

Why Is Sociological Thought Pertinent to Students of Pedagogics?

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Abstract

The article defines the various dimensions pertaining to the relationship between sociology and pedagogics. Social structures impinge broadly pedagogical patterns and institutions not only concerning the establishment of institutions such as schools or universities but also concerning behavior patterns, values, and norms manifest in educational institutions. Conversely, the structure of educational systems influences largely entire developmental courses of societies and economies. Educational systems are investments in the future of societies.

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Sociology dealt with education and upbringing early on in its history. I will only mention names such as Durkheim, Geiger, Parsons, Coleman, Luhmann and Bourdieu. Research fields such as educational sociology have emerged to explore the connections between society and education. These connections are very diverse and affect many, really many phenomena. For example, social structures have an impact on the existence and extension of the education system, on its integration with the economy and society, on the financing of the education system and on the development of curricula (i.e. the body of knowledge to be taught). Social structures, values and standards of behavior define the role of educators, the interactions between educators and students and the interactions between students themselves. But there is more. Under the heading of socialization, the psychological development and enculturation of the child as a function of family and school in particular and society in general is dealt with. It is found that children and young people develop different structures in the areas of personality, thinking, values, action orientation and behavioral patterns depending on different socialization conditions. This covers a broad field. It opens a view of historically determined complexes of society, socialization and personality, i.e. of the existence of historically determined socialization and development processes. Furthermore, a look at the fact that even within a given society, different social milieus socialize their children differently. This, in turn, has an impact on their educational aspirations and school performance.

This panoramic view already shows the close links between sociology and educational science. However, educational science also refers to psychology and draws on its findings. Interdisciplinarity therefore seems to be the tried and tested

means of further developing educational science issues. However, the relationship between educational science and sociology is two-sided, as not only do social structures have an impact on education, but education also has a strong effect on society. This interaction will be presented here in all due brevity.

Let us first turn to the topic of how social conditions affect education, i.e. the relevance of sociology for educational science. I would like to illustrate this connection using three phenomena: the socio-economic stage of development, social milieus and cultural standards.

The socio-economic stage of development of a society determines whether or not there is an institutionalized educational system at all. Hunter-gatherer societies and pre-state rural village societies did not have a school system. Only state societies have school education, which initially only covers a small part of the population. And it was only in industrialized societies that compulsory education was introduced.

However, the educational efforts of industrialized society did not stop with the introduction of compulsory primary school education. In the last 100 years in particular, the percentage of those who have attended secondary schools and universities has grown. This educational expansion expresses a continuous progression, the end of which is not in sight. There are authors who deny that this educational expansion reflects the requirements of socio-economic and professional development, but rather see it as an expression of a distribution struggle for well-paid positions, i.e. as an expression of a barrier that is placed in the way of upwardly mobile groups of people from above (H. Gintis, P. Bourdieu).

Even if one does not rule out phenomena of milieu closure in individual cases, it is of course obvious that the expansion of the stock of knowledge required for practicing a profession is the main cause of educational expansion. Today's society is more than ever a knowledge society and also a scientific society. Education and training are the engines of economic growth par excellence and therefore also engines of social change.

The second phenomenon I wanted to use to demonstrate social effects on the education system was the social milieu. It is said that Germany is one of the industrialized countries in which social inequality has a particularly strong impact on educational success. It has long been studied how to explain the fact that different social milieus significantly influence children's success at school. Children from financially strong families attend higher schools and universities more frequently and often have better grades than children from financially weak families. This is a general phenomenon in modern societies that has been documented for generations. A wide variety of reasons have been put forward for this inequality.

The third phenomenon that I announced I would use to explain the social causes of educational action is cultural standards. This refers to values, norms, moral motives and convictions that are reflected in educational action. While the first phenomenon refers to socio-economic development, the second phenomenon to the social milieu, the third phenomenon refers to practical action based on idealistic motives. This practical action on the basis of cultural standards encompasses and describes pedagogical treatment, pedagogical interactions, the role of the teacher and educational styles in the family and educational institution. These cultural standards have undergone an enormous development for the better, especially in the last 100 years. For example, very authoritarian treatment that often degraded the child was

once common and widespread in families and society. Spanking and violence against children was even seen as sensible and was part of the repertoire until around 1965/1970. Today, this is forbidden. As you can see, social developments also manifest themselves in the areas of values, morals, parenting styles and pedagogical behavior in families and society.

