursue it. (The word *school* comes from the Greek word *σχολή* [*scholē*] meaning "leisure.") Industrialization transformed education, for the new machinery and new types of jobs required workers to read, write, and work accurately with figures—the classic three R's of the nineteenth century (Reading, 'Riting, and 'Rithmetic).

Industrialization and Universal Education

After the American Revolution, the founders of the new republic were concerned that the country lacked unity, that its many religious and ethnic groups (nationalities) would make the nation unstable. To help create a uniform national culture, Thomas Jefferson and Noah Webster proposed universal schooling. Standardized texts would instill patriotism and teach the principles of representative government (Hellinger and Judd 1991). If this new political experiment were to succeed, they reasoned, it would need educated voters who are capable of making sound decisions. A national culture remained elusive, however, and in the 1800s the country remained politically fragmented. Many states even considered themselves to be near-sovereign nations.

Education reflected this disunity. There was no comprehensive school system, just a hodgepodge of independent schools. Public schools even charged tuition. Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Roman Catholics operated their own schools (Hellinger and Judd 1991). Children of the rich attended private schools. Children of the poor received no formal education—nor did slaves. High school was considered higher education (hence the name *high* school), and only the wealthy could afford it. College, too, was beyond the reach of almost everyone.

Horace Mann, an educator from Massachusetts, found it deplorable that the average family could not afford to send its children even to grade school. In 1837 he proposed that "common schools," supported through taxes, be established throughout his state. Mann's idea spread, and state after state began to provide free public education. It is no coincidence that universal education and industrialization occurred at the same time. The economy was changing, and political and civic leaders recognized the need for an educated work force. They also feared the influx of foreign values and, like the founders of the country, looked on public education as a way to "Americanize" immigrants (Hellinger and Judd 1991).

By 1918, all U.S. states had **mandatory education laws** requiring children to attend school, usually until they had completed the eighth grade or turned 16, whichever came first. In the early 1900s, graduation from the eighth grade marked the end of education for most people. "Dropouts" at that time were students who did not complete grade school.

As industrialization progressed and as fewer people made their living from farming, formal education

education a formal system of teaching knowledge, values, and skills

mandatory education

laws laws that require all children to attend school until a specified age or until they complete a minimum grade in school

This 1893 photo of a school in Hecla, Montana, taught by Miss Blanche Lamont, provides a glimpse into the past, when free public education, pioneered in the United States, was still in its infancy. In these one-room rural schools, a single teacher had charge of grades 1 to 8. Children were assigned a grade not by age but by mastery of subject matter. Occasionally, adults who wished to learn to read, to write, or to add and subtract would join the class. Attendance was sporadic, for the family's economic survival came first.



came to be regarded as essential to the well-being of society. With the distance to the nearest college too far and the cost too great, many high school graduates could not attend college. As discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box below, this gave birth to community colleges. As you can see from Figure 17.1, receiving a bachelor's degree in the United States is now *twice* as common as high school diplomas used to be. Sixty-three percent of all high school graduates enter college (*Statistical Abstract 2002:Table 255*).

One-sixth of Americans still don't make it through high school, however, which condemns most of them to a difficult economic life. As you can see from the Social Map on the next page, the rate of high school graduation is far from evenly distributed across the states. You may wish to compare this Social Map with the one on page 280 that shows how poverty is distributed among the states.

Education in Global Perspective

To further place our own educational system in perspective, let's look at education in three countries. This will help us see how education is directly related to a nation's culture and its economy.

DOWN-TO-EARTH SOCIOLOGY

Community Colleges: Challenges Old and New

I ATTENDED A JUNIOR COLLEGE IN OAKLAND, California. From there, with my newly minted associate's degree in hand, I transferred to a senior college—a college in Ft. Wayne, Indiana, that had no freshmen or sophomores.

I didn't realize that my experimental college matched the vision of some of the founders of the community college movement. In the early 1900s, they foresaw a system of local colleges that would be accessible to the average high school graduate—a system so extensive that it would be unnecessary for universities to offer courses at the freshman and sophomore levels (Manzo 2001).

An equally strong voice questioned whether preparing high school graduates for entry to four-year colleges and universities should be the goal of junior colleges. They insisted that the purpose of junior colleges should instead be vocational preparation, to equip people for the job market as electricians and other technicians. In some regions, where the proponents of transfer dominated, the admissions requirements for junior colleges were even higher than those of Yale (Pedersen 2001). This debate was never won by either side, and you can still hear its echoes today.



Community colleges have opened higher education to millions of students who would not have access to college due to cost or distance.

The name *junior* college also became a problem. Some felt that the word *junior* made their institution sound as though it weren't quite a real college. A struggle to change the name ensued, and about three decades ago *community* college won out.

The name change didn't settle the debate about whether the purpose was preparing students to transfer to universities or training them for jobs, however. Community colleges continue to serve this dual purpose.

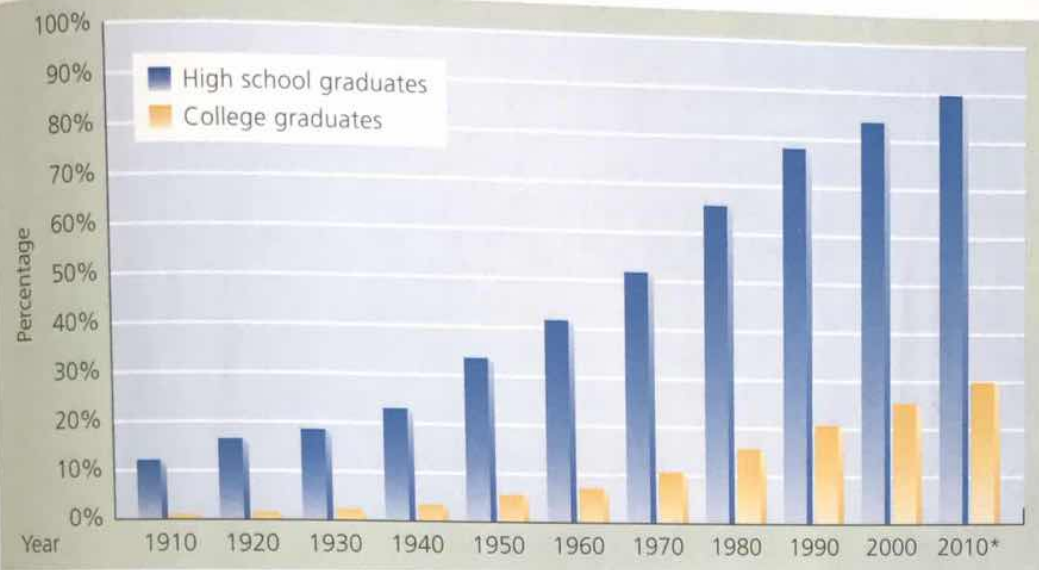
Community colleges have become such an essential part of the U.S. educational system that about *half* of all undergradu-

ates in the United States are enrolled in them (Kim 2002). Most students are what are called *nontraditional* students: Many are age 25 or older, from the working class, have jobs, and attend college part time (Bryant 2001).

To help their students transfer to four-year colleges and universities, many community colleges are making arrangements with top-tier public and private universities (Chaker 2003b). Some provide admissions guidance on how to enter flagship state schools. Others coordinate courses, making sure that they match the university's title and numbering system, as well as its rigor of instruction and grading.

The challenges that community colleges face are the usual ones of securing adequate budgets in the face of declining resources, continuing an open-door policy, meeting changing job markets, and maintaining quality instruction. New challenges include meeting the shifting needs of students, such as the growing need to teach immigrants English as a second language and to provide on-campus day care for parents who no longer enjoy an extensive familial support system.

Figure 17.1 Educational Achievement in the United States



Note: Americans 25 years and over. Asterisk indicates author's estimate.

Sources: By the author. Based on National Center for Education Statistics, 1991:Table 8; *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 208.

Figure 17.2 Not Making It: Dropping Out of High School



Note: The states vary widely. The extremes range from 8.2 percent in South Dakota and Washington to 22.9 percent in West Virginia.
Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 212.

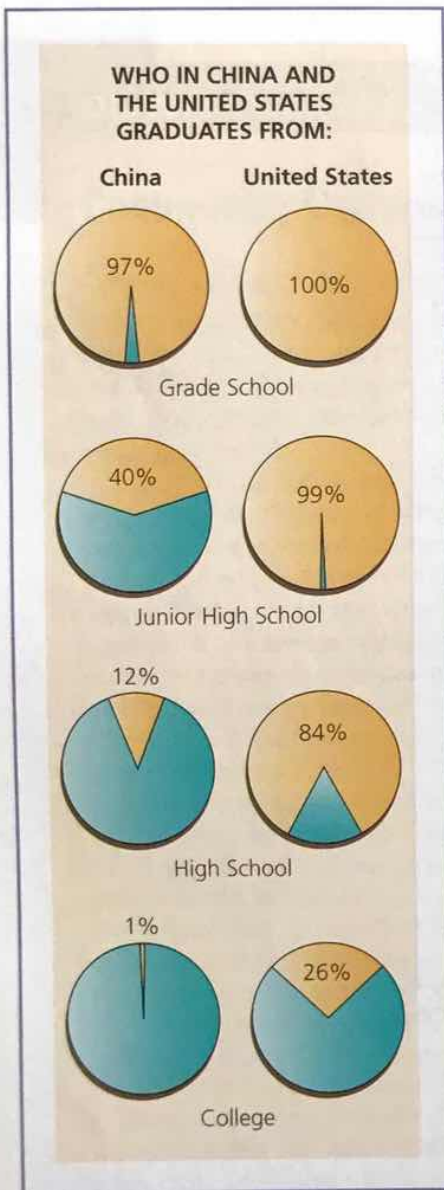
Education in the Most Industrialized Nations: Japan

A central sociological principle of education is that a nation's education reflects its culture. Because a core Japanese value is solidarity with the group, the Japanese discourage competition among individuals. In the work force, people who are hired together work as a team. They are not expected to compete with one another for promotions, but, instead,

they are promoted as a group (Ouchi 1993). Japanese education reflects this group-centered approach to life. Children in grade school work as a group, all mastering the same skills and materials. On any one day, children all over Japan study the same page from the same textbook (“Less Rote . . .” 2000).

