



Exploration of Theoretical Forms and Considerations in Sociology of Education (1960-1990)

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author ET designed the study, wrote the protocol and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author GL managed the elaboration of the study. Author KE managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

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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. INTRODUCTION

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].

In this vein, a large number of researchers, questioning the approaches of Sociology of Education developed in the '60s, give special meaning to the study of social processes in lower fields of analysis. They underline the necessity to resume empirical studies, placing their interest in the work performed in the social field. This, of course, does not mean that they deny the importance of previous studies that led to understanding the operation of school system. The new trends are orientated towards methods and approaches focusing not only on structure, but mainly on the level of human act. Drawing on data from the theory of social interaction, ethnomethodology [2] and social phenomenology, researchers make an attempt to analyze the social interactions unfolded within the school classroom as well as the emerging conditions among teachers and students [3,4].

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

The first perception of sociology was inspired by the positivist philosophical trend, whereas the reference point of the second one derives from phenomenology and hermeneutics. The works of ethnomethodologists or fans of symbolic

interactions, the most prominent work of which is that of E. Goffman [5], illustrate this hermeneutic paradigm which includes studies tied to meaningfulness on behalf of the subjects.

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

The present study focuses on certain schools of thought considered to be the most important, as they incorporate broader considerations and determine the further course of Sociology of Education. Our view is based on their approach through the Greek paradigm of theories interpretation about Sociology of Education.

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

A number of research orientations in the educational field are inspired by priority given to the local, becoming the content of many studies in the U.S.A. and England ever since the end of the '50s. These works were conducive to enriching analyses of social inequalities in school [6].

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

analyzing different school phenomena in detail [7].

This research trend was commenced in 1954 by G. Spindler at Stanford University. The publication of many edited works is a proof of the fact that these orientations pertain to relations between school and the community on the one hand, and school and classrooms on the other. The issues tied to immigrant students' school course are the focal point of the American Anthropology of Education [8]. These researchers interpret everyday situations, to the meanings given by various acting individuals, the role of interactions, negotiations and strategies which entails repetitive observations and long-term stay at the research spot in order to generate certain knowledge. An opening towards other theoretical approaches is observed, namely the symbolic interaction from the School of Chicago. According to this orientation, individuals are considered to interact through symbols and construct their actions and meanings [9].

In England, at the beginning of the '70s, a new trend emerged "the new sociology of education" [10]. Its main feature was concentration on processes and studies pertaining to school and local space. These works coincide with the creation of "educational priority zones", the main objective of which was to improve school operation in non-privileged areas by involving other social carriers, too [11].

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

In England around 1970, ethnographers began to detect smaller details of school life, as it was experienced by both teachers and students. Some authors like P. Woods [12], are inspired by ethnographic and interaction studies. Woods defines the aims of ethnography in the framework of symbolic interaction. He contends that it is important to discover the meaning given by the members of a social group to the conditions that help shape their everyday life. This ethnomethodological standpoint assumes that it is necessary to use the institutional language, known to the entire group, in order to understand it.

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

3. SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION IN FRANCE

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

In France, sociology of education is orientated towards a kind of sociology focusing on reproduction processes while it ignores "the local" as a level of analysis. Until the '80s, French researchers prioritized macro-sociological studies, placing their attention mainly on the

whole of educational inequalities and the role of school, as an institution that puts forward social segregation. Eventually in France, during the '80s, researchers drew their attention to the local. The policy of "educational priority zones" (political planning throughout 1981-1983) roused their interest in a series of studies about school and its environment. Teachers are invited by official circulars to include the social actors in their program, as they are interested in children's socialization and performance at school. In this way, learning is reinforced in these so-called zones through a new organization of the school classroom that is through an instructional intervention. Thus, the relationships with the "community" are obviously enhanced by creating socio-educational centers that provide athletic and cultural activities [13].

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

Through ethnographic researches, some authors proceed to a detailed analysis of educational priority zones. The results indicate that the students' parents have different symbolic and material interests. Therefore, the formation of a homogeneous group cannot be assumed. Families of lower social strata suffer to a larger extent, than other groups, the coercions deriving from the local, whereas middle classes are able to develop strategies so as to use the local to their benefit [14].

