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*THEORIES OF THE EFFECTS OF
EDUCATION ON CIVIC PARTICIPATION
IN DEVELOPING SOCIETIES*

John W. Meyer

SOUTHEAST ASIA DEVELOPMENT ADVISORY GROUP

Theories of the Effects of Education on Civic...

301.56 Southeast Asia Development Advisory Group
M612 (SEADAG).

Theories of the Effects of Education on
Civic Participation in Developing Societies.
John W. Meyer. May 1972.

11 p.

Bibliography throughout.

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author.

1. Political behavior. 2. Civic participation. 3.
Popular participation. I. Meyer, John W. II. Title.



The Asia Society - SEADAG
505 Park Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10022



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PW PBH 876
JEN 71464

*THEORIES OF THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION ON CIVIC
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John W. Meyer

Stanford University
Palo Alto, California

This is an edited version of the paper presented by Dr. John W. Meyer to the SEADAG Education and Human Resource Development Panel Seminar on "Education for Civic and Communical Participation" held at the La Fonda Hotel, Santa Fe, New Mexico on May 25-27, 1972. The views and conclusions of the paper are exclusively those of the author. The paper may not be quoted or reproduced without the author's express permission.

The research and thinking in this paper grew out of work partially supported by National Science Foundation Grant GS32065.

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*THEORIES OF THE EFFECTS OF EDUCATION ON CIVIC
PARTICIPATION IN DEVELOPING SOCIETIES*

By

John W. Meyer

Several convincing empirical studies of a number of very different societies demonstrate close relationships between the amount of education an individual has and his involvement -- both in attitudes and behavior -- in public affairs.¹ At the aggregate or societal level it is a little less clear how close the causal relationship is between educational expansion and the development of participatory public institutions (especially if economic development is held constant): in the opinion of some investigators the close individual relationship between variables argues strongly for a similar societal one, but there is little formal evidence. Certainly it is commonly held by both intellectuals and political leaders that education is a means to and a support for the modern participatory state.²

Discussions of these questions in the literature tend to rely on a limiting set of notions about the nature of the effects of education on civic attitudes and participation. This paper develops a typology of such effects which may serve to broaden this limited set of images. The broader, institution-forming, consequences of education which we discuss here may add to those traditionally considered, and may have special relevance for developing societies where education may affect not only participation but also the institutional forms within which participation can take place.

The Individual Socialization Model

The classic argument has it that schools create participation (and political modernization in general) by generating in their students a network of values, aspirations, personality characteri-

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1. See, for example, Alex Inkeles, "Making Men Modern: On the Causes and Consequences of Individual Change in Six Developing Countries," *American Journal of Sociology* (September, 1969); and Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1963).
 2. See the papers in James Coleman (ed.) *Education and Political Development* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1965).

tics, and plans which are associated with modern behavior in political and economic life. These socialized students take their "bundles" of modern participatory qualities with them into their political, economic, and social roles as adults, behaving in distinctive ways by virtue of their distinctive qualities. They create new roles and act with new effectiveness (and toward new ends) in old ones, and are one of the sources of social development and modernization.

This "classic" notion of the importance of education in creating citizens and elites contains three basic propositions in its structure:

Proposition (A). Schools, via substantive curricula, teacher models, peer cultures, and universalistic organizational forms³ engender in students attitudes, values, skills, and intentions appropriate to the modern polity and society. There is a good deal of agreement, both in the theoretical and the empirical literature, about what these "appropriate" qualities are: intellectual competence and independence, political and personal self-esteem or efficacy, universalistic and achievement orientations (including interpersonal trust and tolerance), and commitment to progress, are among those mentioned.

Proposition (B). Socialized students carry the noted qualities with them out into the political world both creating and effectively filling citizen and elite roles to the degree that they possess these qualities.