In a fascinating cultural contradiction, college admissions in Japan are highly competitive. Like the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT) required of U.S. college-bound high school seniors, Japanese seniors who want to attend college must also take a national test. U.S. high school graduates who perform poorly on their tests can find some college to attend—as long as their parents can pay the tuition. In Japan, however, only the top scorers—rich and poor alike—are admitted to college. Japanese sociologists have found that even though the tests are open to all, children from the richer families are more likely to be admitted to college. The reason is not favoritism on the part of college officials, but, rather, that the richer parents apparently spend more for tutors to prepare their children for these open exams (Ono 2001).

Figure 17.3 Education in a Most Industrialized (Postindustrial) Nation and a Least Industrialized Nation



Note: These are initial attendance rates, not completion rates. The U.S. junior high school total is the author's estimate.
Sources: Brauchli 1994; Kahn 2002; *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 208.

Education in the Industrializing Nations: Russia

After the Revolution of 1917, the Soviet Communist party changed the nation's educational system. At that time, as in most countries, education was limited to children of the elite. Following the sociological principle that education reflects culture, the new government made certain that socialist values dominated its schools, for it saw education as a means to undergird the new political system. As a result, schoolchildren were taught that capitalism was evil and that communism was the salvation of the world.

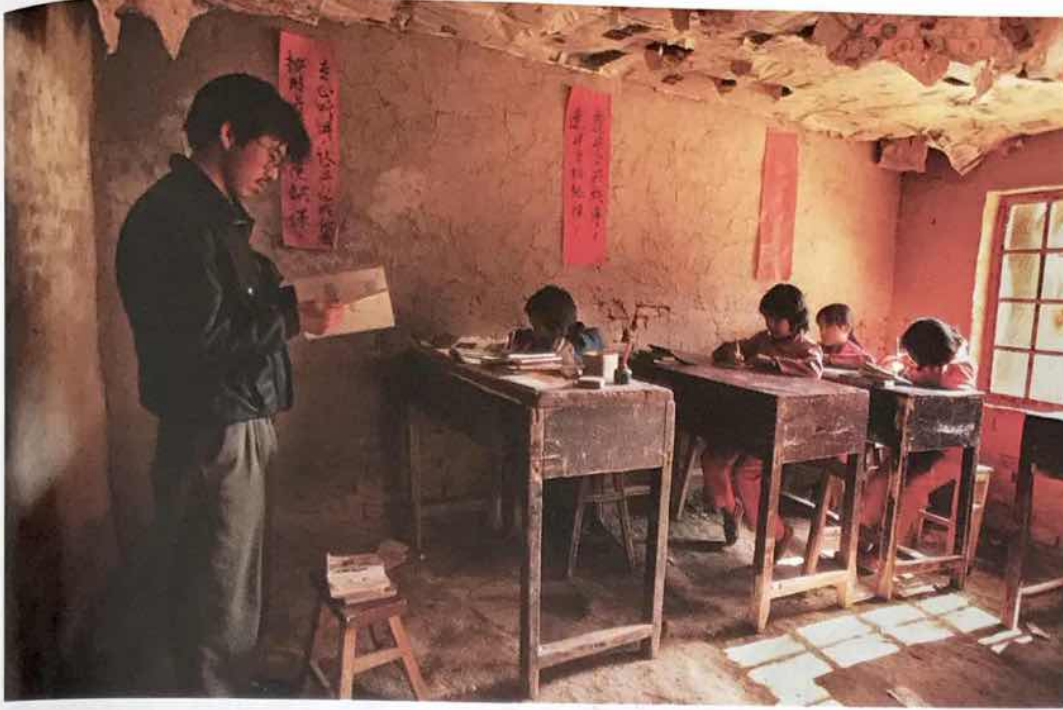
Education, including college, was free. Schools stressed mathematics and the natural sciences, and few courses in the social sciences were taught. Just as the economy was directed from central headquarters, so was education. With orders issued out of Moscow, schools throughout the country followed the same state-prescribed curriculum. All students in the same grade used the same textbooks. To prevent the development of thinking that might be contrary to communism, students memorized the materials and were taught to repeat lectures on oral exams (Deaver 2001).

Post-Soviet Russians are in the midst of “reinventing” education. For the first time, private, religious, and even foreign-run schools are allowed, and teachers can encourage students to think for themselves. The problems that Russians confronted are mind-boggling. Not only did they have to retrain tens of thousands of teachers who were used to teaching pat political answers, but also school budgets shrank, while inflation spiraled upward. The average teacher makes just \$33 a month, one-third the salary of the average Russian worker (“Saving the . . .” 2001). (To put this in perspective, \$17 is the cost of staying in a dormitory for a month [MacWilliams 2001a]). Some teachers haven't been paid for months, and teachers at one school were paid in toilet paper and vodka (Deaver 2001). The abysmal salaries have led to corruption, and students know which professors can be bribed for good grades (MacWilliams 2001b).

Because it is true of education everywhere, we can safely predict that Russia will develop an educational system that reflects its culture. This system will glorify its historical exploits and reinforce its values and world views. The transition to capitalism is transforming basic ideas about profit and private property, and Russia's educational system now reflects those changed values.

Education in the Least Industrialized Nations: Egypt

Education in the Least Industrialized Nations stands in sharp contrast to that in the industrialized world. Even if the Least Industrialized Nations have mandatory attendance laws, they are not enforced. Because most of their people work the land or take care of families, they find little need for education. In addition, formal education is expensive and most of these nations cannot afford it. As we saw from Figure 9.2 (pages 246-247), most people in the Least Industrialized Nations live on less than \$1,000 a year. Consequently, in some nations most children do not go to school beyond the first couple of grades. Figure 17.3 contrasts education in China and the United States. As was once common around the globe, it is primarily the wealthy in



The poverty of some of the Least Industrialized Nations defies the imagination of most people who have been reared in the industrialized world. Their educational systems are similarly marked by poverty. This photo shows a village school in Shaanxi Province, China.

the Least Industrialized Nations who have the means and the leisure for formal education—especially anything beyond the basics. As an example, let's look at education in Egypt.

Several centuries before the birth of Christ, Egypt's world-renowned centers of learning produced such acclaimed scientists as Archimedes and Euclid. The primary areas of study during this classic period were physics, astronomy, geometry, geography, mathematics, philosophy, and medicine. The largest library in the world was at Alexandria. Fragments from the papyrus manuscripts of this library, which burned to the ground, have been invaluable in deciphering ancient manuscripts. After Rome defeated Egypt, however, education declined, and has never regained its former prominence.

Although the Egyptian constitution guarantees five years of free grade school for all children, many poor children receive no education at all. For those who do, qualified teachers are few and classrooms are crowded. One result is that half of Egyptians are illiterate, with the rate of illiteracy higher among women (Cook 2001; Zaalouk 2001). Those who go



Within the Least Industrialized Nations are pockets of high quality schools taught by and for Westerners. This bicycle-powered school bus in Nepal transports children to the English Boarding School.

beyond the five years of grade school attend a preparatory school for three years. High school also lasts for three years. During the first two years, all students take the same courses, but during the third year they specialize in arts, science, or mathematics. All high school students take a monthly examination and a national exam at the end of the senior year.

The Functionalist Perspective: Providing Social Benefits

A central position of functionalism is that when the parts of society are working properly, each contributes to the well-being or stability of that society. The positive things that people intend their actions to accomplish are known as **manifest functions**. The positive consequences they did not intend are called **latent functions**. Let's look at the functions of education.

Teaching Knowledge and Skills

Education's most obvious manifest function is to teach knowledge and skills—whether the traditional three R's or their more contemporary counterparts, such as computer literacy. Each generation must train the next to fulfill the group's significant positions. Because our postindustrial society needs highly educated people, the schools supply them.

Often what counts is not the learning, but the *certification* of learning. Sociologist Randall Collins (1979) observed that we have become a **credential society**. By this, he means that employers use diplomas and degrees as *sorting* devices. For example, they assume that college graduates are responsible people, for presumably they have shown up on time for numerous classes, have turned in scores of assignments, and have demonstrated basic writing and thinking skills. The job skills a position requires can then be grafted onto this foundation, which has been certified by the college.

In some cases, job skills must be mastered before an individual is allowed to do certain work. On-the-job training was once adequate for physicians, engineers, and airline pilots, but with changes in information and technology this is no longer the case. This is precisely why doctors display their credentials so prominently. They stand before you certified by an institution of higher learning, their framed degrees declaring that they have completed rigorous training programs and are licensed to work on your body.

Cultural Transmission of Values

Another manifest function of education is the **cultural transmission** of values, a process by which schools pass a society's core values from one generation to the next. Consequently, schools in a socialist society stress values of socialism, while schools in a capitalist society teach values that support capitalism. U.S. schools, for example, stress respect for private property, individualism, and competition.

