

## Research Article

# Contributions to the Study of Sociology of Education: Classical Authors

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**Abstract.** Since its origins, sociology has focused on the study of specific areas such as education, in order to become a science that not only explores the scientific studies, but is also specialized on the subject matter. This article presents an overview of the contributions of various theoretical European traditions regarding education. From the “theoretical inputs” presented, the reflection and theoretical proposal about the subject matter related to the sociology of education are re-defined, due to a seemingly lack of clarity or consensus among the authors. Mainly, this research attempts to analyze those core issues related to the understanding of the multiple interactions between society-education and vice versa, visible from sociology. As one of the main findings, it is argued that the traditionally named sociology of education encompasses three subject matters: sociology of education, pedagogical sociology and the sociology of the educational system. Although these lines of research are intertwined, its categorization facilitates the specific understanding of various aspects within the same subject matter.

**Keywords:** *Sociology, Education, Education System, Society.*

## A. INTRODUCTION

When analyzing the development of sociology as a social science, from the time that goes back to the classical authors to the present, it can be seen that the sociological scientific community has shown a special interest in the application of sociological knowledge to the study of education since various perspectives. It is not surprising that the development of the so-called "sociology of education" has a strong impact in Europe, the same continent that saw the emergence and consolidation of sociology within the academy since the 19th century (Ballantine et al., 2021).

This long history has resulted in numerous theoretical and research contributions that are very useful for those who intend to start their higher studies in the field of education (Oliveira & Silva, 2020). In this way, a review of the contributions that various theoretical traditions have made on the subject is presented, and a reflection on the object of study of the sociology of education (Lingard, 2021). In addition, it is a contribution to the growth of theoretical production and knowledge about education, based on the approaches developed here.

Its objective is to provide the student population (whether in education sciences or teaching, that has just begun their training in this area, a document that facilitates the introduction to this field from the sociological perspective, mapping the various currents, authors and theoretical texts and pointing out some of its main approaches (Reay, 2020). As a temporary location, the year of birth and death of the classical authors (namely: E. Durkheim, M. Weber, K. Marx, G. Simmel), and the year of publication of the works and of the publication will be mentioned.

On the other hand, the contributions and clarifications on sociological theory of Dr. Óscar Fernández González are appreciated, who has been a mentor for many generations

of students in the sociology career (University of Costa Rica), to whom for his teachings we owe the intellectual stimulation required to delve into the field of theory (Browm, 2018). In the case of the sociology of education, it is notorious that there is no single research line to which all the authors, called classics, resorted or that allow to clearly define the object of study of the sociology of education.

Grosso modo, the emphasis of the various theories mentioned is placed according to the greater or lesser emphasis given within the extremes of the relationships: microsocial-macrosocial, individual-society and action-structure. Where, in some of them, to a certain extent, some of the philosophical debates of past centuries (materialism-idealism, rationalism-empiricism, etc.) are contained. For this reason, those aspects that served to define the object of study of the sociology of education were examined. Secondly, this document serves as an introductory review for anyone who wants to start exploring the field and is partially or totally unaware of the most representative authors of the theoretical schools reviewed. On the other hand, it can be concluded that the educational reality is plural, because it is not only restricted to school and college, but unfortunately in many definitions of education it is reduced to formal education (Verger et al., 2019).

Given this, it becomes necessary to reflect on some unknowns such as: if a sociology of non-formal education could be generated? A sociology of people or groups with special educational needs?, among others, in order to develop in greater detail the scope of sociology in terms of the interpretation and explanation of the educational phenomenon, as a critical form of education, the system, thought and as a possible generator of solutions.

For this reason, following the point of view of Diamond (2018), one might ask: could it be that the sociology of education will not be able to contribute to the understanding and search for solutions to problems such as violence in educational centers (student to student/student to teacher), desertion, repetition, the so-called school failure (which is commonly foisted on the student without reflecting on the possible social causes involved), etc.?, that is, thinking about problems related to educational practice in practical terms, so that this is not only restricted to the teaching and learning process.

