RESEARCH STARTERS
ACADEMIC TOPIC OVERVIEWS

Socialization for Lifelong Learning

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Abstract

This article presents examples of the socialization process and subsequent impacts on lifelong learning. Additionally, contrasts are made to better explain differences between positive and negative outcomes on different groups despite socialization processes. Also presented are insights into ways socialization and lifelong learning philosophies affect current sociological thought and an examination of transformed ways of thinking for sociologists viewing societies through the lens of lifelong learning. A conclusion is offered that describes solutions for conceptualizing theories of socialization and lifelong learning into current sociology practices. Further recommendations are offered for constructing socialization processes that will positively initiate lifelong learning for individuals despite societal background.

Overview

Socialization Processes

Weidman (1989), quoting Brim, stated that socialization is "the process by which persons acquire the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that make them more or less effective members of their society" (Brim, as cited in Weidman, 1989, p. 293). Dunn, Rouse, and Seff (1994) echoed Weidman by stating that socialization is "the process by which individuals acquire the attitudes, beliefs, values and skills needed to participate effectively in organized social life" (p. 375). Socialization can also be described as the process through which a "child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community" (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002, p. 339). Bragg (1976) further indicated that "the socialization process is the learning process through which an individual acquires the knowledge and skills, the values and attitudes, and the habits and modes of thought of the society to which he or she belongs" (p. 3).

While culture can be described as the sum of activities in a given organization or community, socialization can be described as the processes by which individuals acquire and incorporate an understanding of those activities (Tierney, 1997). Culture within an organization or community is relatively constant and can be understood through reason. An organization's culture, "teaches people how to behave, what to hope for, and what it means to succeed or fail" (Tierney, 1997, p. 4). Within this framework, some individuals become competent, and others do not. From a learning standpoint, socialization determines key attitudes that "proactively direct or re-direct change for human well-being and development" (Preece, 2006, p. 307). These attitudes directly impact the individual's attitude toward learning.

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Keywords

Collective Socialization

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Postmodernists have expressed concerns with these definitions and have argued that:

- The modernist assumption is that socialization is a process where people "acquire" knowledge,
- Socialization is viewed as a one-way process in which the initiate learns how the organization works, and
- Socialization is little more than a series of planned learning activities (Tierney, 1997).

The postmodernist lens offers a different methodology of thinking about culture and socialization. Bloland (1995) argued, "Postmodernism points out that totalization hides contradictions, ambiguities, and oppositions and is a means for generating power and control" (p. 525). McDermott and Varenne (1995) noted, "Being in the world requires dealing with indefinite and unbounded tasks while struggling with the particular manner in which they have been shaped by the cultural process" (p. 337). Moreover, socialization involves give-and-take where new individuals make sense through their own unique backgrounds and current contexts (p. 337).

Lifelong Learning

Lifelong learning is a concept that describes ways that people learn many things in "a variety of spaces throughout their lives, both inside and outside educational institutions" (Schugurensky & Meyers, 2003, p. 328). For purposes of informed theoretical understanding, lifelong learning can be understood in a broader category rather than just education, and instead encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal learning, whether the learning is "intentional, incidental, or unconscious" (p. 330). From a Freirean approach, Elliot (2000) argued that lifelong learning has great potential for extending citizenship for women that encourages critical awareness, political skills, and civic participation. Regardless of context, learning itself is "an uninterrupted, complex, and dynamic lifelong and life-wide process in which agency and structure constantly interact" (cited in Schugerensky & Meyers, 2003, p. 331). Important also to this discourse is the understanding of the three types of learning settings: formal, non-formal, and informal.

- Formal learning refers to the institutional system that extends from preschool to higher education, which is organized in a sequential system and is controlled, regulated, and funded by the state typically dictated by a prescribed curriculum.
- Non-formal education refers to all "organized educational activities" such as workshops or short courses that are outside the formal education system, which can be organized by a variety of agencies such as government, professional associations, non-profits, business groups, business groups, churches, or unions.
- Informal learning is a residual category that is comprised of learning that occurs outside of formal and informal settings. This learning typically consists of activities that are either self-directed, incidental, or socialization (Schugerensky & Meyers, 2003, p. 331).