Regardless of a country's economic system, loyalty to the state is a cultural value, and schools around the world teach patriotism. U.S. schools teach that the United States is the best country in the world; Russians learn that no country is better than Russia; and French, German, Japanese, and Afghani students all learn the same about their respective countries. Grade school teachers in every country extol the virtues of the society's founders, their struggle for freedom from oppression, and the goodness of the country's basic social institutions.

Social Integration

Schools also bring about *social integration*; that is, they help to mold students into a more cohesive unit. When students salute the flag and sing the national anthem, for example, they become aware of the "greater government," and their sense of national identity grows. One of the best indicators of how education promotes political integration is the millions of immigrants who have attended U.S. schools, learned mainstream ideas and values, and

manifest functions in-
tended beneficial consequences
of people's actions

latent functions unintended
beneficial consequences of peo-
ple's actions

credential society the use
of diplomas and degrees to de-
termine who is eligible for jobs,
even though the diploma or de-
gree may be irrelevant to the
actual work

cultural transmission in
reference to education, the
ways in which schools transmit
a society's culture, especially its
core values



As this photo makes evident, among the major functions of education is the cultural transmission of values, such as patriotism and good citizenship. Another function of education, social integration, also is apparent from this photo. These students in Los Angeles are learning that despite their individual identities, they all are Americans.

given up their earlier national and cultural identities as they became Americans (Violas 1978; Rodriguez 1995; Carper 2000).

This integrative function of education goes far beyond making people similar in their appearance or speech. *To forge a national identity is to stabilize the political system.* If people identify with a society's social institutions and *perceive them as the basis of their welfare*, they have no reason to rebel. This function is especially significant when it comes to the lower social classes, from which most social revolutionaries are drawn. The wealthy already have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo, but to get the lower classes to identify with a social system *as it is* goes a long way toward preserving the system in its current state.

People with disabilities often have found themselves left out of the mainstream of society. To overcome this, U.S. schools have added a new manifest function, **mainstreaming**, or inclusion. This means that schools try to incorporate students with disabilities into

mainstreaming helping people to become part of the mainstream of society



In recent years, social integration, a traditional function of public education, has been extended. In a process called mainstreaming (also known as inclusion by educators), children who used to be sent to special schools now attend regular schools. Shown here is a class in Bergen County, New Jersey.

regular social activities. As a matter of routine policy, students with disabilities used to be placed in special schools. There, however, they learned to adjust to a specialized world; this left them ill prepared to cope with the dominant world. Educational philosophy then changed to one that encourages or even requires students with disabilities to attend regular schools. For people who cannot walk, wheelchair ramps are provided; for those who cannot hear, “signers” (interpreters who use sign language) may attend classes with them. Most students who are blind attend special schools, as do people with severe learning disabilities. Overall, one half of students with disabilities now attend school in regular classrooms (“State of American Education” 2000).

Gatekeeping

Gatekeeping, or determining which people will enter what occupations, is another function of education. One type of gatekeeping is *credentialing*—using diplomas and degrees to determine who is eligible for a job—which opens the doors of opportunity for some and closes it to others. Gatekeeping is often accomplished by **tracking**, sorting students into different educational programs on the basis of their perceived abilities. Some U.S. high schools funnel students into one of three tracks: general, college prep, or honors. Students on the lowest track are likely to go to work after high school, or to take vocational courses. Those on the highest track usually attend prestigious colleges. Those in between usually attend a local college or regional state university. The impact is lifelong, affecting opportunities for jobs, income, and lifestyle. Although schools have retreated from formal tracking, placing students in “ability groups” serves the same purpose (Lucas 1999; Tach and Farkas 2003).

Gatekeeping sorts people on the basis of merit, said functionalists Talcott Parsons (1940), Kingsley Davis, and Wilbert Moore (1945). They pioneered a view known as **social placement**, arguing that some jobs require few skills and can be performed by people of lesser intelligence. Other jobs, however, such as that of physician, require high intelligence and advanced education. To motivate capable people to postpone gratification and to put up with years of rigorous education, rewards of high income and prestige are held out. Thus, functionalists look on education as a system that, to the benefit of society, sorts people according to their abilities and ambition.

Replacing Family Functions

Over the years, the functions of U.S. schools have expanded, and they now rival some family functions. Child care is an example. Grade schools do double duty as babysitters for parents who both work, or for single mothers in the work force. Day care always has been a latent function of formal education, for it was an unintended consequence of schooling. Now, however, because most families have two wage earners, day care has become a manifest function. Some schools even offer child care both before and after formal classes. Another function schools are performing is giving sex education and birth control advice. This has stirred controversy, for some families resent this function being taken from them. Such disagreements over values have fueled a movement for alternative schooling, a topic discussed in the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page.

Other Functions

Education also fulfills other functions. For example, because most students are unmarried, high schools and colleges serve as *matchmaking* institutions. It is at school that many young people find their future spouses. The sociological significance is that schools funnel people into marriage with mates of similar background, interests, and education. Schools also establish *social networks*. Some adults maintain friendships from high school and college; others develop networks that benefit their careers. Finally, schools also help to *stabilize employment*. To keep millions of young people in school is to keep them out of the labor market, protecting the positions of older workers. Schools also *stabilize society* by keeping these millions off the streets, where they might be marching and protesting in search of unskilled jobs long lost to other nations.

gatekeeping the process by which education opens and closes doors of opportunity; another term for the social placement function of education

tracking the sorting of students into different educational programs on the basis of real or perceived abilities

social placement a function of education—funneling people into a society's various positions

Home Schooling: The Search for Quality and Values

"YOU'RE DOING WHAT? YOU'RE GOING TO teach your kids at home?" is the typical, incredulous response to parents who decide to home school their children. "How can you teach? You're not trained."

The unspoken question is, "What's wrong with you? Do you want your kids to be dumb and social misfits?"

The home schooling movement was small at first, just a trickle of parents who were dissatisfied with the rigidity of the school bureaucracy, the lax discipline, incompetent teachers, low standards, lack of focus on individual needs, and, in some instances, of hostility to their religion.

The trickle has grown. While not yet a raging river, the number of children who are being taught at home is roughly the size of the public school systems of Los Angeles and Chicago combined. The best estimate is that about 1 million children are being home schooled (Hill 2000; Lines 2000; Stevens 2001).

Home schooling seems to have burst onto the U.S. scene, but, surprisingly, it is not new. In the colonial era, home schooling was the *typical* form of education (Carper 2000). Today's home-schooling movement, which is restoring this earlier pattern, reflects a fascinating shift in U.S. politics. Contemporary home schooling was begun by political and religious liberals in the 1950s and 1960s. Their objection was that the schools were too conservative. Shortly after this, the schools grew more liberal, and in the 1970s and 1980s, political and religious conservatives embraced home schooling (Lines 2000; Stevens 2001).

Does home schooling work? Can parents who are not trained as teachers actually teach? The early results of testing



These children in Evanston, Illinois, are being home schooled by their mother. The text reports the surprising results of home schooling.

home schoolers were promising, but they were limited to small groups or to single states. Then in 1990, a national sample of 2,000 home schoolers showed that these students did better than students who were in public schools. Could this really be true?

To find out, researchers tested 21,000 home schoolers across the nation (Rudner 1999). The results are astounding. The median scores for every test at every grade were in the 70th to 80th percentiles. The home schoolers outscored both public and Catholic school students.

The basic reason for the stunning success of home schooling appears to be the parents' involvement in their children's education. Home schoolers receive an intense, one-on-one education. Their curriculum—although it includes the basics that are required by the state—is designed around the student's interests and needs. Ninety percent of students are taught primarily by their mothers, 10 percent by their fathers (Lines 2000). Ninety-eight percent of the fathers are in the labor

force, but only 22 percent of the mothers. The parents' income is also above average.

What about the children's socialization? Do home-schooled kids become social misfits? The studies show that they do just fine on this level, too. They actually have fewer behavior problems than children who attend conventional schools (Lines 2000). Home-schooled children are not isolated. As part of their educational experience, their parents take them to libraries, museums, factories, and nursing homes (Medlin 2000). For social activities, many of the children meet with other children who are being home schooled. Home-schooling associations also run conferences for parents and children and even hold sporting events.

What we do not know, of course, is what these home schoolers' test scores would have been if they had been taught in public schools. With their parents' concern and involvement in their education, they likely would have done very well there, too. Finally, although the Rudner study was large, about 21,000 students, it was not a random sample, and we cannot say how the *average* home schooler is doing. But, then, we have no random sample of all public school students, either.

For Your CONSIDERATION

Why do you think home schooling is turning out to be so successful? At current rates of growth, it won't be long before 2 million U.S. children are being taught at home. Do you think this movement may eventually become a threat to U.S. public schools? Would you like to have been home schooled? Would you consider home schooling your children?



Another function of schools is to provide employment. With 53 million students in grade and high schools, and another 15 million enrolled in college, U.S. education is big business. Primary and secondary schools provide jobs for 2.9 million teachers, while another million teach in colleges and universities (*Statistical Abstract* 2002: Tables 200, 239, 257). Millions more work as support personnel—aides, administrators, bus drivers, janitors, and secretaries. Another several million earn their living in industries that service schools—from building schools to manufacturing pencils, paper, desks, and computers.