Of course, when reading the previous suggestions to try to define the object of study of the sociology of education as well as the topics suggested in scheme 2, we want to emphasize that since education is a macro topic, the traditionally called sociology of education (society-education-society relationship), encompasses educational sociology, educational sociology and the educational system, turning out to be lines of research on the same topic, but its categorization facilitates the specification of various aspects within the same object of study, that can be included within what will be called the sociology of education, rather than the irreconcilable result of an endless debate (Borondki & Hassan, 2020).

Finally, it is also intended to draw attention to the contributions that some sciences (such as sociology) can give in various fields and the possible theoretical or methodological integrations or complementarities that may arise, around a topic such as education, which is viable to address from an inter and transdisciplinary perspective. In this sense, it is clear that there is an unavoidable need for more research, articles and essays, since there is still much to explore and develop, both within this scientific field and within education as an object of study. The reader is therefore exhorted to delve into the development of research proposals and projects and in this way also contribute to the debate regarding the sociology of education.

## **B. METHOD**

This research uses qualitative research with descriptive analysis approach. The type of data used in this study is secondary data using literature study techniques. The focus in this study is to analyze and compare some of the classical views on the sociology of education presented using qualitative methods.

## **C. RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

### **1. What is? And What is Sociology For?**

These questions seem "innocent", but they are crucial to broadly understand what will be developed later, because sociology, according to Adorno and Horkheimer (1969), was born as a "daughter of positivism" and, from its beginnings, seeks to liberate the will and knowledge of the influence of religious knowledge and any metaphysical speculation from philosophy, through the rigor and objectivity of scientific research applied to the understanding of social phenomena.

That is to say, although the "novelty" of sociology was not found in its object of study (society), this being part of human reflection since previous times (as in Herodotus, Ibn Jaldun, etc.), it "novel" and the contribution of sociology are the methods and theoretical interpretations about society that will emerge from the scientific study of it.

Thus, sociology, like many other sciences, began a long road of construction that led to the development of ideas, theories, methods, techniques and debates about the object of study of sociology (Lybeck, 2019), which served (and serve) as part of a constant "review" of the achievements of sociology as a science.

In this way, a distancing from the emotional and the religious was given as a way of understanding reality, passing to a rationality through science and trying to avoid the mechanical transfer of knowledge, techniques and methods from the natural sciences to the sciences. Delamont (2020) developing its own methods and techniques (like all science) and giving sociology the category of scientific knowledge.

From this, sociology slowly developed the necessary elements of any science, such as the "systematic and critical use of research, theoretical thinking and logical-argumental thinking to develop a body of knowledge about a defined object". But as this same author points out, scientific knowledge is diverse, because not all sciences are experimental. However, criticism and rigorous application of the method are necessary requirements of sociology as in all science (Colquhoun, 2020).

In relation to the development of theoretical thought within the specific case of sociology, with the passage of time and the appearance of more people interested in this field, a plurality of theoretical approaches and ways of analyzing society and social phenomena arise, giving way to the appearance of authors who left behind a long theoretical tradition in sociology.

Now, all of the above leads us to ask the question: what is theory? For the conceptual purposes of this document, theory is understood as a set of propositions about a range of objects connected to each other in such a way that from some of them the rest can be deduce its real validity consists in the fact that the deduced propositions agree with actual events. On the contrary, if there are contradictions between experience and theory, one or the other will have to be revised. Either it has been poorly observed, or there is some error in the theoretical principles. Hence, the theory always remains, with respect to the facts, as a hypothesis (Lingard, 2020).

To achieve this, every theory must develop an internal consistency and coherence that allows it to interpret social phenomena (or society as a whole), developing its own

concepts and an approach capable of describing, interpreting and explaining its object of study. In this way, terms such as functionalism, functional-structuralism, Marxist structuralism, phenomenology, etc., began to be in common use within sociology, when naming the classification of the various theoretical currents that appeared during the 20th century. Therefore, the answers to the question "what is sociology?" will depend on the perspective or theoretical tradition from which an author positions himself.

However, in a succinct and simplified way, sociology can be defined as the science that studies society with its own methods, both its structure and social action, which takes society as "a whole" (from its objective elements) or views it from the scale of individuals (subjective and intersubjective), emphasizing the macrosocial or microsocial dimension, respectively (Archer, 2020).