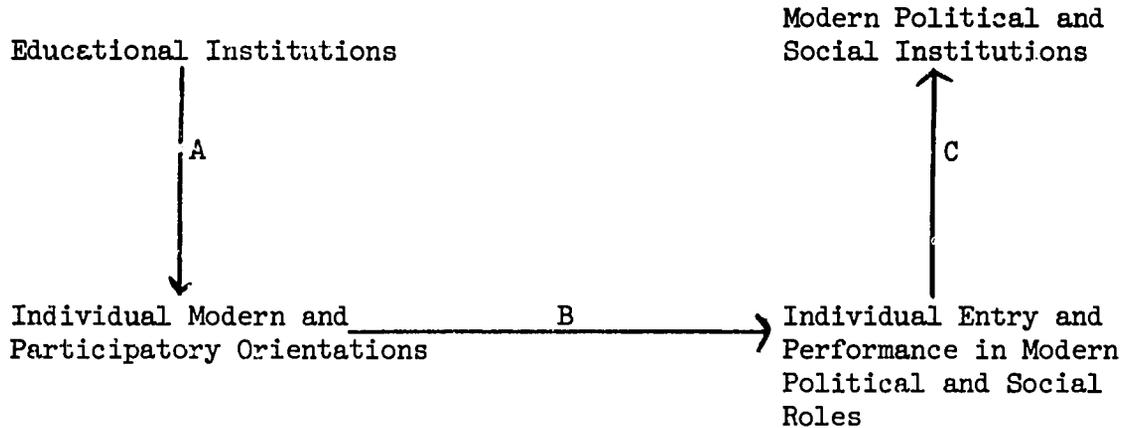
Proposition (C). In carrying the qualities installed in them in the schools out into political and social life, the socialized students add to the development and effectiveness of modern political and social institutions.

This set of ideas is highly developed in the literature on education (and socialization). Figure 1, presents these three propositions and the four variables which they connect in diagrammatic form.

3. Robert Dreeben, *On What is Learned in School* (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley, 1968).

Figure 1

The Individual Socialization Model*



It is generally supposed that different educational institutions "modernize" individuals more or less well and that creating schools which break away from traditional forms and curricula is an important task. But in the modern world, education and almost everywhere tends to be defined in relatively modern ways, and thus its effectiveness may be thought to be more one of degree than of kind.

The Allocation or Certification Model

There are several major problems with the individual socialization model. One problem is that many of the qualities which are thought to be created by schools and to have lasting benefits for long-term individual and societal participation and modernization show only the poorest correlations in practice with such long-run consequences. Many qualities which have seemed central to socialization researchers, and to be of obvious benefit for later role performance -- measured intelligence, for instance -- often are found to be almost uncorrelated with actual measures of later performance.⁴ Obviously the individual socialization argument rests heavily on the assumption that what is learned in schools is of some use in providing skills or orientations relevant to later activity.

A second pre-eminent problem is that detailed studies often show schools to have very limited socialization effects of the sort we

4. Ivar Berg, *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery* (Boston: Beacon Paperback, 1971).

*Arrows indicate causal direction. Letters refer to the propositions developed in the text.

are considering,⁵ while studies of adult populations show quite astonishing differences between those who have and have not attended the schools. If the different individual orientations toward and capacity for effective political participation associated with education are created by schooling, how does it happen that they are not maximized immediately during the schooling process, but are instead at their peak many years later?

One answer is, in a sense, obvious. Individuals, in every society, are allocated into efficacious political and social roles by virtue of their educational statuses. This is true regardless (or at least partly regardless) of whether they have in fact been effectively socialized to modern attitudes and orientations by their schools. A university graduate may or may not acquire modern attitudes, but almost certainly he and others learn that he is a university graduate.⁶ Thus if educated individuals everywhere are found to an extraordinary extent in participatory roles in the modern polity, we must consider the probability, not only that they have acquired qualities appropriate to such roles, but also that they are put in these roles by institutional rules of allocation, to which they and others (including important gatekeepers) conform.⁷

Thus we must add to Figure 1 an additional proposition: (D) Educated individuals are directly allocated by institutional rules into participatory roles in the modern state and society.

But once we have stated this proposition, more modifications of Figure 1 become necessary. Two are obvious: (E) The power of schools to socialize individuals may depend on their power to allocate their graduates into respected social positions (rather than, or in addition to their curricula, teachers, peers, and so on). Schools, that is, function as initiation ceremonies, whose efficaciousness may depend on the public acceptance of the status transformation they

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5. Kenneth Feldman and Theodore Newcomb, *The Impact of College on Students* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1969).
 6. John W. Meyer, "The Charter: Conditions of Diffuse Socialization in Schools," in W.R. Scott, ed., *Social Processes and Social Structures*, (New York: Holt, 1970); and John W. Meyer, "Comparative Research on the Relationship Between Political and Educational Institutions," in M. Kirst and F. Wirt, eds., *State, School and Politics* (Massachusetts: D.C. Heath, Lexington, 1962).
 7. Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper, 1970).

claim to accomplish.⁸ *Proposition (E)*, thus, poses an explanation of the modernizing power of schools which parallels that of *Proposition (A)*.

