Chapter Activities

# Chapter 10: Family and Education: Institutionalizing Socialization

## Social Structure and Mate Selection

**Objective:** Students will explore how various social factors influence mate selection.

**Directions:** Pair students up and have each interview the other about the characteristics that person is looking for in a mate, using the questions below. Language can remain gender neutral in order to protect the privacy of any students who are sexual minorities but do not wish to identify themselves as such. Then students should reconvene as a class and discuss the ways that some preferences are near universal among college students at their university (e.g., want a mate who is attractive or who earns a good salary), while others may differ (e.g., the level of education desired, whether prior relationships matter). Try to distinguish the background characteristics of students whose desires differ from the general trend. In addition, traits that male students are looking for versus those that female students desire can be explored.

**Your Future Mate**

1. Do you ever desire to find a romantic partner? If not, why?
2. Ideally, how many partners will you have in your lifetime?
3. Ideally, what will your prospective mate look like? On a 1–10 scale, how attractive will he or she be?
4. Ideally, what will your mate do for a living? (Note: “stay-at-home parent” is an option)
5. Ideally, what is the highest level of education your prospective mate will have completed?
6. Ideally, will you have children? How many? Will one partner stay home with the kids? Who?
7. Ideally, what religion will your mate be? (Note: “no religion” or “atheist” is an option)
8. Ideally, how often would your partner attend religious services, if ever?
9. Ideally, what family background will your mate come from (nuclear, married family, gay or lesbian parents, single parent family, etc.)?
10. Ideally, will your partner ever have been married before?
11. Do you plan to cohabit with your partner?
12. Ideally, would you like to marry your partner?
13. List five words that describe your ideal mate.

**Yourself**

1. How attractive do you feel you are (1–10 scale)?
2. What job or career do you plan to have? (Note: If you plan to stay home with children, please say so.)
3. What is the highest level of education you will complete?
4. Do you have any children? If so, how many? How many children do you want?
5. What religion do you identify as (if any)?
6. How often (if ever) do you attend religious services?
7. What is your family background?
8. Have you ever been married? Do you ever plan to marry (again)?
9. Have you ever cohabited? Do you ever plan to cohabit (again)?
10. List five words that describe you.

## What is a Family?

**Objective:** This activity will demonstrate the complexities in describing a family and expose some preconceived notions that people have about what constitutes a family.

**Directions:** Break students up into pairs and have them write down as many family types as they can think of. You can give the example of a nuclear family and have them go from there. After a few minutes have students share their family types. In the author’s experience a common response will be “single mother with children,” which allows the instructor to ask about a single father with children. Typically, students will say “yes this is a family.” Have them continue. A married couple without children? A cohabitating heterosexual couple? A married gay couple? A cohabitating gay couple? Continue to illustrate that the concept of what constitutes a family is not as simple as it may appear on the surface.

## Talking About Family

**Objective:** To have students critically think about what we think constitutes a family.

**Directions:** Ask students to take out a piece of paper and draw what they think of when they hear the word “family.” Have students share their photos and ask the class several questions to get them thinking about how we define family:

1. Why did you draw these people?
2. Does this look like the family you grew up in?
3. The family you picture having one day?
4. Are pets in any of the pictures?
5. Did anyone draw a picture of their closest friends?
6. Extended family members?

A discussion of the different types of pictures students have drawn makes a great introduction to the chapter on family.

## Childhood Socialization and Family

**Objective:** Students will be able to critically analyze messages children get about “proper” families.

**Directions:** Choose a Disney movie for students to watch in class (suggestions: *Frozen* or *Maleficent*). While watching, students should take notes on the portrayals of families. What is the role of the father that is presented? The mother? The stepmother? Siblings? What do we learn about marriage from these movies? What might children learn about “proper” families from watching these videos?

## Family, Work, and Social Policy Paper

**Objective:** Students will understand that the things they think make their family unique are often constrained by social factors.