For this, it uses qualitative and quantitative research methods, resulting in the analysis, understanding and reflection of social phenomena and the interrelationships between different areas or social aspects. It is at this point where one can speak of sociology as a plural field, that is, it is about recognizing the existence of "sociologies" that emphasize one or another aspect but that at the same time allow sociological production to be classified as something diverse.

Thus, for example, there have been discrepancies between those who see sociology from an "empiricist" or "theoreticist" point of view (Horkheimer, 2000); who speak of an experimental sociology versus a social sociology, academic sociology, etc. (Amstron, 2018); or the debates between "social pragmatists" and "social philosophers, which differ in their positions (to varying degrees) about the importance of empirical evidence, the construction of theory, the elaboration of research, the development of an innovative and exhaustive methodological approach, etc.

Having briefly detailed what sociological theory consists of, a new question arises, which is, what is sociology for? It is clear that this leads to an analysis of the usefulness of sociological knowledge and its academic and extra-academic value, in a science with a diverse function (determined by whoever produces said knowledge) on society and current times, which due to its same function and diverse Perspectives finds itself constantly destined to offer its results and answer: "What is this or that sociology really good for?" Or "how do social actors use sociological publications that they can access?" (Ball, 2020).

Precisely, society legitimizes or delegitimizes sociological knowledge according to the function given to it by the researcher and the utility assigned to it socially. In this way, for some sociology is capable of analyzing and diagnosing society, for others it contributes the ideology of the struggle of the oppressed against power, for some it is the generator of instruments for the domination of those who exercise political power and for others, it is integrated into social change projects through the participatory action of communities.

## **2. Functionalism and the Influence of Durkheim**

Also known by some authors as the consensus or positivist perspective, it has had a long tradition within academic fields. Here particularly reference will be made to one of the main exponents in France. In his work, the philosopher Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) gives education and the educational system a priority place in relation to society. Along with his written production, his teaching career combined education and social sciences on several occasions.

The above happened when he obtained the chair of pedagogy and social sciences at the University of Bordeaux (1896), or when he was appointed full professor of the science of education and sociology course at the Sorbonne University (1902), where "he

defended the need to resort to the sociology of education to support both theories and pedagogical practices, since all education is of a social nature” (Jones, 2020).

His sociological perspective prioritizes social structures over the individual, attaches special importance to socialization and the reproductive processes of sociocultural patterns, giving great value to coercion and social coercion of the individual, morality being the element that permeates everything. the educational process.

It is worth noting mainly that for Durkheim, socialization is of the utmost importance, because it operates as the process of integrating individuals into society and their acquisition of the necessary skills. The final result is the endowment of a certain model of individual for a certain society in a defined space and time. Other key concepts to understand Durkheim's work are "general action", "collective action", "mechanical solidarity", "organic solidarity" and "social fact", but due to the breadth of these, it is not possible to develop them widely.

However, within his work certain studies related to education such as *Education and Sociology* (1922/2009) stand out, where he analyzes education from the educational systems that existed and exist in each society, where the system is unique and multiple at the same time. , that is, it gives all members of society certain standards of uniformity, but education also varies according to social class, place of residence, time, etc.

A constant in his work on education is the defense of the social nature of education against those who privileged its individualistic and psychological character, because for the author, education and the educational system respond to eminently social needs. In addition, within the educational system he recognizes the important role of the State in establishing goals of a social nature and the power of education to try to achieve them.

On the other hand, he recognizes the difference between education and pedagogy, “where it follows that education is nothing more than the subject of pedagogy. The latter is based on a certain way of thinking about the elements of education” (Power & Rees, 2020). In this way, pedagogy as a practical theory (denying its character of art or science) is based on the educational sciences for its application.

Regarding its relationship with sociology, Durkheim affirms that it is precisely this science that helps to determine the ends of education that are in accordance with the ends of society and for which the reproduction of sociocultural patterns is necessary, where each norm and institution complies with giving maintenance to society so that it continues to preserve its form.

For his part, in *Moral Education* (1925/2002), he carries out an analysis of rationalist secular morality that provides the elements for the functioning of society as a whole, where the school supports and protects the "French national type" (prevailing in the time in which he writes the text), far from religious dogmas and practices.

