

Exploration of theoretical forms and considerations in Sociology of Education (1960-1990)

ABSTRACT

During the '60s and '70s social inequalities are obviously the domineering issue in Sociology of Education. The concept of school failure is spread across discussions associated with school. A significant part of the school population has difficulties and in short time they withdraw, bearing the stigma of the "incapable". This period is characterized by numerable works, namely creating empirical data bases and statistical information systems. The role of school in society is the dominant issue of discussion, as the social factors of school career along with the relationship between education and access to social, economic and professional hierarchy are determined.

After the 2nd World War and within a system of unequal education, the increasing school population was conducive to directing researchers to emphasize quantitative methods in order to describe the phenomena under exploration. They study social inequalities of failure and school course. Data collections networks are established to study and investigate both quantitative and qualitative transformations of the school system. These statistic tools ought to ensure knowledge in the education system and contribute to processing educational policies.

Sociology of Education, throughout the '60s and '70s, is full of macro-sociological analyses. Functionalist and Marxist sociologists seek the causes of the changing education in the broader society without taking into consideration actions and social relations of people participating in the education system.

Keywords: *sociology of education, social inequalities, social theories, education, political rights*

1. NEW ORIENTATIONS IN SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION

The theoretical discussions in the field of Sociology – the controversial prominent paradigms – were conducive to shifting the issue under question. They widely affected the orientations of Sociology of Education [1].

26 In this vein, a large number of researchers, questioning the approaches of Sociology of
27 Education developed in the '60s, give special meaning to the study of social processes in
28 lower fields of analysis. They underline the necessity to resume empirical studies, placing
29 their interest in the work performed in the social field. This, of course, does not mean that
30 they deny the importance of previous studies that led to understanding the operation of
31 school system. The new trends are orientated towards methods and approaches focusing
32 not only on structure, but mainly on the level of human act. Drawing on data from the theory
33 of social interaction, ethnomethodology [2] and social phenomenology, researchers make an
34 attempt to analyze the social interactions unfolded within the school classroom as well as the
35 emerging conditions among teachers and students [3].

36 These schools of thought claim a changing perspective, namely the transfer from a holistic to
37 an individualistic sociology. The former is characterized by a macro-sociological approach,
38 as it focuses on social structures. The latter is characterized by a micro-sociological
39 approach since it gives meaning to the investigation of the individual, as it considers them
40 the basic factor of every social formation and the major subject of social organization
41 through interactions and everyday actions.

42 The first perception of sociology was inspired by the positivist philosophical trend, whereas
43 the reference point of the second one derives from phenomenology and hermeneutics. The
44 works of ethnomethodologists or fans of symbolic interactions, the most prominent work of
45 which is that of E. Goffman [4], illustrate this hermeneutic paradigm which includes studies
46 tied to meaningfulness on behalf of the subjects.

47 The attention placed on structures and the operation of the school institution was interpreted
48 as a deterministic perspective about the role of school in which innovation and change are
49 absent, while experience and individual practices are ignored. Thus, a new field of research
50 develops tied to acting individuals' interactions within school and school classroom as well
51 as to the local operation of school.

52

53 **2. SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION IN THE U.S.A. AND ENGLAND**

54

55 A number of research orientations in the educational field are inspired by priority given to the
56 local, becoming the content of many studies in the U.S.A. and England ever since the end of
57 the '50s. These works were conducive to enriching analyses of social inequalities in school
58 [5].

59 Researchers were particularly interested in the unfolding processes within schools and
60 classrooms, the content of knowledge and the everyday social relationships among acting
61 individuals. They make an attempt to analyze inner school processes that do not depend
62 merely on external factors, but also on the individuals' interactions within the school system.
63 Thus, they were interested in on-the-spot researches, ethnography, as a method of
64 exploration and its use by non-ethnologist researchers, who considered the possibility of
65 analyzing different school phenomena in detail [6].

66 This research trend was commenced in 1954 by G. Spindler at Stanford University. The
67 publication of many edited works is a proof of the fact that these orientations pertain to
68 relations between school and the community on the one hand, and school and classrooms
69 on the other. The issues tied to immigrant students' school course are the focal point of the
70 American Anthropology of Education [7]. These researchers interpret everyday situations, to
71 the meanings given by various acting individuals, the role of interactions, negotiations and
72 strategies which entails repetitive observations and long-term stay at the research spot in
73 order to generate certain knowledge. An opening towards other theoretical approaches is

74 observed, namely the symbolic interaction from the School of Chicago. According to this
75 orientation, individuals are considered to interact through symbols and construct their actions
76 and meanings.