However, we still need an explanation of why school effects, directly measured, seem so much smaller than those measured in studies of adult populations. This can be provided by *Proposition (F)*: Educated individuals learn modern orientations, not only from schools, but from the political and economic roles into which the schools allocate them. A man might acquire a good deal of political efficacy from a lifetime spent high in the civil service of his country. If schools in fact possess the power (as they do in most societies) to allocate their graduates into modern citizen and elite statuses, the life experiences thus created can be expected to have enormous socializing functions.

The Zero-Sum Character of the Allocation Principle: Propositions (D), (E), and (F) all rest on the idea that schools allocate their graduates into the status order. This idea suggests an odd societal consequence, however. If the institutionalization of schooling means that graduates are allocated into leading roles in the modern state and society, it also may mean that non-graduates are allocated out of such roles. If the allocation principle is the only one operating, it suggests simply that education replaces more traditional bases of allocation of political and social authority, but adds nothing of substance to the modernization of the whole structure. Graduates become more participatory as they graduate and proceed through their careers, while non-graduates become less participatory as they learn to withdraw into the periphery of the modern order. The net effect of education on modern attitudes and orientations and behaviors is thus zero -- it simply determines who gets to participate.⁹

The allocation principle thus raises a question about *Proposition (C)* which asserted that educated students, by filling participatory roles, add to the aggregate modernization of society. A question mark must be placed next to this assertion to the extent that education allocates graduates into such roles without particularly socializing them.

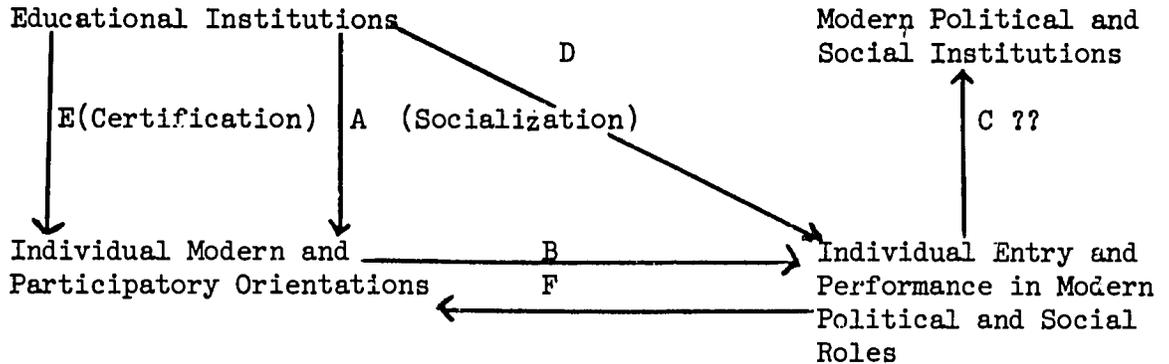
The propositions we have added to Figure 1 are shown diagrammatically in Figure 2.

8. Frank Young, *Initiation Ceremonies* (Indiana: Bobbs-Merrill, 1965).

9. Illich, *op. cit.*

Figure 2

The Individual Models: Socialization and Allocation*



The Aggregate or Societal Model: Education as a Corporate or Ritual Constituent of the Modern Polity

Our allocation model, standing alone, is naively cynical. Creating a modern educational system, and shifting the basis of allocation of positions of power and status from traditional criteria to its authority, does not simply replace one traditional elite with another (or with the same people in slightly different guises). Even if it socializes individuals rather ineffectively, an expanded and authoritative educational system reconstitutes the normative order of society.¹⁰ This happens in many ways, which have in common as their key feature that they have broad effects running throughout the social structure: on those who have gone to the schools and on those who have not; on those who hold the offices connected to the educational system, and on those who are clients of these offices who must legitimize their authority. Consider a range of these effects:

- a. The schools are places in which the national language, history, and culture are seen by all parties as institutionalized. Students may or may not learn these things but they are symbolically located in the schools.

10. Richard Rubinson, "The Political Construction of Educational Systems," Department of Sociology, Stanford University (May, 1972).

* Arrows indicate causal direction. Letters refer to the propositions developed in the text.

- b. As positions in the modern institutional order are allocated on the basis of education rather than traditional criteria, the changed (and universalistic) norms implied by this process are affirmed in the perspective of all the parties involved. This does not necessarily depend on the substantive success of the schools in socialization.
- c. The allocation of positions on the basis of (even non-sensical) educational credentials also changes the character of the positions themselves. Professionalization, even without content, is a way of defining new -- and modern -- purposes and orientations in elites.
- d. Mass education, in particular, provides a moral basis for the shift of authority and participation to the citizenry. Primary schools -- even ineffective ones -- can help to provide or support a political ideology or theory which makes it sensible to allow erstwhile ignorant clods to take part in managing the wider society.