For the author, moral education happens during the process of early childhood within the family. But it is mainly in the second childhood that takes place within the primary school and away from the family, where the bases of morality for social life outside the family circle are constituted.

In this way, the individual in childhood learns the general rules, called moral, as pre-established rules for particular circumstances that “it is up to the moral agent to decide how it is convenient to particularize it. There is always a margin left to his initiative, but this margin is limited” (Durkheim, 2002, p. 53).

It is here where society, through socialization agents, such as the school, imposes, regulates and establishes the actions of individuals. That is, morality (an external element to the individual) disciplines the actions of each of the individuals. Within the analysis of it, Durkheim proposes that there are elements of morality, among which the first is the

spirit of discipline, which establishes regulated behaviors and determined goals and defines by regulating and containing the horizon of possibilities of the individual in society.

The second element of morality is the link to social groups, which consists of the integration of the individual in society from an interest in bonding, for which he must abdicate his individual nature under the condition of being part of the groups social. But at this point the question arises about what space is left for the individual? This is where the third element arises, the autonomy of the will as an element of morality and part of the antinomy between moral rules external to the will and individual autonomy..

For Durkheim (2002, pp. 105-106) under the influence of Kant, this antinomy is solved in the following way, "to the extent that only reason moves us, we act morally and, at the same time, we act with full autonomy because we limit ourselves to following the law of our reasonable nature".

Finally, to instill in the student the elements of morality, based on the spirit of discipline (personal control and measure of desires), school discipline and punishments are used. The author analyzes two positions about punishment: as a way to prevent the lack of observance of the rule (punishment as threat and intimidation) and as a way to eliminate the fault (punishment to repair the infraction).

### **3. Methodological Individualism: Max Weber**

This current is related to the contributions of the philosopher, lawyer and economist Max Weber (1864-1920), in what some authors call comprehensive sociology, of social interaction, methodological individualism or actionism. In short, it can be said that the Weberian theoretical perspective focuses on social action and social interaction (in this case, the social is the result of this interaction). As pointed out in *Economy and Society* (Weber, 1922/2008) sociology is "a science that seeks to understand, interpreting it, social action in order to explain it causally in its development and effects" (Weber, 2008, p. 5).

In the case of action, it is defined as "a human behavior (whether it consists of an external or internal act, or an omission or permission) as long as the subject or subjects of the action link a subjective sense to it" (Weber, 2008, p.5). That is to say, this theoretical current prioritizes over the sense and meaning that the subjects give to their individual actions and decisions. For this reason, it focuses on the individual and not on social structures and gives greater importance to the understanding of social action (which has a meaning and meaning) than to coercion or social coercion (as in the case of Durkheim).

For this author, sociology should be responsible for interpreting the action from the evidence obtained. However, "the interpretive explanation as opposed to the observation certainly has as a price the essentially more hypothetical and fragmentary character of the results achieved by the interpretation. But it is precisely what is specific to sociological knowledge" (Weber, 2008, p. 13).

It is at this point where the understanding of action through interpretation, what can be done from it, is the unit of analysis of comprehensive sociology, but considering that "social action is not identical to) nor is it a homogeneous action of many, b) nor to the action of someone influenced by the conduct of others" (Weber, 2008, p. 19).

In this way, from this perspective, the social is defined by the interactions between subjects and the consequences of individual actions. For its part, the relationship is a plural conduct that is reciprocally referred to and oriented by reciprocity.

Other topics of interest and developed by Weber are power, community, types of domination (lay, traditional and charismatic), the State (and its claim to legitimate monopoly of violence), etc. Now, it is important to note that unlike Durkheim, Weber

never devoted an entire book to studying the subject of education or the educational system as such. However, part of his thought associated mainly with the universities of his time is collected here.

In his work *Economy and Society* (2008), he mentions the relationship between education and profession, since in society there are professional structures where the articulation of classes and the forms of education that are created for classes of specific professions (aristocrats, knights, clerics, etc.) are involved as administrative cadres in charge of carrying out and imposing orders and laws within any form of domination. However, "the social prestige based on the enjoyment of a certain education and a certain instruction is not in itself something specific to bureaucratism [...] in other structures of domination it is based on fundamentally different foundations" (Weber, 2008, p. 751).