The Conflict Perspective: Reproducing the Social Class Structure

Unlike functionalists, who look at the benefits of education, conflict theorists examine how education helps the elite to maintain their dominance. They stress that *education reproduces the social class structure*. By this, they mean that education perpetuates a society's social divisions. For example, regardless of abilities, the more well-to-do children are likely to take college preparatory courses and the poor, vocational courses. Both inherit the corresponding life opportunities laid down before they were born.

Let's look, then, at how education reproduces the social class structure.

The Hidden Curriculum

The term **hidden curriculum** refers to the unwritten rules of behavior and attitudes that schools teach in addition to the formal curriculum. Examples are obedience to authority and conformity to mainstream norms. Conflict theorists note how the hidden curriculum helps to perpetuate social inequalities.

To understand this central point, consider the way English is taught. Middle-class schools—whose teachers know where their students are headed—stress “proper” English and “good” manners. In contrast, the teachers in inner-city schools—who also know where *their* students are headed—allow ethnic and street language in the classroom. Each is helping to reproduce the social class structure. That is, each is preparing students to work in positions similar to those of their parents. The social class of some children destines them for higher positions. For these, they need “refined” speech and manners. The social destiny of others is closely supervised, low-status jobs. For these, they need only to obey rules (Bowles and Gintis 1976; 2002). Teaching these students “refined” speech and manners would be needless effort.

From the conflict perspective, even kindergarten has a hidden curriculum, as the Down-to-Earth Sociology box on the next page illustrates.

Conflict theorists stress that education reproduces a country's social class system. To support this position, they point out that the U.S. social classes attend separate schools, where they are taught by teachers of different backgrounds, and where they learn perspectives of the world that match their place in it. Shown here are students lunching with their teacher at St. Alban's School in Washington, D.C.



hidden curriculum the unwritten goals of schools, such as teaching obedience to authority and conformity to cultural norms

Kindergarten as Boot Camp

AFTER HE DID PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION in a kindergarten, sociologist Harry Gracey (2003) concluded that kindergarten is a sort of boot camp for education. Here, tender students from diverse backgrounds are molded into a compliant group that will, on command, follow classroom routines. "Show and tell," for example, does more than allow children to be expressive. It also teaches them to talk only when they are asked to speak. ("It's your turn, Jar-may.") The format also teaches children to request permission to talk ("Who knows what Adela has?") by raising a hand and being acknowledged. This ritual also teaches children to acknowledge the teacher's ideas as superior. She is the one who has the capacity to evaluate students' activities and ideas.

Gracey found a *hidden curriculum* in the other activities he observed. Whether students were drawing pictures, listening to records, eating snacks, or resting, the teachers would scold talkative students



and give approval to those who conformed. In short, the children received the message that the teacher—and, by inference, the entire school system—is the authority.

This, Gracey concluded, is not a side issue—it is *the* purpose of kindergarten. The kindergarten teacher's job is to teach children to "follow orders with unquestioning obedience." It is to "create and enforce a rigid social structure in the classroom through which they effectively control the behavior of most of the children for most of the school day."

This produces three kinds of students: (1) "good" students, those who submit to school-imposed discipline and come to identify with it; (2) "adequate" students, those who submit to the school's discipline but do not identify with it; and (3) "bad" students, those who refuse to submit to school routines. Children in the third category are called "problem children." To bring them into line, a tougher drill sergeant—the school psychologist—is called in. If

that doesn't work, the problem children are drugged into docility with Ritalin.

These early lessons extend beyond the classroom. As Gracey notes, school serves as a boot camp to prepare students for the routines of the work world, both on the assembly line and at the office. It helps turn children into docile workers who follow the routines imposed by "the company."



Tilting the Tests: Discrimination by IQ

Even intelligence tests play a part in keeping the social class system intact. For example, how would you answer the following question?

A symphony is to a composer as a book is to a(n)___
 ___ *paper* ___ *sculptor* ___ *musician* ___ *author* ___ *man*

You probably had no difficulty coming up with "author" as your choice. Wouldn't any intelligent person have done so?

In point of fact, this question raises a central issue in intelligence testing. Not all intelligent people would know the answer. This question contains *cultural biases*. Children from some backgrounds are more familiar with the concepts of symphonies, composers, and sculptors than are other children. Consequently, the test is tilted in their favor (Turner 1972; Ashe 1992).

Perhaps asking a different question will make the bias clearer. How would you answer this question?

If you throw dice and "7" is showing on the top, what is facing down?
 ___ *seven* ___ *snake eyes* ___ *box cars* ___ *little Joes* ___ *eleven*

This question, suggested by Adrian Dove (n.d.), a social worker in Watts, is slanted toward a lower-class experience. It surely is obvious that this *particular* cultural bias tilts the test so that children from some social backgrounds will perform better than others.

In short, because education's doors of opportunity swing wide open for some but have to be pried open by others, conflict theorists say that the educational system reproduces (or perpetuates) the social class structure. In fact, they add, this is one of its primary purposes.

The Correspondence Principle

In a classic analysis, conflict sociologists Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis (1976) used the term **correspondence principle** to refer to how schools reflect society. This term means that what is taught in a nation's schools *corresponds* to the characteristics of that society. The following list provides some examples.

Characteristics of Society

1. Capitalism
2. Social inequality
3. Racial-ethnic prejudice
4. Bureaucratic structure of corporations
5. Need for submissive workers
6. Need for dependable workers
7. Need to maintain armed forces

Characteristics of Schools

1. Promote competition
2. Provide unequal funding of schools
3. Funnel minorities into job training programs that demand little intellect
4. Provide a model of authority in the classroom
5. Make students submissive, as in the kindergarten boot camp
6. Enforce punctuality in attendance and homework
7. Promote patriotism (to fight for capitalism)

Thus, conclude conflict theorists, the U.S. educational system is designed to turn most students into dependable workers who will not question their bosses. It also is intended to produce some innovators in thought and action, but who can still be counted on to be loyal to the social system as it exists (Olneck and Bills 1980).

The Bottom Line: Family Background and the Educational System

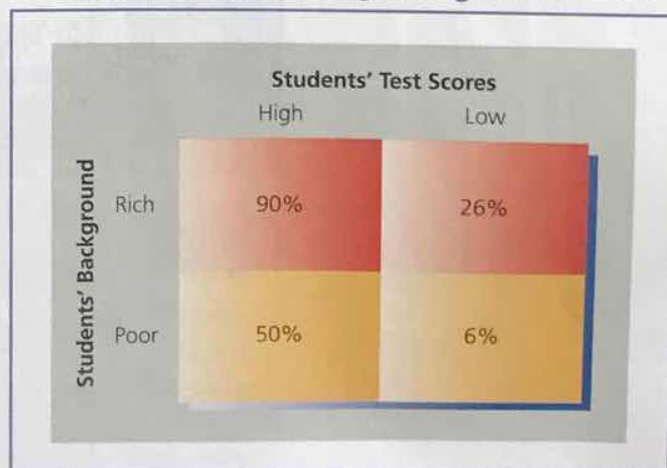
The end result of unequal funding, IQ tests, and so on is this: Family background is more important than test scores in predicting who attends college. Back in 1977, sociologist Samuel Bowles compared the college attendance of the brightest 25 percent of high school students with the intellectually weakest 25 percent. Figure 17.5 shows the results. Of the *brightest* 25 percent of high school students, 90 percent of those from affluent homes went to college, while only half of those from low-income homes did. Of the *intellectually weakest* students, 26 percent from affluent homes went to college, while only 6 percent from poorer homes did so. Other sociologists, both in the United States and England, have confirmed this: If you rank families from the poorest to the richest, as the family's income increases so does the likelihood that their children will attend college (Manski 1992–1993; Reay et al. 2001). Similarly, sociologist Dalton Conley (2001) found that the wealthier a family is, the more years of schooling their children complete.

Conflict theorists point out that the educational system reproduces not only the U.S. social class structure, but also its divisions of race and ethnicity. From Figure 17.6, you can see that, compared with whites, African Americans and Latinos are less likely to complete high school and less likely to go to college. The difference is the greatest for Latinos. Because those without college degrees are more likely to end up with low-paying, dead-end jobs, you can see how this supports the

correspondence principle

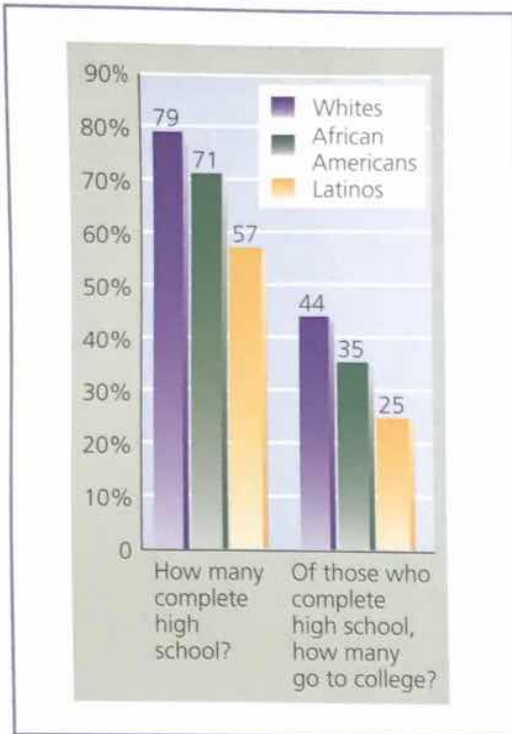
the sociological principle that schools correspond to (or reflect) the social structure of their society

