

Teacher's Notes

IDENTIFYING FLAWS IN SOCIOLOGICAL THINKING, BY JILL SWALE, KENDRICK SCHOOL, READING.

- This activity applies some of the techniques taught on AS Critical Thinking to sociological specifically material. In doing so it helps to build up students' evaluation skills in Sociology, as well as providing them with a critical vocabulary they can use in other areas of study, including entrance tests for many university courses, or wherever it is necessary to evaluate or construct an argument.
- An argument is defined as a conclusion supported by reasoning or evidence. It goes without saying that arguments can be soundly or shakily constructed. Distinguishing between these is an important generic academic skill.

SUGGESTED ANSWERS:

- (1) Confusion between necessary and sufficient conditions.
- (2) Circular argument.
- (3) Post hoc flaw. The Act undoubtedly made divorce easier but was not the only cause for the rise.
- (4) Post hoc flaw. Correlation does not prove causation. Also prediction of future with insufficient evidence. Withdrawal of benefits could just as easily increase crime in this group.
- (5) Ad hominem, insulting the arguer instead of tackling the argument.
- (6) Post hoc argument and poor analogy. The two scenarios are too dissimilar to draw a conclusion.
- (7) Assumption that Catholicism is a more 'integrated' denomination is not supported.
- (8) Word 'aggression' used inconsistently, as role-played Batman-type aggression is not the same as real life violence. Last sentence also contains unfounded generalisation.
- (9) Slippery slope argument containing restricted options.
- (10) Post-hoc argument of the New Right. Ignores other variables.
- (11) Circular argument.
- (12) An 'unscientific' argument that no evidence can disprove.
- (13) Contradiction between final sentence and rest of passage.
- (14) An argument impossible to disprove.

- (15) Ad hominem argument.
- (16) Generalisation (from untypical sample)
- (17) Straw man
- (18) Misleading use of key word 'symmetrical'. Insufficient evidence of significant housework by men.
- (19) Slippery slope argument
- (20) Poor analogy.

ANALOGIES IN SOCIOLOGY: A REVISION EXERCISE USING THINKING SKILLS, BY JILL SWALE, KENDRICK SCHOOL, READING

INTRODUCTION

- The main aims of this activity are to revise important concepts and to evaluate the claims that are being made, for example, Bowles and Gintis' contention that school closely resembles factory life.
- In addition, those students studying for the OCR Critical Thinking courses will find the examination of analogies especially useful.

INSTRUCTIONS

STARTER

- Begin by asking what an analogy is. It is a comparison between two situations or ideas that is used to strengthen an argument. What is true of one is said to be true of the other. The arguer may make much of the similarities but tends to ignore the differences between the items being compared. However if we can find important and relevant differences, the analogy may be a poor one, and the sociological theory based upon it may be weakened.
- Give students two minutes to think in groups of any analogies in the topics you have taught, and discuss why they are analogies and whether they are good ones.

MAIN ACTIVITIES

- Photocopy the sections of the grid relating to the topics taught. It might be an idea to blow it up to A3 in order to give plenty of room for filling in the boxes. If you wish to test their knowledge you can cut up the columns, separating the name of the originator from the description, and use it as a sorting exercise first.
- Distribute the concepts to be discussed in small groups. Ask the students to recall or investigate all the similarities they can think of between the situa-



tions being compared, for example between schools and factories in the correspondence theory.

- Ask what point the sociologists are trying to make by likening the two items. (Bowles and Gintis claim schools are deliberately designed to be like factories, so that workers are already socialised to accept meaningless drudgery).
- Now ask students to list important and relevant differences between the items being compared. Sometimes the analogies may be good ones and this will not be easy, but in many cases critics have already faulted the comparisons. (Both M.S.H. Hickox and David Reynolds have found dissimilarities between schools and employment, casting doubt on the correspondence theory).
- Discuss whether the theories need to be changed if the analogies are weak.
- Ask students if they can think of any different analogies which have been made about the same subjects, and consider how these usually reflect different perspectives.
- To conclude, ensure that through discussion students have an appreciation of the wealth of analogies and metaphors sociologists use. As these are used to persuade, can sociology be regarded as a science based on objective evidence?

FOLLOW UP

- Send students away to skim their textbooks and search their memories for more examples of analogies and bring them in for class discussion. Creative thinkers could be encouraged to make up their own.

SUGGESTIONS TO AID DISCUSSION

- Students are more likely to be familiar with metaphors than with analogies, and it may help them if you explain that analogies are a more developed version of the same thing. In addition to the analogies in the chart, there are many other familiar examples which they could be encouraged to think about. These include the poverty trap, invisible women, man as a naked ape, the march of progress theory, canalisation, poverty and never married parenthood as infectious, areas tipping, sink estates, the dark figure of crime, the magic bullet theory, media moguls, the third world and ear'oles!