On the other hand, education provides the basis for a social stratification of a class nature, giving what is necessary to the subjects to position themselves within society in relation to other classes and within the class to which they belong in relation to their peers.

In his other works, *Science as a Vocation* (1919/2000) (which, together with *Politics as a Vocation*, are commonly known as *The Politician and the Scientist*, although no Weber text bears this title), he describes and compares the educational system university, through the analysis of the functions of the assistant of the American universities and of the privatdozent of German universities, together with other aspects about the production of scientific knowledge, teaching in higher education centers, the competition for positions, etc. Although he previously wrote *The American and German Universities* (Weber, 1911/2007), where certain elements that gave rise to the text in question from 1919 can be observed and which allows us to recognize a refinement of his position on German universities and the career teacher.

#### **4. The Marxist Perspective**

In general, the work of Karl Marx (1818-1883), and that developed in conjunction with Friedrich Engels (1820-1895), has been one of the theoretical perspectives that has caused the most controversy and debate, either for or against what was originally proposed by Marx. However, the number of followers of the work of this thinker has spread throughout the social sciences and has evolved to produce various positions (such as Marxist structuralists and neo-Marxists), giving way to numerous trends based on his work.

In general, the approaches of this perspective can be summarized as follows: Although society is seen as a "whole", it is divided into social classes with antagonistic interests. In *The Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1847/1997) it is postulated that the history of human societies is the result of the struggle between social classes. This conflict between classes (for which some call this approach as Conflict Theory), gives way to relations between workers (who form the production force that exchange it for a salary) and bourgeois (who control the means of production: workshops, factories, etc).

For Marx, each society is accompanied by its own mode of production: "that is why in order to understand the social "mode of production" of existence, it is necessary to consider the existing production techniques (productive forces), and the ownership of the means of production working conditions (social relations of production)". (Taberner, 2005, p. 25).

This results in the existence of two social classes of greater relevance (workers and bourgeois) that are facing each other. But it also recognizes the existence of middle layers, which generates a constant social dynamic between social classes.

In this way, concepts such as «mode of production» and «social classes», allow us to affirm that there is an interest of this theoretical perspective for those economic and political elements that mediate between the exploitation of the working class and the material production of society.

On the other hand, within this approach society is represented as a building. In this case, there are two elements to consider: the structure (or infrastructure, where the productive forces and the relations of production that provide the material base for society are located) and the superstructure (where the ideological is located through laws, politics, the juridical, etc., and institutions such as the State, the school, the church, artistic manifestations, etc.).

In this way, the superstructure is “supported on the base” and what happens in the superstructure is determined by what can happen in the infrastructure. In this regard, Althusser (1970/2008, p. 17) sees in this an “ultimate determination of what happens in the “floors” (of the superstructure) by what happens in the economic base”. Even so, Marx himself, as highlighted by Althusser, recognizes that what happens between superstructure and structure is thought of in two ways: the relative autonomy of the superstructure and the reaction of the superstructure on the base.

## **5. Simmel's Contributions and Influence**

Of all the classics, Georg Simmel (1858-1918) is perhaps the only one who does not enjoy a wide prestige in Latin America like the previous ones (Durkheim, Weber, Marx), due, perhaps, to the ignorance of his work or the undervaluation of his works.

The work *Pedagogía Escolar* (Simmel, 1921/2008) has recently been published in Spanish, which collects his lessons on pedagogy (taught in the Botanical Garden of the University of Strasbourg, the only place left available when the classrooms were occupied as a hospital during World War I), written by Simmel but edited by Karl Hauter.

Watier (2005) points out that this theoretical approach is characterized by considering sociology as an eclectic science, which takes from other sciences (History, Anthropology, etc.) materials to elaborate a synthesis based on a new look (sociological look) on the facts, thus Simmel's works span a broad spectrum of social science and philosophy.

This look is based on the premise of taking a certain distance to record the facts and the experience that happens in social reality. But he appreciates that these facts can take the place of knowledge as a construction, the product of interpretation and modeling by individuals who are immersed in numerous social ties.