Figure 17.5 Who Goes to College? Comparing Social Class and Personal Ability in Determining College Attendance

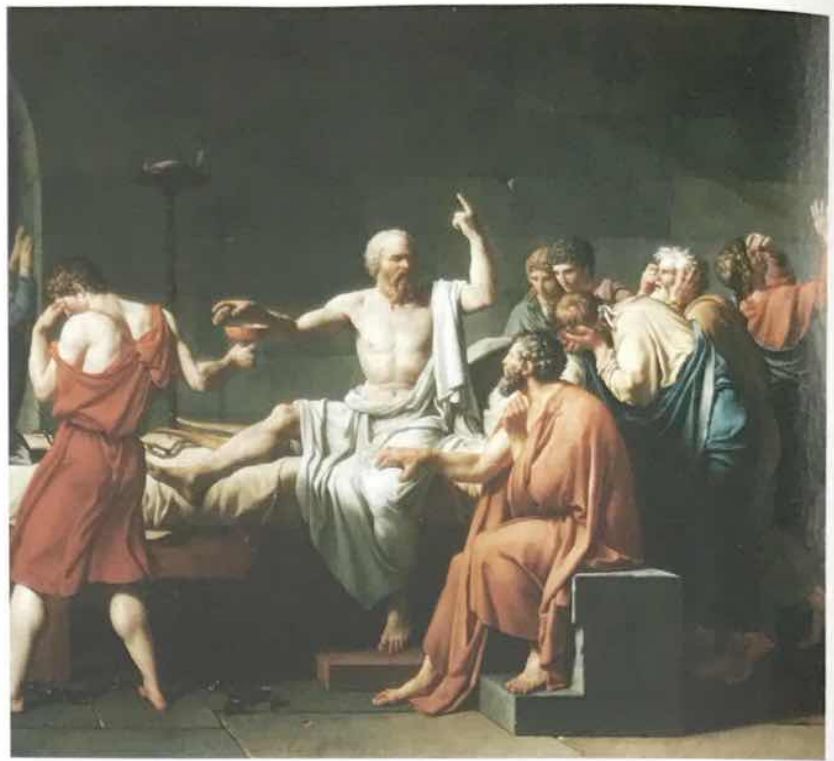


Source: Bowles 1977.

Figure 17.6 The Funneling Effects of Education: Race and Ethnicity



Note: The source gives totals only for these three groups.
 Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 252.



Education can be a dangerous thing. Socrates, who taught in Greece about 400 years before the birth of Christ, was forced to take poison because his views challenged those of the establishment. Usually, however, educators reinforce the perspectives of the elite, teaching students to take their place within the social structure. This 1787 painting of Socrates was done by Jacques Louis David.

conflict view—how education is helping to reproduce the racial-ethnic structure for the next generation.

As you know, the type of college you attend is also important. As Table 17.1 shows, of those who attend college, there isn't much difference in the percentage of whites, African Americans, and Asian Americans who go to four-year private colleges. These totals show growing equality and do not support the conflict view. But look at how much less likely Latinos and Native Americans are to attend private four-year colleges. Coupled with their being less likely to attend college in the first place, you can see how this will help to perpetuate society's racial-ethnic divisions.

Table 17.1 Of Those Who Go to College, What Percentage Attends Each Type of College?

Racial-Ethnic Group	Public College	Private College	2-Year College	4-Year College
Whites	76%	24%	36%	64%
African Americans	76%	24%	41%	59%
Asian Americans	79%	21%	39%	61%
Latinos	83%	17%	56%	44%
Native Americans	85%	15%	50%	50%

Source: *Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 258.

Conflict theorists stress that a major purpose of the educational system is to *reproduce social inequality*, to help keep the social class structure intact from one generation to the next. A variety of techniques funnel the children of the poor into community college job training programs and the children of the middle class into state universities and small private colleges. The children of the elite, in contrast, are funneled into exclusive boarding high schools, where they are taught in small classes by well-paid teachers (Persell et al. 1992; Powell 1996). The social networks that these privileged children inherit come with admissions officers who have connections with the nation's most elite colleges. Some of these networks are so efficient that *half* of the graduating classes of these private schools are admitted to Ivy League universities (Persell and Cookson 1986; Golden 2003).

The Symbolic Interactionist Perspective: Fulfilling Teacher Expectations

Functionalists look at how education benefits society, and conflict theorists examine how education perpetuates social inequality. Symbolic interactionists, in contrast, study face-to-face interaction in the classroom. They have found that the expectations of teachers have profound consequences for their students.

The Rist Research

Why do some people get tracked into college prep courses and others into vocational ones? There is no single answer, but in what has become a classic study, sociologist Ray Rist came up with some intriguing findings. Rist (1970) did participant observation in an African American grade school with an African American faculty. He found that after only eight days in the classroom, the kindergarten teacher felt that she knew the children's abilities well enough to assign them to three separate worktables. To Table 1, Mrs. Caplow assigned those she considered to be "fast learners." They sat at the front of the room, closest to her. Those whom she saw as "slow learners," she assigned to Table 3, located at the back of the classroom. She placed "average" students at Table 2, in between the other tables.

This seemed strange to Rist. He knew that the children had not been tested for ability, yet their teacher was certain that she could identify the bright and slow children. Investigating further, Rist found that social class was the underlying basis for assigning the children to the different tables. Middle-class students were separated out for Table 1, children from poorer homes to Tables 2 and 3. The teacher paid the most attention to the children at Table 1, who were closest to her, less to Table 2, and the least to Table 3. As the year went on, children from Table 1 perceived that they were treated better and came to see themselves as smarter. They became the leaders in class activities and even ridiculed children at the other tables, calling them "dumb." Eventually, the children at Table 3 disengaged themselves from many classroom activities. At the end of the year, only the children at Table 1 had completed the lessons that prepared them for reading.

This early tracking stuck. Their first-grade teacher looked at the work they had accomplished and placed students from Table 1 at her Table 1. She treated her tables much as the kindergarten teacher had, and the children at Table 1 again led the class.

The children's reputations continued to follow them. The second-grade teacher reviewed their scores and also divided her class into three groups. The first she named the "Tigers" and, befitting their name, gave them challenging readers. Not surprisingly, the Tigers came from the original Table 1 in kindergarten. The second group she called the "Cardinals." They came from the original Tables 2 and 3. Her third group consisted

of children she had failed the previous year, whom she called the “Clowns.” The Cardinals and Clowns were given less advanced readers.

Rist concluded that *each child’s journey through school was determined by the eighth day of kindergarten!* This research, as with that done on the Saints and Roughnecks (reported in Chapter 4), demonstrates the power of labels. They can set people on courses of action that affect the rest of their lives.

What occurred was a **self-fulfilling prophecy**. This term, coined by sociologist Robert Merton (1949), refers to a false assumption of something that is going to happen but which then comes true simply because it was predicted. For example, if people believe an unfounded rumor that a bank is going to fail, they all rush to the bank to demand their money. The prediction—although originally false—is now likely to come true.

The Rosenthal-Jacobson Experiment

All of us know about teacher expectations—that some teachers have higher standards and expect work of a higher quality. Teacher expectations, however, also work at a subtle level. In what has become a classic experiment, social psychologists Robert Rosenthal and Lenore Jacobson (1968) tried out a new test in a San Francisco grade school. They tested the children’s abilities and then told the teachers which students would probably “spurt” ahead during the year. They instructed the teachers to watch these students’ progress, but not to let the students or their parents know about the test results. At the end of the year, they tested the students again and found that the IQs of the predicted “spurters” had jumped ten to fifteen points higher than those of the other children.

You might think that Rosenthal and Jacobson became famous for developing such a powerful scholastic aptitude test. Actually, their “test” was another of those covert experiments. Rosenthal and Jacobson had simply given routine IQ tests to the children and had then *randomly* chosen 20 percent of the students as “spurters.” These students were *no* different from the others in the classroom. A self-fulfilling prophecy had taken place: The teachers expected more from those particular students, and the students responded. In short, expect dumb and you get dumb. Expect smart, and you get smart.

Although attempts to replicate this experiment have had mixed results (Pilling and Pringle 1978), a good deal of research confirms that, *regardless of their ability*, students who are expected to do better generally do so, and those who are expected to do poorly, do so (Snyder 1993; McKown and Weinstein 2002).

How Do Teacher Expectations Work?

Sociologist George Farkas (1990a, 1990b, 1996) became interested in how teacher expectations affect grades. Using a stratified sample of students in a large school district in Texas, he found that *even though they had the same test scores*, girls averaged higher course grades than did boys. Asian Americans also received higher grades than did African Americans, Latinos, and whites who had the same test scores.

At first, this may sound like more of the same old news—another case of discrimination. But this explanation doesn’t fit, which is what makes the finding fascinating. Look who the victims are. It is most unlikely that the teachers would be prejudiced against boys and whites. To interpret these unexpected results, Farkas used symbolic interactionism. He observed that some students “signal” to their teachers that they are “good students.” They show an eagerness to cooperate, and they quickly agree with what the teacher says. They also show that they are “trying hard.” The teachers pick up these signals and reward these “good students” with better grades. Girls and Asian Americans, the researcher concludes, are better at displaying these characteristics so coveted by teachers.

We do not have enough information on how teachers form their expectations or how they communicate them to students. Nor do we know much about how students “signal” messages to teachers. Perhaps you will become the educational sociologist who will shed more light on this significant area of human behavior.