77 In England, at the beginning of the '70s, a new trend emerged "the new sociology of
78 education" [8]. Its main feature was concentration on processes and studies pertaining to
79 school and local space. These works coincide with the creation of "educational priority
80 zones", the main objective of which was to improve school operation in non-privileged areas
81 by involving other social carriers, too [9].

82 In England, the priority of the local in educational policies is specified through the
83 introduction of new organizational forms in school institutions, grouped according to
84 geographical classifications, in order to form the so-called "educational priority zones". An
85 educational priority zone is conditioned by a priority regarding the support and monitoring of
86 children having difficulties at school, hiring permanent personnel that can participate in
87 school activities and out-of-school innovations in cooperation with teachers and students'
88 parents as well as with local businesses employees and representatives. The objective
89 sought was to lead those schools, the outcomes of which are below the national average, to
90 a middle level, to improve the teachers' morale, to develop relationships between school and
91 families aiming at integrating society into the educational process. Placing interest on
92 smaller segments such as the school institution, classroom and class was conducive to
93 shifting interest from macro-sociological studies to micro-sociological ones.

94 In England around 1970, ethnographers began to detect smaller details of school life, as it
95 was experienced by both teachers and students. Some authors like P. Woods (1990) [10],
96 are inspired by ethnographic and interaction studies. Woods defines the aims of
97 ethnography in the framework of symbolic interaction. He contends that it is important to
98 discover the meaning given by the members of a social group to the conditions that help
99 shape their everyday life. This ethnomethodological standpoint assumes that it is necessary
100 to use the institutional language, known to the entire group, in order to understand it.

101 Woods' studies aspire to teachers' better understanding of sociology, putting forward the
102 idea that both the sociological and pedagogic thought can support each other and cooperate
103 by using ethnographic techniques. The cooperation among teachers to find solutions to
104 educational problems is considered necessary [11].
105

106 **3. SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION IN FRANCE**

107

108 In France, the enforced structural-functionalistic paradigm, after the post-war period until the
109 '80s, obviously diversifies the French from the Anglo-Saxon sociology. The latter somehow
110 continues the tradition of the School of Chicago. On the contrary, in France, the scientific
111 community tends to reject for quite a long period of time the content of comprehended
112 sociology. Some sociologists seek sources of inspiration at risk of being ostracized from the
113 scientific community and research-related funding organizations. G. Lapassade's role in the
114 field of education in France worth mentioning, as he was one of the forerunners of the
115 institutional pedagogy school. One of his main objectives was to establish a relationship
116 between theory and practice aided by conceptual tools very much alike to those used by
117 ethnographers. It is noteworthy that the movement of institutional pedagogy is an original
118 French ethnographic school characterized by a socio-analytical dimension, which is absent
119 from the Anglo-Saxon tradition. The tradition of institutional pedagogy includes numerous
120 forms of ethnographic study.

121 In France, sociology of education is orientated towards a kind of sociology focusing on
122 reproduction processes while it ignores "the local" as a level of analysis. Until the '80s,
123 French researchers prioritized macro-sociological studies, placing their attention mainly on
124 the whole of educational inequalities and the role of school, as an institution that puts
125 forward social segregation. Eventually in France, during the '80s, researchers drew their
126 attention to the local. The policy of "educational priority zones" (political planning throughout
127 1981-1983) roused their interest in a series of studies about school and its environment.
128 Teachers are invited by official circulars to include the social actors in their program, as they
129 are interested in children's socialization and performance at school. In this way, learning is
130 reinforced in these so-called zones through a new organization of the school classroom that
131 is through an instructional intervention. Thus, the relationships with the "community" are
132 obviously enhanced by creating socio-educational centers that provide athletic and cultural
133 activities.

134 The relationship between school and community (city or neighborhood) is associated with
135 the contestation of centralization imposed by the state not only on school buildings and
136 equipment maintenance, but rather on matters regarding the confrontation of school failure,
137 the generalized monitoring exercised by the education system through school curricula, work
138 organization and, of course, assessment. According to some authors, school does not take
139 into consideration the peculiarities of populations residing in non-privileged areas, regarding
140 cultural diversity tied to social and national origin.

