

# Teacher professional development – a Functionalist Perspective

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**Abstract:** In this article I would like to highlight the differences but also the common principles and formations within the group that form a social structure governed by the principles of Functionalism. Thus we observe how these constituent elements of the individual from whom the structural constituents branch out- norms, customs, traditions and institutions, which often come in antithesis with another element - reach a common mental state, hence the approach through the prism of Functionalism. The basic element of David Mitrany's philosophy, considered the father of Functionalism, was cooperation.

**Key-words:** Functionalism; Education; Didactic training; Career; Case study; Sociology.

## 1. Introduction

We intend to observe a group of 20 young individuals, aged between 19 and 35, participating in the courses of teacher training module. We make these observations through the prism of Functionalism, or Structural Functionalism as sometimes quoted. Thus we perceive the group as a compacted mass through interconnection in a network that brings stability and cohesion between elements. This macro-level approach to the resulting social structures give homogeneous form to society by giving it an evolutionary-organic valence. Furthermore, this approach is not limited only to observing the appearance of social structures but also of social functions – Functionalism observes society as a unitary whole through links between elements called social structures and also through the prism of constituent elements, namely: norms, customs, traditions and institutions.

In this micro-research we would like to highlight the differences and also the common principles and formations within the group that form a social structure governed by the above mentioned principles. The approach from a widely sociological point of view is based on the structure presented by John Macionis and Linda Marie Gerber in *Sociology*<sup>2</sup> (7th ed.) magazine. Thus we observe how these constituent elements, we are talking here about the individual from whom the structural constituents branch, - norms, customs, traditions and institutions, which often come in antithesis with another element - reach a common mental state, hence the approach through the prism of Functionalism. The basic element of David Mitrany's<sup>3</sup> philosophy, considered the father of Functionalism, was cooperation. In Mitrany's case, we are talking about cooperation between states to achieve peace by permanently eliminating political conflicts. Just as Mitrany proposed cooperation between states, in this case we meet the principle of Functionalism in the cooperation and mass homogenization of the next generation of teachers. Differences in social origins, sex, religion or the perception of the education system become elements of the social structure - the basis of Structural Functionalism.

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<sup>2</sup> John Macionis and Linda Marie Gerber.2011. *Sociology*. (7th ed.). Toronto, Canada: Pearson Prentice Hall.

<sup>3</sup> David Mitrany (1888–1975) Romanian-born, naturalized British scholar, historian and political theorist. Considered to be father of Functionalism.

## 2. Case study statistics

The statistical data of the group in case are as follows: Out of the twenty individuals surveyed, five come from rural areas and the remaining fifteen from urban areas. The marital status of the twenty subjects is distributed as follows: five are married, representing 25% of the total group; fourteen are unmarried and represent 70% of the total group and the remaining 5% is represented by a single divorced person, who falls to the top extreme of the age group, i.e. 33 years. Subjects rated their economic status as average to high at 50%, while the other half found that their economic status is in the average to low group, namely eight people and the remaining two people are in the category of low economic status representing 10%. Of the twenty subjects, eleven are bachelor graduates, eight high school graduates and one with postgraduate studies. As for religious orientation 75% of those surveyed identify as Orthodox Christians, the rest - a Catholic an agnostic and two atheists. Ethnicity is 95% inclined towards Romanian and a person representing 5% is ethnically Aromanian.

Throughout the microstudy we see aspects related to Analytical Functionalism, term associated with David Lewis<sup>4</sup> and is often referred to as analytic functionalism or conceptual functionalism. The basic idea of analytic functionalism is that theoretical terms are implicitly defined by the theories in whose formulation they occur and not by intrinsic properties of the phonemes they comprise. In the students' responses there is a discrepancy in the confidence in the education system and the chosen profession, between the relationship with the teacher and again the chosen job, and this paradox continues even at the level of understanding, application or usefulness of the knowledge acquired during the school years. Furthermore, to the questions referring to the usefulness of what they learned in the education system, the subjects answered as follows: almost 50% of the participants considered that what they learned in high school or university were useful to them in the current profession – and the other half are divided, roughly equally, six and five people respectively, between the application of knowledge acquired only in exams and in life in general respectively. Of course we must note that only six people representing 25% of the group mass have mentioned their job/profession. It is also interesting to note, however, taking into account the ratio of 25% men – 75% women, that 66% of women opted for the first options concerning the usefulness of knowledge acquired in the current profession or exams – instead a similar percentage in the case of men opted to use knowledge in the current profession or in life in general. Of the total group 60% appreciated an average degree of effort in understanding and accumulating knowledge in the education system. The remaining 40% are divided equally into the categories that have made a minimum and high minimum effort in understanding and acquiring knowledge.

The principle of Analytical Functionalism refers to the example in which the result matters – the mental state and not the stimulus or confirmation method. Be they even at odds. Thus, we further observe, regarding the degree of involvement of teachers in teaching applied to the needs of students, – 75% appreciated that only a few of the teachers adapted their teaching mode. A 5% representing a single person claimed that the majority of teachers adapted their teaching mode, the remaining 20% found that none of the teachers had adapted their teaching method to the student's comprehension ability. – we note here what can be an extremely harmful domino effect, whether at the base is the curriculum of the school previously completed or the inability of teachers throughout the studies to be understood and transmit to the student the necessary knowledge.