The presentation of the three phenomena of socio-economic development, social milieu and cultural standards should shed some light on the way in which social structures influence education and upbringing. This should briefly demonstrate the relevance of sociology for educational science. I would now like to use a few examples to show that, conversely, education and upbringing also have a strong impact on social structures and social change. As a result, social phenomena are themselves pedagogically conditioned and influenced to a large extent. Conversely, the educational sciences are also relevant to sociology.

The relevance of education for the existence of society can be illustrated with a simple example. Without the mastery of basic arithmetic, contemporary society would collapse within minutes. Vendors would not be able to give change, bank transfers could no longer be controlled and the entire economy and society would descend into chaos. However, basic arithmetic is not innate, but is learned through educational instruction. Only simply structured natural economies and agrarian societies can exist on the basis of widespread illiteracy among the population.

Compulsory schooling based on several years of school attendance is therefore already functionally necessary in the early phase of the existence of industrial societies. The more the industrial society develops socio-economically as a result of the development of natural sciences and engineering, the more necessary the expansion of higher education becomes. A modern knowledge and science society cannot exist without many years of intensive specialist training and a high proportion of university graduates. Education and training are therefore the most important drivers of socio-economic development and securing the future viability of societies. It is not financial capital and raw materials, but knowledge and science that are the decisive forces.

What applies to the course of industrial society perhaps also applies to its beginnings. After all, it is fair to say that its emergence 250 years ago was the result of education and science. James Watt's steam engine, for example, is not the result of craftsmanship and tinkering, but of the modern physics and chemistry of the time. The industrial society is therefore primarily the result of an educational history or educational success, the result of the English and European education system, as Margaret Jacob, among others (e.g., Joel Mokyr or Simon Winchester), has shown in a monograph from 1997. The education system therefore not only has an impact on epochs and social stages, but also creates them, at least with regard to the emergence of industrial modernity.

Education and training have not only created modern society, but also modern people. Illiterate people in literate societies do not think much differently from literate people because they always live in a literate environment and are influenced by it. People in thoroughly illiterate societies, however, do not have access to certain complex, abstract and logical thought patterns and ways of thinking, which one could actually assume to be innate if the research results did not show otherwise. Alexander Luria and Peeter Tulviste are among the researchers who have found that illiterate people from pre-modern cultures can, for example, use syllogisms of the simple type: "All bears in Russia are brown. The city of Moscow is in Russia. What color are the bears in Moscow?" because they do not put the sentences into a logical relationship and

understand words such as "all" and "some" differently.

One conclusion is obvious. At school, children do not only absorb information and knowledge, but also change their thought processes. They learn how to deal with abstract, logical and systematic ways of thinking. They learn methodical and reflective thinking. They learn critical thinking, which they should and can apply both to themselves and to society. Modern education pursues the goal of socializing self-determined and responsible citizens. Without self-determined, informed and critically thinking citizens, there can be no civil society, no constitutional state and no democracy. Education and critical thinking are therefore the engines of the process of civilization mentioned by Norbert Elias.

This ban on physical violence in education is certainly not an isolated phenomenon. The moral and humanistic standards in intergenerational relations in the family and education are matched by the higher standards in gender relations and in domestic and foreign policy. The so-called post-heroic age outlaws wars and imperialism. The fact that the most advanced societies of the present rely on the realization of humanistic standards in domestic and foreign policy and differ pleasantly from their past in these matters is the result of the civilization process, which in turn is due to an education-related increase in reflexivity and empathy. It should come as no surprise that this process is not taking place at the same speed in global society. But the fact that the educational goals and educational practices of democratic societies are geared towards reflexivity and critical thinking, cultivating humanistic and democratic values, has collective effects at a societal and historical level. The existence and stability of democracy, the rule of law and humanism in democratic societies are the result of the democratic and humanistic education system and the anchoring of the psychological effects it triggers in the people who support these societies. Conversely, this means that the dictatorships of the contemporary world, with their willingness to discriminate and use violence, have a massive education problem. The people living in them lack the ways of thinking for which a democratic and humanistic education system is a prerequisite.

Footnotes

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