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Credentialism.

'Credentials' are the key factors at the interface between systems of education and systems of employment. **R. Collins's** *The Credential Society* (1979) was an extension of his doctoral thesis on *Education and employment* which coincided closely with the publication in 1967 by **P.M. Blau** and O.D. Duncan of *The American occupational structure*. Belief in the acquisition of credentials – educationally tested and graded capacities to perform occupationally in commensurately graded employment tasks – is a bi-product of a technocratic model of the social function of **education**. As Collins succinctly represented it, the model assumes that 'Education prepares students in the skills necessary for work, and skills are the main determinant of occupational success. ... Hence education determines success.' Collins perceived that the **De-Schooling** movement was an attempt to liberate education from credentialism and that the early work of **Pierre Bourdieu** on social reproduction (which he linked with that of **Louis Althusser** on the reproduction of the class relations of capitalism) was also an attempt to discredit the claims of technocratic and meritocratic thinking. Nevertheless, neither critique sufficiently emphasized the importance of cultural markets in distorting the transmission of occupational opportunities. Collins argued that even the civil rights movement in the U.S. failed to destroy the supposed legitimacy of an a-cultural model of educational and occupational allocation. Disadvantaged groups sought to work the system of credentialism, generating an inflation of grades dubiously related to levels of educational achievement.

Collins argued that in the 1960s the credential system went into a state of 'explicit crisis'. He suggested that the credential system was caught between opposing forces. On one side the system had become central to sustaining an economy of excess productive capacity. On the other side, it had become very expensive and relatively unrewarding for many individual investors. A balance remained possible but there was a potential crisis on either side. In the first instance, too much growth in the credential market generates disillusion and withdrawal of material investment, whilst, in the second, too little investment produces economic depression.

He suggested that different ideological positions had been adopted about credentialism. The basic opposition was between what he called 'credential capitalism' and 'credential socialism', but pressure from ethnic groups stimulated 'ethnic-patrimonial' or 'patronage' credentialism which, in turn, provoked 'credential fascism' in reaction. He characterised 'de-schooling' as a form of 'credential radicalism' but his view was that there were only two 'honest and realistic' positions: either 'credential Keynesianism' which would recognize that education 'creates an artificial credential currency' which does not assume any precise occupational purchasing power, or, preferably, 'credential abolitionism' which would force education to re-emphasize its intrinsic, rather than instrumental, value.

438 words.

Derek Robbins.