5 Mechanisms of Learning Socialization

According to Ainsworth (2002), within the context of lifelong learning, socialization is especially relevant, because the sense-making involved in the socialization processes can be activated through five interrelated mechanisms that specifically impact learning and education attitudes (specifically in urban environments). Specifically, these five interrelated mechanisms include:

- Collective socialization,
- Social control,
- Social capital,
- Differential occupational opportunity, and
- Institutional characteristics (Ainsworth, 2002).

For purposes of enhanced understanding these will be examined within the context of school socialization and neighborhood environments.

Collective Socialization

Collective socialization can be described in the context of neighborhood characteristics that shape the role models youth are exposed to outside the home. Neighborhoods in which most adults work steady jobs foster behaviors and attitudes that are conducive to success in school work. From this standpoint, "children in such advantaged neighborhoods are more likely to value education, adhere to school norms, and work hard because that is what they see modeled for them by neighborhood adults" (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 119). Wilson (1991) argued that life can become "incoherent" for youth because of the lack of "structuring norms" modeled by working adults. With potentially "fewer positive role models in the neighborhood, children may be less likely to learn important behaviors and attitudes that lead to success in school" (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 119).

Social Control

A second mechanism for determining lifelong learning is social control, which can be described as the "monitoring or sanctioning of deviant behavior." Neighborhoods with fewer adults or adults with limited time to influence the lives of youth may experience

stronger peer-group influences which may create anti-school attitudes and behaviors (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 120).

Social Capital

Social capital or "social networks" is a third mechanism through which neighborhood context can influence educational (learning) outcomes. Sampson and Groves (1989) and Wilson (1996) argued that children who live in advantaged neighborhoods are more likely to be exposed to supportive social networks or adults who can provide positive resources, information, and opportunities that may be educationally beneficial. These opportunities may include the use of personal computers, job opportunities, or help with projects. Neighborhood socialization context was also supported by Wilson's (1996) argument that in impoverished neighborhoods "children are disadvantaged because the social interaction among neighbors tends to be confined to those whose skills, styles, orientations, and habits are not as conducive to promoting positive social outcomes as are those in more stable neighborhoods" (p. 63).

Differentiated Occupational Opportunity

Perceptions of differentiated occupational opportunity have a positive effect on educational outcomes. Most individuals are socialized to believe that anyone "can be successful if they work hard enough; however, the degree to which this ideology is supported by the concrete experience of adolescents and may vary by neighborhood context (Massey, Gross, & Eggers, 1991; Turner, Fix, & Struyk, 1991; Wilson, 1992; Wilson, 1987)." (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 121). Circumstances and educational outcomes strongly determine youth learning outcomes which are impacted by how educational opportunity impacts employment (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 121).

Institutional Characteristics

Ainsworth outlines a fifth mechanism through which neighborhood context can influence educational outcomes:

> . . . the neighborhood's impact on institutional characteristics, such as schools or other educational institutions. Wacquant (1996) argued that students from disadvantaged neighborhoods are more likely to attend inferior schools that spend less time on teaching and learning (cited in Ainsworth, 2002, p. 121).

Resulting strains could decline school atmosphere and the school's resources regarding student behavior. Simcha-Fagan and Schwartz (1986) postulated that neighborhood effects on an individual's association with "delinquent peers are primarily indirect and mediated through weak attachment to school" (cited in Ainsworth, 2002, p. 121). Social workers working in urban districts should consider these mechanisms as potential indicators to mediate adult and student success.

While each of these five mechanisms can be activated through neighborhood environment, generalizability can be drawn between neighborhood environments and other community environments. Organizations and the culture of lifelong learning can also be viewed through these five mechanisms. The research from which these mechanisms were examined explicitly draws connections between structural factors and individual-level processes of learning and outcomes (Ainsworth, 2002, p. 144). Schugerensky and Myers (2003) posit that other settings of potential socialization can be explored include:

- Family socialization;
- Elementary schooling;
- Secondary schooling;
- Pre-service training;
- Higher education programs;
- The media;
- Non-formal education;
- Political engagement and community involvement;
- Civics instruction; and
- Other sources (p. 326).