The Sociology and New Technology box on the next page discusses how technology is producing new forms of “signaling” and of student-teacher interaction.

self-fulfilling prophecy

Robert Merton’s term for an originally false assertion that becomes true simply because it was predicted

Internet University: No Walls, No Ivy, No All Night Parties

Distance learning, courses taught to students who are not physically present with their instructor, is not new. For decades, we have had correspondence courses. Today, however, telecommunications have transformed distance learning. Satellites, computers, video conferencing, and streaming video are making cyber colleges part of mainstream education. Using video links, students are able to watch the professor on their screen. Clicking a little icon, they can "raise their hands" to ask questions. Eventually, computer-mounted cameras may allow everyone in the class to see everyone else simultaneously. Spider-web diagrams let the instructor know who is e-mailing others—and who is holding back. Tucked deeper in the software is a program to allow deans (supervisors) to scrutinize the instructors. The deans will get reports, for example, that let them know how long it takes instructors to answer e-mail from students.

Distance learning offers tremendous potential for increasing cultural diversity,



to the benefit of both students and professors. It is possible to enjoy a stimulating international experience without ever leaving the country. For example, sociology professors at the State University of New York and the State University of Belarus (Minsk, Russia) jointly taught an online course on Social Control. With their political experiences so different from one another, the American and Russian stu-

dents found that the course opened their eyes to different realities (Beaman 2003).

Why should formal education be limited to walled classrooms? Think of the possibilities of the Net. We could study human culture and compare notes on eating, dating, or burial customs with fellow students in Thailand, Iceland, South Africa, Germany, Egypt, China, and Australia. We could write a joint paper in which we compare our experiences with one another, within the context of theories taught in the text, and then submit our paper to our mutual instructor.

Will we eventually go from kindergarten to grad school with classmates from around the world? While this may sound intriguing, no walls also means no joking in the hallway or dorm, no flirting after class, no getting together over a cup of coffee. . . .

A different view of distance learning is presented in the Sociology and the New Technology box on the next page.



Problems in U.S. Education—and Their Solutions

To conclude this chapter, let's examine two problems facing U.S. education—and consider their potential solutions.

Problems: Mediocrity and Violence

The Rising Tide of Mediocrity All Arizona high school sophomores took a math test. It covered the math that sophomores should know. Seven of eight failed it. Meanwhile, in New York, to get its students to graduate, the state had to drop its passing

Capitalism and Distance Learning: Marketing Education in Cyberspace

Always eager for profits and looking for new areas for investment, capitalists saw the potential of advanced communications technology for education. For them, distance learning was a perfect answer. The potential for profit is huge, as distance learning requires little infrastructure—no classrooms, desks, blackboards, or parking lots. In addition, once developed, the course can be repackaged and sold over and over again. Capitalists also want expanding markets, and with the demand for education increasing around the world, distance learning supplied this, too. In many ways, distance learning is a capitalist's dream.

As stressed in this text, one of the main social changes that is enveloping us all is the globalization of capitalism. Distance learning has become part of this fundamental transformation of our world. With the United States being the world's leading capitalist country, it was

only natural that U.S. universities would lead the charge, cobble together degrees in cyberspace, and sell them around the world.

But to attract the best-paying customers, marketers need to sell name brands. University of Phoenix—what is that? The name of a bird? A town in Arizona? Is a degree from this virtual school worth anything? The name Cardean University has the same problem.

How then could the marketers get brand names into the virtual market? The promoters of Cardean University, which exists only in cyberspace, hit upon an ingenious solution. Brand name universities were hesitant to venture into this unknown territory as it might sully their ivied reputations. But joining together, they could spread the risk. Stanford, Columbia, Carnegie Mellon, and the University of Chicago decided to participate in offering a joint degree online. The promoters of Cardean were overjoyed, for

they could market a degree associated with these hallowed names. And what is more natural for educational capitalists to sell than a masters in business, which is just what their package of courses offers (Pohl 2003)?

It's a global market, and we are still on the frontiers of the Wild West. The new educational capitalists have accurately grasped this, and they envision a student body of *millions* of people around the world. Think of the vast numbers of people in Asia and Africa who don't have access to universities. Of course, most of them don't have any money either—but the children of the elite do. So do the children of the *nouveau riche*. Admittedly, the \$24,000 for the Cardean M.B.A. (Pohl 2003) is a bit steep for most of the market, but it is still much less than the \$100,000 it costs to get an online M.B.A. from Duke University (Forelle 2003).



grade to 55 out of 100 (Steinberg 2000). Some New York City schools are so bad that officials have given up and turned them over to private, for-profit companies (Wyatt 2000). When test results showed that 1,500 of Michigan's high schools "needed improvement," officials lowered the percentage needed to pass. Overnight, only 200 schools "needed improvement" (Dillon 2003). Perhaps nothing so captures what is wrong with U.S. schools than this event, reported by sociologist Thomas Sowell (1993b):

[A]n international study of 13-year-olds . . . found that Koreans ranked first in mathematics and Americans last. When asked if they thought they were "good at mathematics," only 23 percent of the Korean youngsters said "yes"—compared to 68 percent of American 13-year-olds. The American educational dogma that students should "feel good about themselves" was a success in its own terms—though not in any other terms.

Figure 17.7, which summarizes the scores on the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT), indicates how sharply student achievement declined from the 1960s to 1980. At that point, educators—and even Congress—expressed concern and demanded greater accountability. Schools raised their standards, and math scores started to climb. The recovery has been excellent, and, as you can see, today's high school seniors now score higher than seniors did in the 1960s. The verbal scores, however, have not recovered.

Why the SAT scores declined has been a controversy. The president of the American Federation of Teachers said that the lower test scores meant that teachers were doing a *better* job! They were getting more students to stay in high school and to go on to college. Students from poorer academic backgrounds, who used to drop out of high school, had become part of the test results (Sowell 1993b). Perhaps this was the reason. But if so, it did not indicate success, but a severe underlying problem—teachers giving inferior education to disadvantaged students.

Now that the math scores have recovered, we can look to better teaching as the answer. Administrators are requiring more of teachers, and teachers are requiring more of students. Each is performing according to the higher expectations.

How about the lower verbal scores? They may have declined because children read less and watch more television and play more video games (Rigdon and Swasy 1990). Students who read little acquire a smaller vocabulary and less rigor in thought and verbal expression. The “Dummed down” textbooks that require little thought certainly haven't helped (Hayes and Wolfer 1993). Nor have lowered teacher expectations—less homework, fewer term papers, grade inflation. Then, too, there are the burned-out teachers who are more interested in collecting paychecks than in educating their students.

How to Cheat on the SATs If you receive poor grades this semester, wouldn't you like to use a magic marker to, presto!, change them into higher grades? I suppose every student would. Now imagine that you had that power. Would you use it?

Some people in authority apparently have found such a magic marker, and they are using it to raise our low national SAT scores. Table 274 of the 1996 edition of the *Statistical Abstract of the United States* reports that in 1995 only 8.3 percent of students earned 600 or more on the verbal portion of the SAT test. The very next edition, in 1997, however, holds a pleasant surprise. Table 276 tells us that it was really 21.9 percent of students who scored 600 or higher in 1995. Later editions of this source retain the higher figure. What a magic marker!

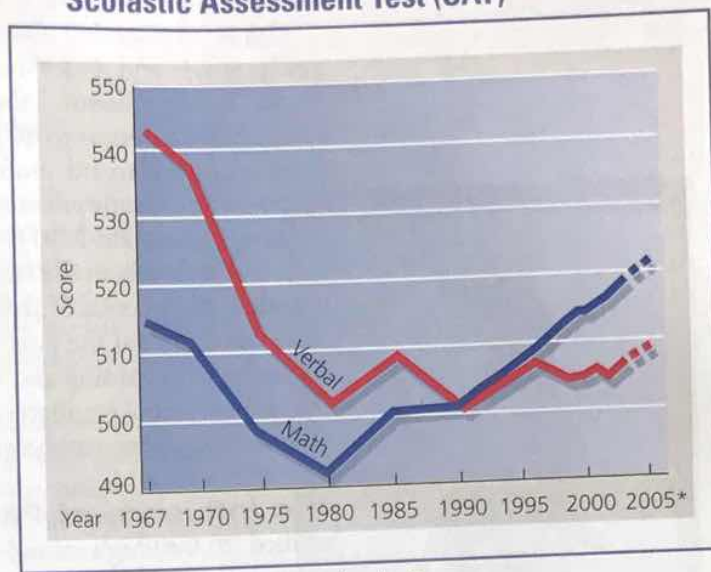
In the twinkle of an eye, we get another bonus. Somehow, between 1996 and 1997 the scores of *everyone* who took the test in previous years improved. Now that's the kind of power we all would like to have. Students, grab your report cards. Workers, change those numbers on your paycheck.

It certainly is easier to give simpler tests than to do better teaching. And this is what has happened to the SAT. The test is now shorter and students have more time to answer fewer questions. To make the verbal part easier, the test on antonyms was dropped (Manno 1995; Stecklow 1995). Results of previous years were then “rescored” to match the easier test. And even with these measures, the national verbal scores remain low.

This “dummying down” of the SAT is yet another form of grade inflation, the topic to which we shall now turn.

Grade Inflation, Social Promotion, and Functional Illiteracy High school teachers used to be stingy with their A's, reserving them for outstanding performance, but now they give more A's than C's. Since grades went up while learning went

Figure 17.7 National Results of the Scholastic Assessment Test (SAT)



Note: Broken lines indicate the author's estimate.