**Directions:** Students should be given the following paper assignment:

**Assignment: Write a 4- to 6-page paper that addresses all the following points:**

* 1. Spend one-to-two pages summarizing your family history for at least three generations (yourself, your parents, and at least one set of grandparents). Be sure to include information about these people’s education, marriages, divorces, births, occupations, and health.
  2. Spend roughly two pages writing about the interconnections between one generation’s choices and the choices of subsequent generations. For example, if your parents did not attend college, how did that impact your decision to go to school? If your grandfather was a coal miner, how did that impact your father’s choice of occupation? If your mother had her first child at age 20, how is that related to your own preferences for when you did or will have children?
  3. Spend roughly two pages detailing some of the social and governmental policies and programs that have impacted your family in some way. For example, if your grandfather worked in a coal mine, how was your family impacted by the Clean Air Act? If your mother is a teacher, how has No Child Left Behind impacted her job? How has the Federal Student Loan program impacted you?
  4. Finally, examine the interconnections among these topics. How are the options available to you in life and your choices related to your family history, and social or governmental policies and programs? Explain the ways in which your own path has been determined, at least in part, by the paths of those before you and social structural factors.

## Family Similarities and Differences

**Objective:** Students will have the opportunity to learn about various types of families and understand that commonalities within families outweigh outward differences.

**Directions:** Invite a panel of speakers to your classroom that represent persons living in a variety of household structures. Suggestions include: a person living in a nuclear family, a person in an arranged marriage, a person in a gay or lesbian family, a person in a single-parent household, a person in a polyamorous relationship, and a person living in an extended-family household. Students should be told the types of families represented by the panel, but you should not specify which individual lives in which type of family. Then students should be given 15–20 minutes to question the panel about the goings-on within their households (e.g., division of labor, recreational activities, or ideas about parenting). Finally, students should attempt to guess which individuals live in which type of family. Then lead a discussion about the exercise, allowing the panel to participate if they wish.

## Why Do People Divorce?

**Objective:** This activity will help students see that the reasons why couples divorce are not as easy to determine as people think.

**Directions:** Break your students into small groups; make sure as many groups as possible have both male and female members. Ask each group to draft a list of 10 reasons—from most important to least important—that describes why people might get divorced. Have groups keep track of whether males or females presented the reason. Afterward, have each group present its list to the class, noting how many items are similar or different between groups. In addition, break the male and female suggestions out to see if there are differences between them. If there are differences, have students discuss what might be the reasons for the differences. Compare your lists with the extensive research done on the topic to see how close your students were to what researchers have found.

## The Importance of the Family

**Objective**: Students will understand the importance of the family as an institution.

**Directions**: Assign the students to groups of four and have them imagine a society with no families. Then have them answer these questions:

1. How would children be cared for in this type of society?
2. What type of adults would this society create?
3. How would children raised in a society with no family structure be affected financially, emotionally, and physically?

## Family Structures and Financial Budgets

**Objective**: Students will understand the difficulties of creating a financial budget for certain family structures.

**Directions:** Come up with various family structures and scenarios. For example, an example might be a nuclear family with six children all under the age of 20. The father works full time and the mother stays home. Three of the children attend private school. The yearly income is $40,000. Have them come up with a monthly budget based on these characteristics. Assign students to groups of four and give them various scenarios. Have them work together to come up with a monthly budget and present their findings on the board.

## The State of the U.S. Education System

**Objective:** To challenge students to think critically about the current state of the education system in the United States and the potential for alternative models to impact positive change.

**Directions:** If your university has the film Waiting for Superman borrow it and show it to the class. If not, show the preview available at http://www.takepart.com/waiting-for-superman/.

Use the community conversation guide available at http://www.takepart.com/sites/default/files/Ford\_FINAL\_Waiting\_for\_Superman\_Community\_Discussion\_Guide.pdf

To lead a discussion on the state of education in the United States, of particular interest is discussing the different school options available. Doing research on your own state prior to this discussion (on the number of charter schools, vouchers) makes the conversation even more beneficial to the students.