141 Through ethnographic researches, some authors proceed to a detailed analysis of
142 educational priority zones. The results indicate that the students' parents have different
143 symbolic and material interests. Therefore, the formation of a homogeneous group cannot
144 be assumed. Families of lower social strata suffer to a larger extent, than other groups, the
145 coercions deriving from the local, whereas middles classes are able to develop strategies so
146 as to use the local to their benefit [12].

147 It is realized that the sociologist of education gradually acquires a broader field of research.
148 Some researchers – participants in a group about the sociology of education at the Paris V
149 University, began to be interested in the ethnographic approach long before this was
150 permitted somehow by the French research environment in the field of education. Through
151 an ethnographic research, R. Sirota observes many communication networks existing within
152 a school classroom. Teachers' practices are not limited any more within a school or a
153 classroom. School is the basic cell around which "educational spaces" such as the city,
154 neighborhood, and community are spread. The interactions between teachers and students
155 are analyzed independently from the teaching content through ethnographic researches
156 about the communication networks within classrooms. The researcher is interested in
157 learning how teachers intervene, what the rationale is and the outcomes of their
158 interventions to students of heterogeneous social origin [13].

159 There is obviously a shift of the issue under question. Researchers draw their attention to
160 studying specific processes which generate de facto success or failure. In particular, their
161 interest is focused on strategies and interactions of acting individuals. It is not only the
162 researchers who focus overtly on ethnographic approach, but all those who, inspired either
163 by ethnomethodology or phenomenology or the theory of social interaction, contribute to a
164 less deterministic sociology.

165 During the '80s, French sociologists were interested in Anglo-Saxon sociological studies
166 which are based on the theory of symbolic interaction and ethnography. At first view, it
167 seems that French sociology does not accept the ethnographic approach. The community of
168 sociologists considers ethnography to be more descriptive, focusing on observations of a

169 micro-sociological level, while generalizations are potentially limited. Ethnographic
170 researches are considered to be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity and, therefore,
171 are not characterized by scientific validity.

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174 **4. THE RESEARCHER AS AN ACTING INDIVIDUAL AND THEIR SUBJECTIVITY**

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176 Shifting of this issue from a macro-level to a micro-level has put at the forefront an acting
177 individual, completely concealed up until now: the researchers themselves [14]. A question is
178 posed as to how the researcher can escape the influence of subjectivity while interpreting
179 phenomena. A number of social scientists pinpoint that the researcher must avoid the
180 excessive theoretical influence and similar emotional commitments that potentially play a
181 role to data collection and interpretation.

182 G. Devereux (1980) [15] showed that the researcher's prejudice, emotions and mainly fears
183 are reflected on their observations and similarly affect the consequent conceptual
184 processing. The researchers' personal story, including their scientific education, professional
185 expertise and, most of all, analysis of their values and prejudice is reflected into the manner
186 by which they conduct their study. To put it simply, reference is made to an evident selective
187 perception of reality. It is essential that the researchers decode and explain the manner by
188 which they conducted their research as well as how their education and personal story
189 affected their choices or the manner by which the subject of the study was used.

190 The researcher can acquire knowledge "from the inside" of the social life under exploration.
191 In order to develop deep understanding of people's perspectives and experiences they ought
192 to be close to groups, to live with them, to view the world from their own perspective, to
193 observe them through various conditions, to assess behavioral ambiguities and conflicts, to
194 detect the nature and magnitude of their interests and to understand their relationship to
195 other individuals or groups. This is the subject logic in participatory observation.

196 The researchers must understand the symbols in the way that they are perceived by other
197 people. This means that they must learn in detail the language of those individuals under
198 exploration, to understand other means of communication, such as gestures, appearance,
199 look, namely the "body language". These symbolic expressions must be associated with the
200 observed behavior and the conditions in which it develops, as it may vary in terms of
201 interacting with different people and at different time periods.

202 The researchers, eventually, participate in the group process which they observe, yet going
203 even further, as Lewin (1948) suggests that "*a field research, urging the individuals*
204 *interested to participate*" [16] (Gogou, 2010: 277). In other words, all persons involved,
205 namely the researchers, teachers, students and parents participate in the field research or
206 action research which is followed by intervention so that after procedures, group dynamics
207 and lurking problems have been understood, certain interventions follow in the form of
208 methodological stages of change and improvement pertaining to group dynamics and
209 conditions. These will eventually lead to inequalities, school difficulties and failures capsizing
210 [16] (Gogou, 2010: 275-357).