Source: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract* 2002; Table 244; "SAT Scores..." 2003.

down, some of today's A's are the C's of years past. Another sign of **grade inflation** is that 44 percent of all college freshmen have an overall high school grade point average of A. Ninety-four percent have at least a B average (*Statistical Abstract* 2002:Table 264).

Grade inflation has also hit the Ivy League. At Harvard University, half of the course grades are A's and A-'s. Ninety percent of Harvard students graduate with honors. To rein in the "honor inflation," the Harvard faculty voted to limit the number of students who graduate with honors to 60 percent of a class (Hartocollis 2002). To match his colleagues' grading, one Harvard professor gives an official, inflated grade for the student's transcript—and then in private gives a grade that reflects his true evaluation of the student's learning (Mansfield 2001).

Grade inflation in the face of declining standards has been accompanied by **social promotion**, the practice of passing students from one grade to the next even though they have not mastered the basic materials. One result is **functional illiteracy**, people having difficulty with reading and writing even though they have graduated from high school. Some high school graduates cannot fill out job applications; others can't figure out if they get the right change at the grocery store.

The Influence of Peer Groups Two psychologists and a sociologist, who studied 20,000 high school students in California and Wisconsin, found that the peer group is the most important factor on how teenagers do in school (Steinberg et al. 1996). Simply put: Those who hang out with good students tend to do well; those who hang out with friends who do poorly in school do poorly themselves. Student subcultures include informal norms about grades. Some groups have norms of classroom excellence, while others sneer at getting good grades. The applied question that arises from this research, of course, is how to build educational achievement into student culture.

Violence in Schools Some U.S. schools have deteriorated to the point that safety is an issue (Cantor and Wright 2003). To get into some schools, students must pass through metal detectors, and uniformed guards have become a permanent fixture. Some grade schools even supplement their traditional fire drills with "drive-by shooting drills" (Toch 1993; Grossman 1995).

And what about school shootings, such as the event with which we opened this chapter? For a surprising analysis, read the Mass Media box on the next page.

Solutions: Safety, Standards, and Other Reforms

It is one thing to identify problems, and quite another to find solutions for them. Let's consider some solutions to the problems we just reviewed.

A Secure Learning Environment The first step in offering a good education is to make students safe and free from fear. With the high rate of violence in U.S. society, we can expect some violence to spill over into the schools. To minimize that spillover, school administrators can expel all students who threaten the welfare of others. They also can refuse to tolerate threats, violence, and weapons. The zero tolerance policy for guns and other weapons on school property that school boards and administrators have adopted helped to make schools safer.

Higher Standards Within a secure learning environment, then, we can take steps to improve the quality of education. To offer a quality education, we need quality teachers. Don't we already have them? Most teachers are qualified, and if motivated, can do an excellent job. But a large number of teachers are not qualified. Consider just a couple of items. California requires that its teachers pass an educational skills test. California's teachers did so poorly that to get enough teachers to fill their classrooms officials had to drop the passing grade to the 10th grade level. For fifteen of our states, teachers need to be able to read only at the lowest quarter of the national average (Schemo 2002). I don't know about you, but it would seem that this situation is appalling, that it should make

grade inflation higher grades given for the same work; a general rise in student grades without a corresponding increase in learning

social promotion passing students on to the next grade even though they have not mastered basic materials

functional illiterate a high school graduate who has difficulty with basic reading and math

School Shootings: Exploring a Myth

The media sprinkle their reports of school shootings with such dramatic phrases as "alarming proportions," "outbreak of violence," and "out of control." They give us the impression that schools all over the nation are set to erupt in gunfire. The public views the shootings as convincing evidence that something is seriously wrong with society. Parents used to consider schools safe havens, but no longer. Those naïve thoughts have been shattered by the bullets that have sprayed our schools—or at least by the media's portrayal of growing danger and violence in our schools.

Have our schools really become war zones, as the mass media would have us

believe? Certainly events such as those at Columbine High School portrayed in this chapter's opening vignette are disturbing, but we need to probe deeper than newspaper headlines and televised images in order to understand their social significance.

When we do, we find that the media's sensationalist reporting has created a myth. Contrary to "what everyone knows," *there is no trend toward greater school violence. In fact, the situation is just the opposite—the trend is toward greater safety.* Despite the dramatic school shootings that make headlines, as Table 17.2 shows, shooting deaths at schools are decreasing.



This picture was taken when Drew Golden was 6 years old. Five years later, when Drew was 11, he teamed up with 13-year-old Mitch Johnson. Together, they ambushed their middle school teachers and classmates in Jonesboro, Arkansas. They wounded nine students and one teacher and killed four girls and one teacher.

This is not to say that school shootings are not a serious problem. Even one student being wounded or killed is too many. But, contrary to the impression fostered by the media, we are seeing a decrease of school shooting deaths.

This is why we need sociology: to quietly, dispassionately search for facts so we can better understand the events that shape our lives. The first requirement for solving any problem is accurate data, for we do not want to create solutions based on hysteria. The information presented in this box may not make for sensational headlines, but it does serve to explode the myth that the media have created.

Table 17.2 Exploding a Myth: Deaths at U.S. Schools^a

School Year	Shooting Deaths	Other Homicides ^b	Deaths by Gender		Total
			Boys	Girls	
1992–1993	45	11	49	7	56
1993–1994	41	12	41	12	53
1994–1995	16	5	18	3	21
1995–1996	29	7	26	10	36
1996–1997	15	11	18	8	26
1997–1998	36	8	27	17	44
1998–1999	25	6	24	7	31
1999–2000	16	16	26	6	32
2000–2001	18	4	18	4	22
2001–2002	3	1	4	0	4
2002–2003	5	1	5	1	6
Mean, 1992–2003	22.6	7.5	23.3	6.8	30.1

^aIncludes all school-related homicides, even those that occurred on the way to or from school; includes suicides; includes school personnel killed at school by other adults; includes adults who had nothing to do with the school but who were found dead on school property.

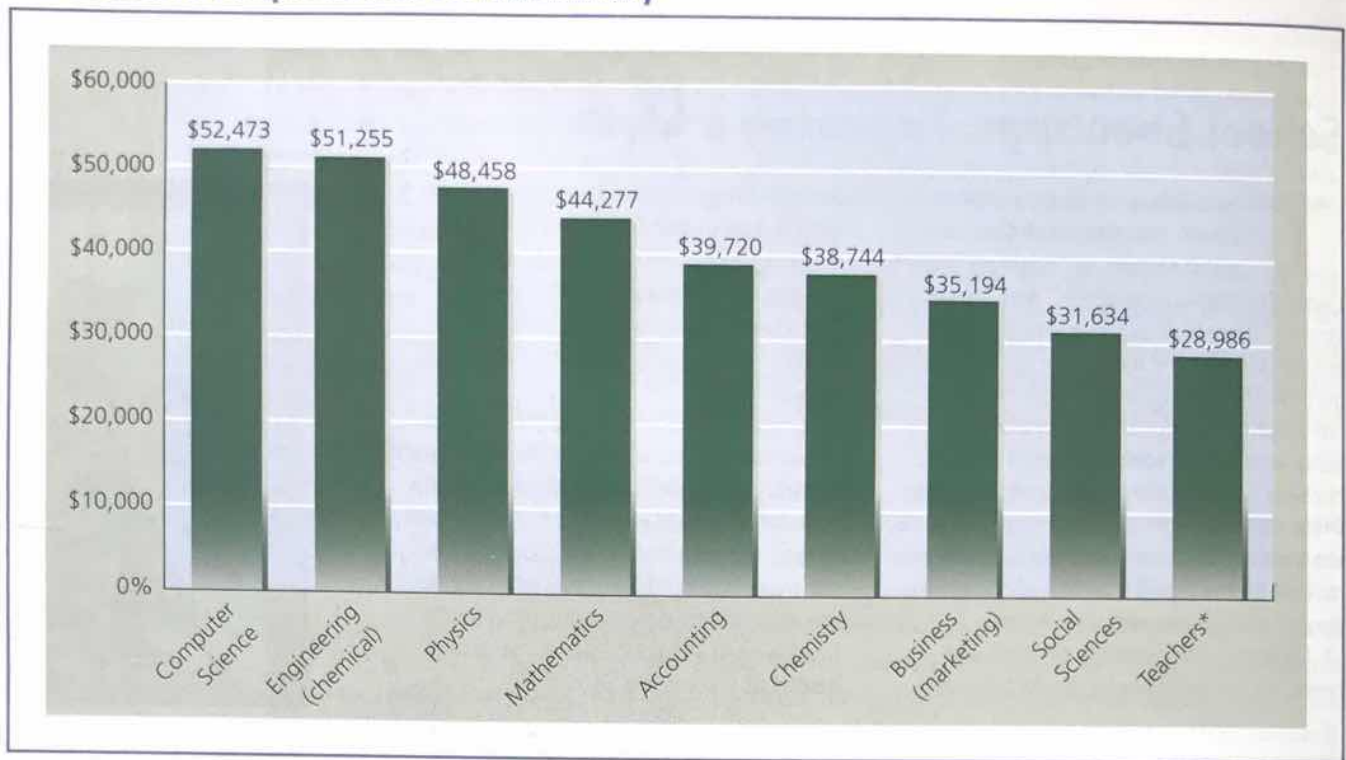
^bBeating, hanging, jumping, stabbing, and strangling.

Source: National School Safety Center, 2003.

national headlines and be considered a national disgrace. If we want to improve teaching, we need to insist that teachers meet high standards.