- The family is a good source of contrasting analogies. While Functionalists liken it to a soothing warm bath, some feminists regard it as a prison (Gavron's 'The Captive Wife') or a power struggle (Kate Millett's 'Sexual Politics'). In contrast to the Postmodernist view of religion as a supermarket, Marx regarded religion as 'the opiate of the people'.
- If students have difficulty in recalling alternative analogies from their sociological studies, they should be able to think of some from everyday conversation, such as the idea that men are from Mars and women from Venus.
- For fun, encourage students to be inventive and a bit wacky. Could religion be a warm bath? Could school, or is school a sausage machine or a race where students 'jump through hoops'?

EDUCATION: MATCH THE OPINION TO THE EVIDENCE, JANIS GRIFFITHS, BRYN HAFREN COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOL, BARRY

This is a quick and simple activity for lower ability GCSE students which acts as a useful model developing other similar materials which can be used in the basic teaching of a topic or for revision purposes.

BRIEFING: THE BRITISH SOCIAL ATTITUDES SURVEY, ROB POVEY, BABBINGTON COMMUNITY COLLEGE, LEICESTER

Rob Povey's series of Briefings on major sources of official data are now combining together into a very useful guide for students to refer to when doing coursework research. This briefing gives particularly full coverage to the British Social Attitudes Survey. The only rider is that needs to be pointed out that surveys of attitudes do not tell us how people actually behave.

KEY TEXT: WASTED LIVES BY ZYGMUNT BAUMAN, REVIEWED BY STEPHEN THOMAS, CASTLE SCHOOL THORNBURY

This is a very important and stimulating book which is to be highly recommended to teachers of sociology. The Key Text item is inevitably very selective and the book deserves to be read in full. It has implications across the subject but is especially pertinent on the effects of modernisation and globalisation. There are many issues relevant to students doing the AQA World Sociology paper.



Analogies in Sociology: A Revision Exercise Using Thinking Skills

Jill Swale

- An analogy is a comparison between two situations or ideas that is used to strengthen an argument. What is true of one is said to be true of the other. The arguer may make much of the similarities but tends to ignore the differences between the items being compared. However if we can find important and relevant differences, the analogy may be a poor one, and the sociological theory based upon it may be weakened.
- The purpose of this activity is to get you to test the strength of some common analogies which are used in sociology.

A LEVEL COURSE TOPIC	SOCIOLOGICAL IDEA/ CONCEPT	ORIGIN	ANALOGY	STRENGTHS OF ANALOGY	WEAKNESSES OF ANALOGY
THEORY	(1) Institutions of society are interconnecting and interdependent	Functionalism	Members of society like parts of a body		
THEORY	(2) Is sociology a science?	Auguste Comte	Sociology is like the natural sciences		
FAMILY	(3) The family is a place of security and affection	Functionalism	Family life similar to soaking in 'warm bath'		
FAMILY	(4) Dysfunctional family is a 'source of all our discontents'	Edmund Leach	Privatised nuclear family like an overloaded electrical circuit		
EDUCATION	(5) Correspondence theory	Samuel Bowles and Herbert Gintis	School life is like factory life		
EDUCATION	(6) Self-fulfilling prophecy	Robert Rosenthal and Leonora Jacobson	The idea of Pygmalion or that it is possible, like Eliza Doolittle, to make people into what you want		
IDENTITY	(7) How people react to us influences our behaviour	Charles Cooley	Response of others to us a reflection of 'self' in a mirror or 'looking glass'		



IDENTITY	(8) Self presentation in interaction	Erving Goffman	Humans in society are like actors on stage who play different parts		
MASS MEDIA	(9) Hypodermic syringe model	Behaviourists	Media messages like an injection		
MASS MEDIA	(10) Cultural imperialism	Marxists Postmodernists	Foreign media like an invasion		
WEALTH OR EDUCATION	(11) Cultural Capital	Pierre Bourdieu	High culture like money to be invested from which you get a return		
WELFARE AND POVERTY	(12) Cycles of deprivation	Ken Coates and Richard Silburn	Poverty like a circle		
DEVIANCE	(13) Ludic suicide	R. Etlinger and G. Flordah	Suicide seen as a gamble		
DEVIANCE	(14) Interaction and settlement patterns in cities	R.E. Park of Chicago School	People in cities are cities like competing species		
DEVIANCE	(15) Strain theory	Robert Merton	People in difficult times 'pulled in different directions'		
DEVIANCE	(16) Youth sub-cultural styles	Dick Hebdige	Adopting a sub-cultural style is like a magical transformation		
WORLD SOCIOLOGY	(17) Global village	Postmodernists	World like a village in which communication is very easy		
POWER AND POLITICS	(18) Elite theory	Vilfredo Pareto	Elites are like lions and foxes		
RELIGION	(19) New Religious Movements	Postmodernists	Choice of beliefs like shopping in a supermarket		