On the other hand, for Simmel, society is possible thanks to the awareness of being socialized, of those who make up society. This occurs under a reciprocity, but it does not occur in a total way and much less in the idealized way that some authors denote (Watier, 2005), giving way to a correlation between the individual and the appearance of groups, of which he is a part. For this reason, for this author the appearance of groups and the forms of bonds and associative relations between their members are covered with special importance, since they give way to the formation of groups.

Another important aspect of Simmel's analysis is the forms of socialization, which carry a content (interests, drives, dispositions, feelings, etc.), in which each individual will materialize them through various forms of socialization to achieve them.

Therefore, although social institutions are important for Simmel, it is more important to study associations as part of their relationships with one another, a dynamic in which socialization becomes a link between individuals and generates various degrees of cohesion between them.

## 6. The Object of Study of the Sociology of Education

When speaking of the object of study of the sociology of education, it is necessary to recognize that certain observations must be made in this regard, because sometimes when reading what has been written on the subject (for example, in the case of the classic authors mentioned above) seems to detect a lack of clarity about the object of study of this branch of sociology.

To exemplify the above, in summary it can be noted that for Durkheim education is the curriculum, both official and hidden, because it focuses on both content and moral values. On the other hand, for Weber, education intervenes in society through the estates. On the other hand, Weber also focuses on the issue of power behind the appointment of university professors and argues that political influences inevitably condition the progress or stagnation of some.

Instead, Marx is interested in highlighting the ideological factor of education behind the domination and reproduction of the conditions of production and the marginality suffered by the proletarian class with respect to the conditions in which their education takes place.

Simmel, for his part, focuses his attention on the teaching and learning process, the role of the teacher, the methodology in the lessons, etc., and on the events of the lesson and education. However, to begin with the analysis of the object of study of the sociology of education, it is possible to mention what Van Haecht (1999, p. 9) pointed out at the beginning of his book:

Risking an introduction to the sociology of education in the French language is not a simple undertaking when it is known that behind the translation of an Anglo-Saxon formula (Sociology of Education) hides one (or, rather, some) sociology(s) of the school.

Because, ultimately, don't we feel divided today between the feeling that everything has already been said on this subject and the impression that there are many unknowns that still hover over the social challenges that unfold there? (original in italics).

From the foregoing, it can be recognized that what began as a field of research defined by English researchers and that was limited to the school, has evolved but not without avoiding "unknowns" or a plurality of approaches that result in a constellation of possible objects of study for the sociology of education.

Given this, it could be proactively suggested that the sociology of education deals with a "macrotheme" because "the matter is, in fact, immense and poorly defined" (Janne, 1980, p. 13), where it could be recognized multiple definitions of the object of study from different perspectives.

In this way, as a contribution on the subject, after reviewing everything mentioned above, it is necessary to "catalogue" the horizon of everything observable in the field of sociology of education, because a classification provides greater clarity on the subject. In this case, the sociological study of education is a broad field that can be divided and classified as follows: a) The "traditional view" of the sociology of education: The study of the relationship between society and education. However, what Gómez and Domínguez (2001) point out about the reciprocal relationship could be added to this, because there is also an interaction of education with society, where education is made visible in multiple ways (for example, as a process of acculturation for the student); and b) Other visions: In a proactive way, all these visions are classified into three types: educational sociology, sociology of the educational system and educational sociology.

From the foregoing, it can be said that sociology can deal both with social factors that may have a consequence or relationship with education and vice versa, and with educational institutions (in general and not just schools) as a social institution. and social

setting where the social interaction of numerous individuals (teachers, students, mothers, fathers, etc.).

#### D. CONCLUSION

As can be seen in the review of the theoretical traditions, one cannot speak of "sociology" but of "sociologies". This does not undermine the unit of analysis of sociology (society), but allows us to recognize that the various perspectives vary in their approach. In addition, the foregoing shows that the construction of sociology as a scientific field is a constant, so that scientific knowledge of what is called "the social" is difficult to define due to the dynamics of change in societies and sociology itself. That is, dynamics and change are a fundamental part of sociological research in terms of its object of study and an integral part of the field of sociology. These conditions impose the constant review of the applications of sociology and its branches.

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