

## **Sociology of Education**

### **Comprehensive Exam Question Bank**

**revised March 20221.**

1. Assume that you are being asked to present an introductory lecture on the sociology of education. How would you outline the nature of the field and its relationship to general sociological theory and methods? Make sure to use examples to illustrate your points.
2. Many important works in the sociology of education emphasize the intersections between gender and race, ethnicity and/or class. What does the attention to intersectionality add to the study of education? What problems does it introduce to the researcher? Give examples of works from this subfield that address this problem of intersectionality particularly well and particularly poorly. What are the key elements of these works that distinguish them from one another?
3. Sociologists of education often examine how different types of capital shape the educational experiences and trajectories of youth. Please discuss three different types of capital, addressing similarities and differences in how they are sustained. Consider the role forms of capital play in both gender, class, and racial educational inequalities.
4. Students' academic progress is a product of the formal curriculum (e.g., coursework, content of what is taught) and the social context of the school. Do these formal and informal school processes exacerbate or disrupt the intergenerational transmission of advantage and disadvantage? Choose at least two theoretical perspectives and discuss the roles that schools play in the process. Bolster each perspective with evidence from empirical research.
5. Inequality has long been the central focus of sociology of education. Racial, socioeconomic, gender, and other disparities in educational attainment seem to belie the idea of "equality of opportunity" that motivated the creation and expansion of public education in the Canada. Sociologists attempt to explain why this inequality exists in different ways, some focusing on structural and systemic mechanisms underlying inequality and others focusing on ecological and even interpersonal mechanisms. Summarize each side and make a case for which one is the most compelling.
6. Schools in Canada were created to promote a certain type of citizen. Explain how the work of Egerton Ryerson influenced our current educational landscape and how his vision for education compared to Durkheim's understanding of a moral education. Additionally, explain how and why Canadian education scholars are calling for decolonization of the Canadian education system.
7. You are a policymaker considering how to remedy educational inequalities at either the K-12 or postsecondary level. You must design two policy solutions to address any kind of inequality in your chosen level of schooling (e.g., social class disparities in postsecondary completion, high

levels of bullying of LGBTQ+ youth, racial inequality in higher education—there are many possibilities here). In order to convince the stakeholders and funders, you will need to first explain how the inequality is developed and occurs. You will then need to lay out a plan to approach your chosen issues, based on existing research on the topic.

8. A substantial amount of research in sociology of education considers the role of educational institutions in magnifying and/or diminishing the connection between social class origins and individual occupational and other life outcomes. Evaluate the existing evidence on this matter and make an argument about whether you think educational institutions more often increase or more often decrease the influence of social class on life outcomes. Be sure to explicitly discuss in your answer the different methodological approaches (qualitative, quantitative, and/or mixed methods) as well as some of the kinds of data, samples, and measures employed in various studies on this topic, and indicate how you think the methodological choices employed by scholars does (or does not) influence their findings.
9. bell hooks wrote about education as the practice of freedom. Explain how this notion is tied to key concepts written about by Friere and how these works connect to at least three major scholars in the area of decolonization and critical pedagogy.
10. In your opinion, which educational theory on the reading list has “stood the test of time” and shows the most promise in terms of shaping our understanding of education in Canada? Please justify your decision by discussing the development of the theoretical perspective, the empirical research it has generated, the contributions it has made to the field of the sociology of education, the criticisms pointed against it, and how adequately it has responded to said criticisms.
11. How do the “classic American” texts on the inequality in education in the reading list (e.g. Dewey, Apple, Collins) compare to Canadian accounts of inequality in education. What are the major differences and similarities in the Canadian and American accounts of stratification of education?
12. Explain what is meant by anti-colonial pedagogy, decolonizing pedagogy, critical pedagogy and anti-oppressive pedagogy. Who are the key thinkers in this area and what are their unique contributions?
13. There is a growing consensus among educators that the “banking method” of teaching is a pedagogy based on an old paradigm. Discuss the critique of the “banking method” and provide a critical analysis of at least two alternative approaches to pedagogy. Be sure to cite at least five seminal works in your response.
14. How are institutions of education a source of inequality? What are features of education over the life course that contribute to race, class, and gender inequality?