The same report of teacher involvement can be found in the subjects' answers to the question regarding the availability and communication on the personal problems of the

<sup>4</sup> David Kellogg Lewis - American philosopher, made significant contributions in philosophy of language, philosophy of mind, philosophy of probability, metaphysics, epistemology, philosophical logic, and aesthetics.

student. We can only conclude that reference is made to the same teachers – those who make the effort to adapt the teaching method to the needs of the student are the same who show interest in the individual and personal problems of the student. In the case of objective evaluation of the student by the teacher - 40% of the subjects find that they have been correctly evaluated by only a few of the teachers. Another 40% believe that most teachers have made a correct assessment, and the remaining 20% consider themselves improperly/subjectively evaluated. But we can see a discrepancy when we overlap the answers by gender. If women 35% considered that the majority of teachers rated objectively, only one man representing 5% of the group and 20% of the sex group, found the evaluation of the majority of teachers to be objective.

The most common analogy with reference to Structural Functionalism is that of the body as a whole and organs as component elements – where organs are the representation of individuals or a functional substructure. In this analogy, issued by Herbert Spencer<sup>5</sup>, in his *The Principles of Psychology*<sup>6</sup>, the organs work towards the proper functioning of the body as a whole. In practice, these bodies representing the practices, customs and traditions of the individual to work with all their differences and similarities to function in a stable and unitary system.

In this case this analogy applies both to the aspects related to the perception of the education observed above but as we will see below also in the socio-economic aspect of the origin of the individual-element-organ.

Of those who identified as employees, seven out of eleven people responded that they ended up working in that field out of desire, passion following a long path. Two people happened to end up by necessity in that area, one person continued the family business and another admits to getting there by chance. Although about 50% come from the university arts, the question “What did you want to become when you were in high school?” only 30% answered – Architect, Artist, Graphic Designer or Clothing Designer. Three people wanted to become doctors (medic).

Next we have one person per occupation as follows: Teacher, Policeman, Actor, Journalist, Psychologist, Statistician, Accountant, Tailor, Veterinarian, Pharmacist and a person who wanted to become “better than the others”. 50% confess that their aspirations have changed over time, 25% believe that they have changed only in part and the remaining 25% have remained on the established trajectory. At the sub-point that addresses the hopes and dreams of the subject as an adult 40% aspire to evolve, financial satisfaction and career; 30% want a family, for 10% aspirations and dreams remain the same as in adolescence/childhood. 10% aspire to a dignifying living; the remaining 10% tend to become better, an example for others.

The survey results show that 90% of subjects find a balance between family and work the secret for 50% of them being a good organization of time; 20% do it through compromises and sacrifices, 10% work together (family busyness); 10% receive material support from the family. – the remaining 10% cannot reconcile family and career the reason being “different visions”.

From the data collected with reference to civil status we note that four subjects, representing 20%; are married, nine subjects representing 45% want to marry in the wide range of 22-30 years of age, and 35%, in equal relation by sex, do not intend to marry. In the case of mixed marriages, only three of the 20 families have mixed marriages, in the remaining 17 (85%) family being mono-ethnic. The three mixed families consist of marriages between Romanians and Roma, Romanians and Turkish-Tatars and a marriage between Romanians

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<sup>5</sup> Herbert Spencer - English philosopher, biologist, anthropologist, sociologist, and prominent classical liberal political theorist of the Victorian era.

<sup>6</sup> Herbert Spencer.1986. *The Principles of Psychology*, - editor D. Appleton & Co., New York. pp. 358 - 361.

and Aromanians. When asked whether the idea of the partner belonging to another ethnicity comes into question – following the survey 85% accepts the idea unconditionally, two people, representing 10%, find the idea acceptable only in the case of certain ethnicities and one person considers the idea unacceptable. In the case of marriages between persons of different religions the situation occurs only in four families representing 20% of the total. This is where mixed marriages between persons of the dominant Orthodox religion and persons belonging to the Catholic, Protestant, Jewish and Muslim religions appear. The remaining 80% are Orthodox families. The idea of the partner belonging to another religion is positively met by 70% of the subjects – the remaining 30% opt sits for the three remaining 10% per option – Thus 10%, all women, find the idea unacceptable, is an idea difficult to accept for another 10% and the 10% remaining accept the idea only in the case of certain religions.

### 3. Conclusions

We conclude that in regard to the education system with reference to the acquisition and application of knowledge by young people – the dominant direction, 50%, tends to cover the requirements of the current job and did not require a high effort of understanding. However, it should be noted that 25% of subjects had difficulty accumulating knowledge in school and for 25% the knowledge acquired was not useful to them further from the examinations (baccalaureate, admission to college, etc.).

As far as the system of family values is concerned, we see an openness towards marriage with people of other ethnicity and religion, the majority bloc being Romanian-Orthodox. This aspect can be attributed to the characteristics of the younger generations but equally important being the geographical area – Dobrogea being, for centuries, a model of interculturality and interethnic coexistence. It is interesting to note that subjects have rather reservations about a partner without a job or prospects in this direction than one of other ethnicity or religion.

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