Many more examples of this kind can be advanced.

We are concerned here, however, with the effects on society of an expanded set of educational arrangements as rituals -- networks of rules redefining the members of civil society not as recruited from families, tribes, regions, classes, and so on, but as socialized in a national educational system. These networks of rules have impacts at the societal level over and above their significance as mechanisms of socialization or of allocation. In principle, they can affect -- can modernize, as it were -- many components of society. These networks can directly institutionalize in the social order a nationally universalistic theory (or ideology) of citizenship, a similarly universalistic theory of elite access, a conception or explanation of the loyalty and responsibility of the elite to the nation as a whole, and a similar theory concerning ordinary citizens. These are all potential effects of the educational arrangements as formal structure. In the same way, the educational system may be a way of institutionalizing the content of modernization. In most educational systems several modernizing strands lie in uneasy peace together -- the solidary claims of the national culture, the national goals of modernization and development, and the world scientific and technical culture. Students in most educational systems may even learn something in these areas, but aside from this the educational system is a way of enshrining such modernizing values and commitments.

We thus arrive at *Proposition (G)*: Individual effects quite aside, the educational system may directly affect the creation of a modern participatory state and society.

The Aggregate Model and Processes of Allocation and Socialization:

Once we clearly understand that the educational system can be a means of legitimating, in the most far-reaching way, the personnel (elites and citizens), goals, authority, and reality of the modern state, our conception of the allocation and socialization processes discussed earlier must be modified. In discussing allocation, we argued that the schools are entitled to certify entrants into many positions in the modern sectors of society, and thus that such entrants are likely to acquire modern participatory orientations. We even considered that a zero-sum process could operate here, with entrants from the educational system displacing (and hence "demodernizing") potential recruits from other sources. It now becomes clear that this is probably too limited and misleading. The schools are not simply an arbitrarily chosen source of entrants into modern society. They are in many respects the symbolic repository of modernness, and the graduates coming from them are seen by all parties as carrying the crucial virtue of modern learning. Never mind how social-psychological research may demonstrate his modern beliefs and orientations to be shallow -- the graduate knows, and everyone else must know to a limited extent at least, the larger authority he brings with him into public and occupational life. The educated man, in this sense, is both a socialized carrier and a symbol of modernization.

We have here another process by which the education affects both participation and effectiveness in the modern polity, *Proposition (H)*: The institutionalization of the rules allocating positions in society to graduates creates and legitimizes the authority of their orientations in the eyes of those with whom they deal. Thus we escape the zero-sum character earlier attributed to the allocation process and add another relationship between the educational system and participation in the modern polity.

In much the same way, the individual socialization process in the schools is reconstituted by the larger authority of the educational system in society and its symbolic role in modernization. Students are socialized to participation not only by the curriculum and structure of the school (Proposition A), nor solely by the capacity of the school to confer on them positions in the modern sectors of society (Proposition E). Student socialization is also enhanced by the larger moral authority of school in society. If the schools are crucial repositories of the forms and content of modernization, and if they are the source of the reborn personnel of the modern polity and society, students can be expected to derive from them some of their larger moral purposes, as well as some of their modernizing authority.

This may account for the participatory orientations of students

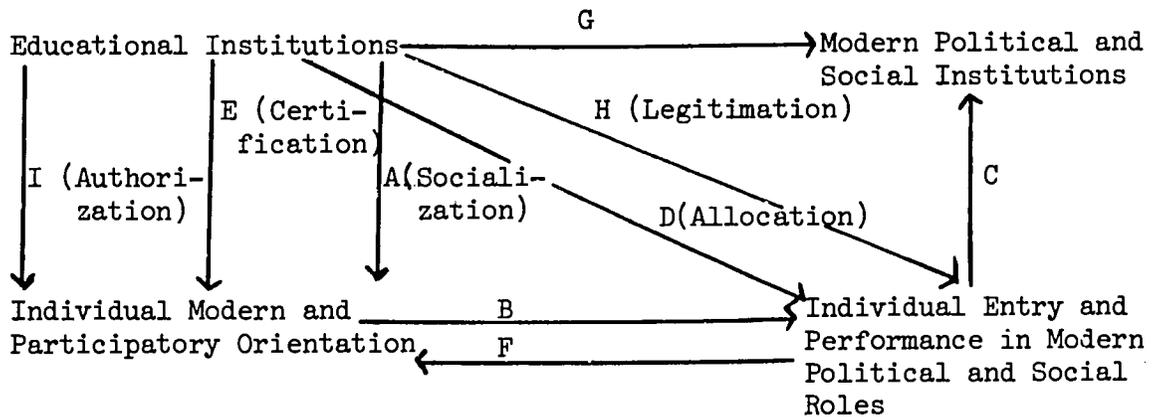
as a status group in many countries around the world.¹¹ In many countries, the civic participation and actual and perceived efficacy of students have reached levels far beyond the capacity of the ordinary channels of participation in the political structure. Clearly this situation indicates levels of socialization to political action greatly surpassing those ordinarily attained by youth. There are many explanations of the level of student politicization in so many countries, but the one we are suggesting makes as much sense as most of the others. If education is the cultural center of national moral purposes and ideals, and the most crucial abilities and skills of the nation, the modernizing moral authority of the students is great.