## Socialization in Schools

**Objective:** This activity is intended to highlight the importance of the hidden curriculum in schools by getting students to realize the various ways schools have socialized them to participate in other social institutions.

**Directions:** Break up your students into smaller groups (the number of groups should reflect the social concepts or institutions you want your students to discuss). Assign each group an aspect of the social world or a social institution. Then have each group of students brainstorm to recall how their educational experiences have influenced their beliefs about the social concept or institution they were assigned. Have them recall specific courses, lessons, activities, programs, or assemblies the school used to address the particular issue. After the students have created their lists (give them 15–20 minutes to create this list), ask them to list how the value, belief, or behavior of the educational experience shaped and influenced them (if at all).

* Recommended institutions include:
  + Higher education
  + The economy (or job market)
  + Religion
  + Media
  + Laws and the criminal justice system
  + Family
  + Politics
  + Sports and leisure
  + Health care
* Recommended issues include:
  + Gender
  + Race and ethnicity
  + Social class
  + Sexuality
  + Sex education
  + Drugs and alcohol
  + Dating
  + Competition
  + Cooperation
  + Patriotism
  + Nutrition and health

Instructors should have each group present its list and challenge other classmates to add to the list or discuss similar experiences. The activity should also include a discussion on the importance of the manifest and latent functions of education. You can also discuss which beliefs, values, and behaviors the students feel schools have the responsibility to socialize in students and others they believe schools should not address.

## Design the Perfect College or University

**Objective:** This activity should get students to think about an ideal-type university. They should then be able to compare their college or university to the ideal type to discuss real versus ideal institutions of higher education.

**Directions:** Either as a class or in small groups, have your students design the perfect college or university. Potential questions to consider include the following:

* How many students are enrolled in the university?
* How many students are in the typical entry-level course?
* How many students are in the typical upper-level or specialty course?
* What types of sports, activities, and clubs does the university offer?
* How much does tuition cost and what is included in this fee?
* What are the demographic characteristics of the student body?
* What are the demographic characteristics of the faculty?
* What resources are available for the students?
* What types of leisure activities are available to the student body?
* Do students live off campus or on campus?
* What does the community look like where the campus is?
* What is the organizational structure of the university?

Once students have created their “ideal” university, have them compare it with their actual university. Also, ask them to consider some of the problems that might exist in their “ideal” university. Are the problems similar to or different from the problems that exist on their actual campus? Instructors should also ask the students how important bureaucracy is in their “ideal” and “real” campus. If the activity was completed in groups, the instructor should have the groups compare their images of an “ideal” university and discuss why the images varied. This activity could also be completed for compulsory schools.

## The Bureaucratic School Structure

**Objective:** This activity will allow students to understand Weber’s bureaucratic structure of schools model while also applying this concept to their own educational experiences.

**Directions:** Present the five components of Weber’s bureaucratic school structure model to the class. Have students reflect on their own high school and how this structure was represented in their school. They should also reflect on if it was helpful or harmful to them and their friends as students. Were all these components in place? Did students benefit from this structure? Were students not served well because of any of these components or how they were implemented? After students fill in each section on their own, lead a class discussion on how each component looked at various types of high schools.

1. Schools have a division of labor among administrators, teachers, students, and support personnel. The roles associated with the statuses are part of the school structure. Individual teachers or students hold these roles for a limited time and are replaced by others coming into the system.
2. The administrative hierarchy incorporates a chain of command and channels of communication.
3. Specific rules and procedures in a school cover everything from course content to discipline in the classroom and use of the schoolyard.
4. Personal relationships are downplayed in favor of formalized relations among members of the system, such as placement on the basis of tests and grades.
5. Rationality governs the operations of the organization; people are hired and fired on the basis of their qualifications and how well they do their jobs (unless or until they attain tenure) (Weber, 1947).