211

212 **5. CONCLUSIONS ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

213

214 All in all, Sociologists of Education are found in front of studies that shed light on these
215 processes taking place at schools everyday either on a macro-sociological or micro-
216 sociological level. The methodological changes should not lead to unproductive conflicts
217 between quantitative and qualitative researches. Quantitative transformations in the

218 education system are broader. Therefore, sociology of education cannot ignore the
219 magnitude and understanding of their consequences.

220 Although the macro-sociological level provides a general framework to analyze education, it
221 has received severe criticism, because it does not take into consideration the formation of
222 social relations tied to the acting individuals that participate in the education system.

223 It can be argued that the deterministic way of thinking in social sciences has been definitely
224 enfeebled over the past decades. The interpretation of social affairs has been questioned,
225 aided by causal models. The paradigm of school failure gives meaning to these
226 developments. Although classic models analyze school failure in relation to justifications
227 referring to social structure and school institution, the approaches developed over the past
228 years focus on procedures that involve various social acting persons [17].

229 Some social scientists, being against the priority given to social structures to analyze the
230 school system, attempted to follow a different direction and showcase the social acting
231 subject focusing on an understanding sociology. It is necessary, however, to transcend the
232 simplistic perspective in favor of the individual's freedom against structures determinism.

233 In the debate developing across social sciences pertaining to the analysis of social
234 phenomena, the imposing authoritative theory is not observed. The increasing interest in the
235 constructive composition about the two levels of analysis, namely the macro-sociological
236 with the micro-sociological, aiming at the fullest understanding of the observed social reality
237 is worth of note [18].

238 In other words, the interest lies in studying which causal arrangements exist between the two
239 different levels. No one supports the idea that the "micro" level is a mere reflection of power
240 over the "macro" level. Estimations must be made regarding up to which point and through
241 which procedures the "micro" explains the "macro" [19].

242 Another feature that makes this change in the researchers' orientation distinct is how
243 research groups are diversified, taking into consideration the fact that other scientists like
244 psychologists, psycho-sociologists, educators and teachers participate along with
245 researchers. It is evident that several reports are not confined to sociology of education, but
246 rather penetrate various areas of sociology (labor, family, business organization, urban
247 sociology...) as well as various disciplines (history, social psychology, economy,...). The
248 strict circumscriptions and defined frameworks have given way, while research has been
249 significantly enriched.

250 The debate about the interdisciplinary aiming at developing scientific knowledge boosted
251 during the '90s in relation to the National Center for Scientific Research in France
252 (C.N.R.S.). The conference that took place in February 1990 titled "The crossroads of
253 Sciences" ("Le Carrefour des sciences") is indicative to this end. E. Morin presents a whole
254 perspective about the problems indicated by scientific expertise. He pinpoints that the
255 various disciplines are absolutely justified since they recognize and perceive the existence of
256 interdisciplinary relations [20]. The concept of the individual in itself is found fragmented
257 across the humanitarian sciences and various biological fields: The psyche is studied by one
258 field, the brain by another, the organism by a third one, the genes, culture, etc. These
259 multiple aspects of a complex human reality can be meaningful only in case they are
260 associated with the reality, instead of ignorance.

261 Morin underlines the fact that we cannot dissolve what has been generated by the scientific
262 fields in view of the idea that a scientific field should be open and close at the same time.

263 The major problem is not to be entrapped only in one single approach which will be
264 unproductive. The issue is to track the way that will lead to the association of various
265 disciplines which do not only hold their own scientific parlance, but also their own conceptual
266 tools.

267

268

269 RECOMENDATION

270

271 It can be inferred that sociology of education has long focused on school forms of socializing
272 and learning and develops a deep understanding of the idea that its subject is complicated
273 and cannot be confined only in the school environment. Shifting from the tight frame of
274 school to the “educational space” as a whole, it can include issues of the young, the city, and
275 immigration. In the new millennium, during which the society gradually shifts to the
276 postmodern era, in which knowledge undergoes a continuous transformation and the relation
277 between education and labor, a historic relation in nature, is put under (re)negotiation,
278 sociology of education must broaden its research horizons using action research. This way it
279 will be able to understand the complexity of the young’s social and professional integration
280 process so that it eventually traces the causes of educational inequalities, school failure and
281 other troublesome situations in order to be effective in terms of finding solutions conducive to
282 educational equality.

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324 **APPENDIX**