Thus *Proposition (I)*: The definition of the educational system as a crucial ingredient in modernization, and as a possessor of core modern values and orientations, confers on students great authority and socializes them to participate with this authority.

Propositions (G), (H), and (I) add to the complexity of the models discussed earlier. All the propositions are assembled diagrammatically in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Individual and Aggregate Models Together: The Socializing, Allocating, and Corporate Constituent Effects of Education*



11. John Meyer and Richard Rubinson, "Structural Determinants of Student Political Activity: A Comparative Interpretation," *Sociology of Education* (Winter, 1972).

*Arrows indicate causal direction. Letters refer to the propositions developed in the text.

Summary: The Effects of Education

Education, institutionalized, is not only a training or socialization site, but is also a basis of allocation and more generally of modernizing authority. In assessing its effects on participation in the wider society, one must consider these several processes at once.

These illustrative conclusions can be drawn from our discussion.

(1) The creation of educational systems to produce modern participatory behavior frequently produces more than is anticipated. Educational systems produce not only socialization, but also (a) concrete status groups making demands for scarce elite positions,¹² and also (b) whole ideologies of modernization which may topple the gradualist structures which created the educational system in the first place. Education, that is, is not just a production process but consists of both specific and general claims to authority. For many purposes of modernization, of course, this is a tremendous advantage -- these second and third order cultural effects of education may be much more significant than the first order consequence of trained persons. Education as ritual may be more central than education as socialization. But it has also long been clear that these same ritual (or allocation) features of educational systems can also be sources of political turmoil and instability.¹³

(2) This first general point can be made more specific in a second one. Elite universities and technical training programs in developing societies are very frequently sources of revolutionary political pressures. Creating such programs to give symbolic thrust to modernizing activities may create an elite pressing for more modernization and more participation than was intended -- relying on the central cultural authority of the educational system itself. Similarly, the development of mass primary education in rural areas can involve the creation of both status groups and symbolic foci leading to rapid mobilization and change. The rural school and teacher are often centers of mobilizing authority.

12. Randall Collins, "Functional and Conflict Theories of Educational Stratification," *American Sociological Review* (December, 1971).

13. Joseph Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper & Row, 3rd Edition, 1950). Especially Chapter XIII, "Growing Hostility."

(3) Research investigating the processes we have been discussing must be comparative in character. We are arguing that the effects of any particular school will vary depending on the allocative and symbolic status that school has in its society. The effects, that is, of any particular elite university with a given curriculum, and set of teachers, will depend on (a) the particular social rules by which it allocates graduates into elite positions, (b) the characteristics of these elites, and perhaps of elites generally in the society in which it is located, and (c) the normative or symbolic aspects of modern education which it represents in its society. All of these factors vary from society to society, and such variations determine, not only the overall effects of the school on society, but even the particular effects of the school on its students. There can be, at least in principle, no complete social psychology of schooling devoid of contextual assumptions.

(4) Finally, proposed alternatives to expanded educational systems must be considered in light, not only of their socializing functions, but also of their allocative and ritual ones. Political parties, armies, trade unions, voluntary associations, and all sorts of work-centered training programs, are sometimes proposed as alternative ways to schools of socializing individuals to participation in the modern polity. But if the army, for instance, is the route to citizenship and to elite status, more is brought into the polity than simply the socialized skills and attitudes. The army then becomes the base of allocation of personnel, and also the cultural focus of national unity, carrying very different ideologies to the center of national authority than educational systems typically do. Similarly if the plantation or urban workplace is to be the locus and structure of socialization, not only trained participation, but also a putative culture and a theory of personnel allocation are brought along.

Contemplation of such questions may suggest that there are some advantages to schools as socializing institutions, even if their students learn very little that is of use, and even if they are hotbeds of disorder in society. Education as initiation ceremony may be preferable to some of the alternatives.