Our schools compete with private industry for the same pool of college graduates. If the starting salary in other fields is higher than it is in education, those fields will attract

Figure 17.8 Starting Salaries of U.S. College Graduates: Public School Teachers Compared with Private Industry



Sources: By the author. Based on *Statistical Abstract 2002*:Table 275; "Survey and ..." 2003.

On average, students in Roman Catholic schools score higher on national tests than students in public schools. Is it because Roman Catholic schools have better students, or because they do better teaching? The text reports the sociological findings.

brighter, more energetic graduates. Figure 17.8 above highlights the abysmal job we are doing in this competition.

What else can we do to improve the quality of education? A study by sociologists James Coleman and Thomas Hoffer (1987) provides helpful guidelines. They wanted to see why the test scores of students in Roman Catholic schools average 15 to 20 percent higher than those of students in public schools. Is it because Catholic schools attract better students, while public schools have to put up with everyone? To find out, Coleman and Hoffer tested 15,000 students in public and Catholic high schools.

Their findings? From the sophomore through the senior years, students at Catholic schools pull ahead of public school students by a full grade in verbal and math skills. The superior test performance of students in Catholic schools, they concluded, is due not to better students, but to higher standards. Catholic schools have not watered down their curricula as have public schools. The researchers also underscored the importance of parental involvement. Parents and teachers in Catholic schools reinforce each other's commitment to learning.

These findings support the basic principle reviewed earlier about teacher expectations: Students perform better when they are expected to meet higher standards. To this, you might want to reply, "Of course. I knew that. Who wouldn't?" Somehow, however, this basic principle is lost on many teachers, who end up teaching at a low level because they expect little of their students and have supervisors who accept low student performance. The reason, actually, is probably not their lack of awareness of such basics, but, rather, the organization that entraps them, a bureaucracy in which ritual replaces performance. To understand this point better, you may wish to review Chapter 7.



If we raise standards, we can expect protest. It is less upsetting to let standards slip and to tell all students they are doing well than it is to require rigorous teaching and learning. When Florida decided to require its high school seniors to pass an assessment test in order to receive a diploma, 13,000 students failed the test. Parents banded together in protest—not to demand better teaching but to put economic pressure on the state to drop the new test. They asked people to boycott Disney World and to not buy Florida orange juice (Canedy 2003).

Ultimately, then, we must expect more not only of students, but also of teachers and administrators. They, too, must be held accountable to higher standards. One way to do this is to peg their salaries, or at least bonuses, to the performance of their students. Of course, we have to make certain that the test results are legitimate. Unfortunately, some teachers and administrators will cheat for money—giving students the answers and throwing out low test scores (Kantrowitz and McGinn 2000).

Other Reforms—From Vouchers to Charter Schools There is no lack of proposals for improving schools, but perhaps the one that has gained the most media attention—both because it is so controversial and because it holds such potential—is *vouchers*. The state would give the parents of each school-age child a voucher to be spent on the school of the parents' choice. As you can see from Figure 17.4 (page 496), the states have a great deal of money to work with, and the amount available per pupil would be large. Public and private schools—even those operated by individuals and businesses—would compete for the vouchers. With each school's test results published in local newspapers and available online, parents would be able to shop around for the school they like best. One major objection is that vouchers might be used to finance religious schools.

In an attempt to save its inner city schools, Milwaukee, Wisconsin, launched an experimental voucher program in 1990. Officials asked John Witte, a political scientist, to evaluate the results. He knew he was stepping into a minefield, that whether his findings were negative or positive, they would be controversial. His main finding was that some of the schools did well and others did poorly. Overall, the voucher students didn't score any higher than did comparable public school students (Davis 2002).

A second step in school reform is the creation of charter schools. **Charter schools** are public schools that, although financed by tax money, are owned and administered by independent groups. They are *chartered* by the state or some state agency to use innovative techniques in order to improve academic standards. There is no single model. Some charter schools are owned and run by parents, others by for-profit corporations. Some are in the inner city, others in the suburbs. A number are open the entire year. One is operated almost entirely online. A trait they share is freedom from teachers' unions and the public school bureaucracy. As you can imagine, teachers' unions and public school administrators have fought the creation of charter schools. Although these schools have great promise, it is too soon to tell if they will meet their potential (Manno and Finn 1998; Perreault 2000; Anderson et al. 2002).

Many applaud charter schools as a way of bringing educational reform and yet avoiding the political controversy of vouchers—that of funding religious schools. Opponents, however, fear that charter schools, like vouchers, will doom public schools by siphoning off their resources. Proponents of these reforms are unfazed by this objection. They say that public schools need to compete in the marketplace. If they don't produce better results, they *should* fold. It is no wonder that public school teachers and administrators fear reform.

To bring about educational reform, in 2002 the federal government passed the *No Child Left Behind Act*. The law requires each state to improve its schools and to ensure that no child is trapped in a failing school. To evaluate the states' progress, students are tested annually and each school's performance is made public. Students in failing schools are given the opportunity to transfer to better schools. It is too early to evaluate the results of this law, but we can note that practical problems have arisen. For example, Ana Vasquez, the mother of Desiree Lopez, a third grader in a failing school in New York City, wanted to transfer her daughter to a good school. When she found out that the best-performing school on the list the city gave her was an hour and a half from her home, she said, "What kind of choice is that? There is no option I can take." Her daughter remains in the failing school (Medina 2003).

Reform in anything needs a guiding principle. I suggest that this serve as the guiding principle in reforming education: The problem is *not* the ability of the students, but,

charter schools schools that, although financed by taxes, are owned and run by private groups

rather, it lies in the nature of the educational system. This principle is illustrated by the following Thinking Critically section, with which we close this chapter.

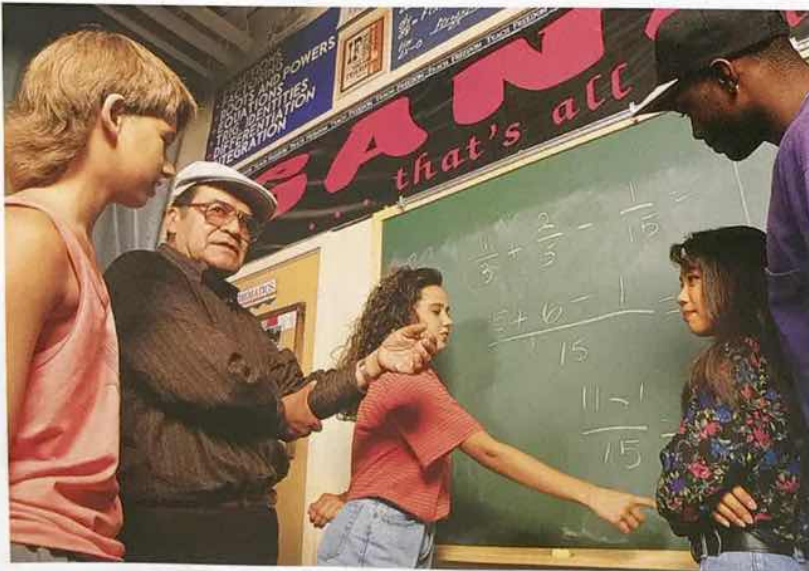
THINKING Critically

Breaking Through the Barriers: Restructuring The Classroom

Jaime Escalante taught in an East Los Angeles inner-city school that was plagued with poverty, crime, drugs, and gangs. In this self-defeating environment, he taught calculus. His students scored so highly on national tests that officials suspected cheating. They asked his students to retake the test. They did. This time, they earned even higher scores. How did Escalante do it?

First, Escalante had to open his students' minds to the possibility of success, that they *could* learn. Most Latino students were tracked into craft classes where they made jewelry and birdhouses. "Our kids are just as talented as anyone else. They just need the opportunity to show it," Escalante said. "They just don't think about becoming scientists or engineers."

To say that today's schoolchildren can't learn as well as previous schoolchildren is a case of blaming the victim. As discussed in the text, Jaime Escalante (shown here) demonstrated that teachers can motivate even highly deprived students to study hard and to excel in learning. His experience challenges us to rethink our approach to education.



Students also need to see learning as a way out of the barrio, as the path to good jobs. Escalante arranged for foundations to provide money for students to attend the colleges of their choice. Students learned that if they did well, their poverty wouldn't stop them.

Escalante also changed the system of instruction. He had his students think of themselves as a team, of him as the coach, and the national math exams as a sort of Olympics for which they were preparing. To foster team identity, students wore team jackets, caps, and T-shirts with logos that identified them as part of the math team. Before class, his students did "warm-ups" (hand clapping and foot stomping to a rock song).

Escalante's team had practice schedules as rigorous as a championship football team. Students had to sign a contract that bound them to participate in a summer math program, to complete the daily homework, and to attend Saturday morning and after-school study sessions. To remind students that self-discipline pays off, Escalante covered his walls with posters of sports figures—Michael Jordan, Babe Ruth, Jackie Joyner-Kersey, and Scottie Pippin.

The sociological point is this: The problem was not the ability of the students. Their failure to do well in school was not due to something within them. The problem was the system, the way classroom instruction was designed. When Escalante changed the system of instruction—and brought in hope—both attitudes and performance changed.

For Your CONSIDERATION . . .

What principles discussed in this or earlier chapters did Escalante apply? What changes do you think we can make in education to bring about similar results all over the country?

Sources: Based on Barry 1989; Meek 1989; Escalante and Dirmann 1990; Hilliard 1991.