Applications

Some Roles for Social Workers

Social investment, dialogue, and community building are "essential elements of effective and authentic public engagement" (Tagle, 2003, p. 49). From a socialization perspective, the creation of learning pathways could foster the individual's capacity to access information regarding personal planning and goal setting, and facilitate access to further education, training, and employment (Shrestha, Wilson, & Singh, 2008, p. 140). Social workers hold the responsibility for mediating social constructs for marginalized individuals. For example, individuals from urban backgrounds with limited access to learning opportunities or attitudes regarding lifelong learning could benefit from mediation strategies aimed at facilitating strategies and outcomes underscored by effective understanding, communication, and collaboration (p. 140). Social workers operating within these environments play a vital role in understanding and developing socialization allowing deeper learning and training outcomes, providing possibilities for building employment-related competencies (p. 140).

Another important consideration from a sociological perspective is increased social capital for marginalized individuals. The opportunity to build a sense of belonging in a new homeland offers the construction of social capital for socially marginalized individuals like newly formed ethnic groups operating in relative social isolation (Shrestha, Wilson, & Singh, 2008). Social workers working with marginalized social groups operating in social isolation are advised to better understand different socialization methodologies and the impact of language and socialization. Language socialization research seeks a holistic and integrative perspective and draws on anthropological and psychological philosophies to human development. Language socialization examines how young children and other novices (like newly introduced ethnic groups) acquire the knowledge and practices

necessary to function as competent members of their community. Language socialization enables individuals to recognize, negotiate, index, and co-construct diverse types of meaningful social contexts, "making it possible for [individuals] to engage with others under an increasingly broad range of circumstances and to expand their social horizons by taking on new roles and statuses (Garrett, Baquendo-Lopez, 2002, pp. 340 – 342).

Factors that Impede Learning

In socialization for lifelong learning, several factors determine attitudes and outcomes regarding how individuals view the importance of lifelong learning, the ability and applicability for individuals, and the desire to continue pursuing learning goals. For example, specific cultures may not value learning or understand the potential benefits or applicability of lifelong learning. Specifically, residents in disadvantaged neighborhoods may be more socially alienated, communicate less often, and experience an erosion of social connectedness that impedes the development of social control networks espousing the benefits of learning (Brody, Ge, Conger, Gibbons, McBride-Murry, Gerrard, & Simons, 2001, p. 1232). Another issue impeding socialization and lifelong learning is that individuals in neighborhoods may not know how to successfully facilitate a collective socialization process that would enable individuals in the neighborhood to gain greater pro-social competence (p. 1232).

Another issue that could impede socialization for lifelong learning is the purpose for the learning and the requirements of the learning. Depending on whether the learning is formal, informal, or non-formal, or if the learning is job-related or aimed at personal growth are factors which motivate interest and the intensity of the learning. For social workers mediating the learning process, expectations regarding performance have also been shown to directly impact learning performance and outcomes (Parsons, Kaczala, & Meece, 1982, p. 323). Social workers may consider the possibility of facilitating or prescribing opportunities for positive learning by organizing more opportunities for individuals to spend time with peers in supervised settings either at school or in other organized community contexts rather than allowing individuals to "hang out" in non-supervised activities (Pettit, Bates, Dodge, & Meece, 1999).

Another central issue is trust, particularly in a work setting where lifelong learning may be promoted but not provided. Critical to this issue is in determining whether workers are motivated to seek learning due to personal or professional reasons. Employers should consider trust as a platform on which the foundational context of the work is constructed always remaining savvy in their ability to "listen well, offer value judgments on the learner's request, respond honestly, and promote the work's success" (Shrestha, Wilson, & Singh, 2008, p. 133; Bambino, 2002; Costa & Callick, 1993).

Viewpoints

Framed within institutional and non-institutional settings, three main "schools of thought" can be identified as key indicators of lifelong learning. These include: human capital, neoliberalism, and progressive humanism (Schugerensky & Myers, 2003, p. 328).

Human Capital View

In the human capital model, education can be understood as a "social investment in the training of employees for market needs." According to Schugerensky and Myers (2003), this theoretical model approaches lifelong learning as a new incarnation of previous ideas using labels such as "further education," "continuing education," "lifelong education," and "education permanente" aimed at "recycling" workers to catch up with new technologies of the workplace. This framework is constructed upon the belief that in the context of increasing globalization and organizational changes, workforce training is necessary to keep nations economically competitive is the training and development of "flexible and autonomous workers" (Schugerensky & Myers, 2003, p. 328). The outcome of this school of thought is equated with professional development equated with work skills; hence, becoming "worklong learning" (p. 329).