## What Is Education?

**Objective:** This activity will show students what education means and how important it is in society.

**Directions:** Conduct a brainstorming session either as a class or in small groups with your students on the “meaning of education.” First, ask them to define, in their own words, the term “education.” What is it? What constitutes an “educated person” versus an “uneducated person?” Second, ask them to look for and discuss any cultural and/or class biases in their definition of “education.” As they have defined and described the term, is “education” equally accessible to everybody? How does “education” reflect the intrinsic worth and value of an individual? And finally, how might the meaning of the term be misused to divide people into “less worthy” and “more worthy” human beings?

**Note to Instructor**: This assignment can be modified to include more concepts from education. If you break the students into groups, have them discuss the questions based on a particular concept, such as tracking, hidden curriculum, tenure, and so forth. Then have each group present what it discovered about the meaning of its concept and incorporate all the concepts into the discussion on the effect of education and each concept on individuals’ chances for success in society.

## Equal Access to Education

**Objective:** In this activity, your students will assess the educational system as a meritocracy. This will encourage students to evaluate the reality of meritocracy in the current educational system and discover potential problems in creating a meritocracy.

**Directions:** Either as a class or in small groups, have your students suggest different aspects about the institution of education that produce inequality. As they list each aspect, have them decide if the inequality should or should not be tolerated by community or society. If they decide that the inequality should not be tolerated, they must come up with a solution to address the problem so that it either is resolved or is tolerable. Instructors should have students pay particular attention to policies regarding tracking, class size, accountability, testing, educational climates, dropouts, grading, school funding, curriculum, and race, class, and gender inequalities. After the activity is complete, instructors should lead a discussion on the reality of formal education as a meritocracy. Students should discuss which aspects of schooling create specific difficulties in creating or maintaining a meritocracy and potential problems in creating a meritocratic educational system.

## Evaluating Inequalities in School Funding

**Objective:** This activity should highlight the reality of unequal school funding for students and have them identify the role of school funding in creating or perpetuating social inequalities.

**Directions:** This activity will require outside research. Prior to coming to class, ask your students to find out the per-pupil spending limit for the high school they attended. Then assign them a school district near your college or university and have them also find out the per-pupil spending limit for a student attending that high school. Make sure that the high schools you assign are socioeconomically diverse (especially if your college or university is not). Then have students investigate some of the resources and activities available to the students in the school districts. When they return to class, either as a class or in small groups, have your students compare the range of per-pupil spending that they discovered. Then have them compare other aspects about the educational climate they discovered in their research. Instructors should discuss with students what resources schools should minimally offer students. They should also discuss the difficulties a district might face in trying to meet students’ needs. They can also discuss potential ethical considerations school districts face when trying to get funding, such as conforming to federal standards and programs, gaining corporate sponsorships, and privatization. In general, the class should discuss the importance of per-pupil spending in shaping inequality and the school environment.

## Exploring Climates in Schools

**Objective:** This activity will help students identify education and value climates in their high school and college or university. Comparing the two will foster a critical discussion of how the two vary.

**Directions:** Give students 5–10 minutes to list some of the contested issues that spurred debate in their high school while they were attending. Have them list the way the issues were resolved, if it was. Then give them another 5–10 minutes to list some of the contested issues in your college or university since they have been attending and how the issue(s) has been resolved. Then, either in small groups or as a class, discuss some of these issues. Have the students decide whether they were issues about the educational climate of the school or the value climate or both. Did the resolutions properly address the climate? How did the issue and/or resolution change the education or the value climate of the school? Instructors can also tie this discussion into the manifest and latent functions of school.

## Problems in Our Educational System

**Objective**: Students will identify problems in our educational system.

**Directions:** Brainstorm with the class some problems in our educational system. Ask the students to identify, in their opinion, the most concerning problems in our educational system. Discuss these issues with the class and ask how many other students may feel the same way about the issue. Ask the students what they feel can be done to resolve this issue in the future.

## Comparing Educational Systems

**Objective**: Students will understand the differences among various educational systems around the world.

**Directions**: Assign each student a country. Some students may have the same country. Have the students research the characteristics of the educational system in that country and discuss their findings with the rest of the class. Compare the similarities and differences of each educational system.