

Sociology Assignment

Problems with Public Education

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Note: This paper is an excerpt of a paper that I wrote for a sociology class several years ago. The assignment involved selecting an excerpt from the class textbook, which discussed an array of major societal problems, then write a term paper that offered solutions to some of those issues.

Reading an excerpt from *The Shame of a Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*, it is clear that the public education system provides a textbook example of an institutional construct that can be examined objectively through the lens of a sociological analytical tool known as conflict perspective (module 9: 5).

Jonathan Kozol documents his visits to more than 60 schools (Kozol: *The Shame of a Nation*) and points out the ironic state of affairs in schools years after the hard one struggle to achieve racial integration in the educational system. Today, schools bearing the names of deceased civil rights icons, such as Thurgood Marshall, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr. have not only failed to integrate its student body, still persistently more than 90 percent nonwhite, but the schools are inferior.

Public schools are often the embodiment of institutional oppression (Konradi & Schmidt, *Reading between the Lines*: 29). Kozol's use of the word "savage" in order to describe the conditions that minority children endure is an appropriate description given the socio-economic consequences that they will encounter based on an assignment of separate and unequal schooling. The system in effect perpetrating racial and economic inequalities via a social structure that is a public issue (module 9:5). Predominantly white schools are housed in adequate buildings with proper educational resources to assist them in the learning process, but impoverished minority children attend schools in horrific conditions that include a chaotic and violent atmosphere, leaking roofs, improper heating, broken bathroom facilities and windows, holes in the walls, outdated textbooks, and lack of proper equipment, and students often go hungry. Minority school districts are not adequately funded; teacher turnover is high, they are overworked, underpaid, and sometimes devise defensive teaching strategies that border on bizarre (Kozol: *The Shame of the Nation*).

Children subjected to these traumatic conditions are consigned to bottom of the barrel job opportunities, if any. Consequences include unwanted pregnancy, a sense of hopelessness, shattered self-esteem, poor health, drug and alcohol abuse, criminal activities, and prison. As C. Wright Mills points out in *The Sociological Imagination* (Konradi & Schmidt: 29), a dysfunctional social structure transcends those of the individual and becomes a public matter or societal issue. One could argue that the American government is breaking the law and trampling on the civil rights of children by continuing to allow the problem to exist. During the fight for desegregation, somehow the funding for was apparently not considered.

Solutions that could reverse major issues in public education include adopting the model used in the reality program Extreme Makeover Home Edition, a program that does remarkable things to buildings in seven days. Since we are in the middle of a recession and thousands of people are out of work, stimulus money could immediately put students into environments that are conducive to educational success, by putting unemployed construction workers to work rehabbing or rebuilding edifices. Generous tax incentives could be given to corporations to adopt the projects. Meanwhile, a national school uniform policy, an abundance of nutritious hearty meals during the week at school, the institution of fruit and vegetable gardens onsite for students and faculty, and a casserole take-home program each weekend and on holidays would solve some immediate problems for students. Most importantly, a restructuring of how schools are funded is in order. Under the current system, tax revenues that support schools are based on the economic base of the school's community, so in poor communities, the decks are stacked. Since desegregation was a national issue, the federal government should provide funds to impoverished schools equal to those of schools in nearby prosperous areas.

Reference

Reading Between the Lines

<http://tinyurl.com/bqzj8t8>

...Wow, love your solutions! Well-written essay overall.