Neoliberalist View

Schugerensky & Myers posit that the neoliberal concept of lifelong learning places the responsibility for learning on the individual. This model conceives individuals as citizens possessing the right to education funded and provided by the state, while being viewed as "potential consumers of educational products and services whose right consists of choosing among several options in the marketplace" (p. 329). This model can be viewed as a commodity creating a "shift from workplace training and state provision of public education to self-recovery or for-profit courses paid for by the learner" rather than the organization. Concerns exist that "this construct of lifelong learning can become an excuse for the public sector to resign its prime responsibility in educational provision" thereby increasing the gap between workers who can afford training (haves) and those who cannot (have-nots) (Schugerensky & Myers, 2003, p. 329).

Progressive Humanist View

The progressive humanist tradition claimed that "education for all could never be achieved within the confines of traditional education" (Schugerensky & Myers, 2003, p. 329). For some operating within this context, the lifelong learning concept individualizes collective political movements, promotes competition and individual entrepreneurship. The main contrast between this model of lifelong learning and other models is the view that lifelong learning offers a liberating and transformative potential, which should be shaped as "an inclusive, holistic, and critical learning project that supports learners as they negotiate changing life, learning and work conditions. Operating from this framework, lifelong learning has the potential to emancipate society through social transformation and democracy" (p. 330).

These schools of thought regarding lifelong learning impact societal views regarding learning, transformation, and cultural change. Individuals interviewed for a study regarding socialization and lifelong learning indicated that family socialization was cited as the "most powerful influence" for shaping political orientations, political knowledge, and civic participation (Schugerensky & Myers, 2003, p. 340). On the other hand, while some indicated

positive lifelong learning attributes obtained from family, other participants indicated that family socialization was a negative experience resulting in a decreased interest in extended learning. Regardless of produced negative or positive socialization outcomes, the family was indicated as a powerful influence (p. 341).

Conclusion

As sociologists examine the role of socialization for lifelong learning, the first strategy for understanding this work is in determining how the two concepts overlap. As defined earlier, socialization is a process "through which a child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community" (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002, p. 339). Additionally, lifelong learning is "a crucial mechanism" for learning to change in a world that is constantly changing, in which humans must "drive, rather be driven by those changes" (Preece, 2006, pp 307 – 308). However, individuals themselves may not recognize the need or be exposed to the necessary constructs that encourage lifelong learning. Without these building blocks, theorists have suggested that humans will not understand the values of "citizenship, democracy, and social justice (Coffield, 2000, p. 38).

Regardless of how socialization and lifelong learning is interpreted, sociologists continue to play a key role in helping society define key social movements and strategies for implementation. Within this construct, lifelong learning is an important concept enabling society to reflectively learn from itself, evaluate progress, and learn from other societies. In conclusion, sociologists enable citizens to realize these tenets through planning and communicating socialization strategies.

Terms & Concepts

Collective Socialization: Collective socialization can be described as neighborhood, societal, or community characteristics that shape the role models that youth are exposed to outside the home.

Differentiated Occupational Opportunity: Differentiated occupational opportunities can be described as ways in which circumstances and educational outcomes strongly determine potential employment opportunities.

Lifelong Learning: Lifelong learning can be understood in a broader category rather than just education, and instead encompasses formal, non-formal, and informal learning, whether the learning is "intentional, incidental, or unconscious."

Social Capital: Social capital is a mechanism through which neighborhood context can influence educational (learning) outcomes. Individuals who live in advantaged neighborhoods may be more likely to be exposed to supportive social networks or adults who can provide resources, information, and opportunities that may be educationally beneficial.

Social Control: Social control can be described as the monitoring or sanctioning of deviant behavior in specific groups.

Socialization: The process through which a "child or other novice acquires the knowledge, orientations, and practices that enable him or her to participate effectively and appropriately in the social life of a particular community" (Garrett & Baquedano-Lopez, 2002, p. 339).

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