It is realized that the sociologist of education gradually acquires a broader field of research. Some researchers – participants in a group about the sociology of education at the Paris V University, began to be interested in the ethnographic approach long before this was permitted somehow by the French research environment in the field of education. Through an ethnographic research, R. Sirota observes many communication networks existing within a school classroom. Teachers' practices are not limited any more within a school or a classroom. School

is the basic cell around which "educational spaces" such as the city, neighborhood, and community are spread. The interactions between teachers and students are analyzed independently from the teaching content through ethnographic researches about the communication networks within classrooms. The researcher is interested in learning how teachers intervene, what the rationale is and the outcomes of their interventions to students of heterogeneous social origin [15].

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

During the '80s, French sociologists were interested in Anglo-Saxon sociological studies which are based on the theory of symbolic interaction and ethnography. At first view, it seems that French sociology does not accept the ethnographic approach. The community of sociologists considers ethnography to be more descriptive, focusing on observations of a micro-sociological level, while generalizations are potentially limited. Ethnographic researches are considered to be influenced by the researcher's subjectivity and, therefore, are not characterized by scientific validity.

4. THE RESEARCHER AS ACTING INDIVIDUAL AND THEIR SUBJECTIVITY

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

G. Devereux [16] showed that the researcher's prejudice, emotions and mainly fears are reflected on their observations and similarly

affect the consequent conceptual processing. The researchers' personal story, including their scientific education, professional expertise and, most of all, analysis of their values and prejudice is reflected into the manner by which they conduct their study. To put it simply, reference is made to an evident selective perception of reality. It is essential that the researchers decode and explain the manner by which they conducted their research as well as how their education and personal story affected their choices or the manner by which the subject of the study was used.

The researcher can acquire knowledge "from the inside" of the social life under exploration. In order to develop deep understanding of people's perspectives and experiences they ought to be close to groups, to live with them, to view the world from their own perspective, to observe them through various conditions, to assess behavioral ambiguities and conflicts, to detect the nature and magnitude of their interests and to understand their relationship to other individuals or groups. This is the subject logic in participatory observation [17].

The researchers must understand the symbols in the way that they are perceived by other people. This means that they must learn in detail the language of those individuals under exploration, to understand other means of communication, such as gestures, appearance, look, namely the "body language". These symbolic expressions must be associated with the observed behavior and the conditions in which it develops, as it may vary in terms of interacting with different people and at different time periods [18].

The researchers, eventually, participate in the group process which they observe, yet going even further, as Lewin (1948) suggests that "a field research, urging the individuals interested to participate" (Gogou-Kritikou [19]: 277). In other words, all persons involved, namely the researchers, teachers, students and parents participate in the field research or action research which is followed by intervention so that after procedures, group dynamics and lurking problems have been understood, certain interventions follow in the form of methodological stages of change and improvement pertaining to group dynamics and conditions. These will eventually lead to inequalities, school difficulties and failures capsizing (Gogou [20]: 275-357).

5. CONCLUSIONS

All in all, Sociologists of Education are found in front of studies that shed light on these processes taking place at schools everyday either on a macro-sociological or micro-sociological level. The methodological changes should not lead to unproductive conflicts between quantitative and qualitative researches. Quantitative transformations in the education system are broader. Therefore, sociology of education cannot ignore the magnitude and understanding of their consequences.

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

It can be argued that the deterministic way of thinking in social sciences has been definitely enfeebled over the past decades. The interpretation of social affairs has been questioned, aided by causal models. The paradigm of school failure gives meaning to these developments. Although classic models analyze school failure in relation to justifications referring to social structure and school institution, the approaches developed over the past years focus on procedures that involve various social acting persons [21,22].

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

In the debate developing across social sciences pertaining to the analysis of social phenomena, the imposing authoritative theory is not observed. The increasing interest in the constructive composition about the two levels of analysis, namely the macro-sociological with the micro-sociological, aiming at the fullest understanding of the observed social reality is worth of note [23].

In other words, the interest lies in studying which causal arrangements exist between the two different levels. No one supports the idea that the "micro" level is a mere reflection of power over

the “macro” level. Estimations must be made regarding up to which point and through which procedures the “micro” explains the “macro” [24].

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

The debate about the interdisciplinary aiming at developing scientific knowledge boosted during the ‘90s in relation to the National Center for Scientific Research in France (C.N.R.S.). The conference that took place in February 1990 titled “The crossroads of Sciences” (“Le Carrefour des sciences”) is indicative to this end. E. Morin presents a whole perspective about the problems indicated by scientific expertise. He pinpoints that the various disciplines are absolutely justified since they recognize and perceive the existence of interdisciplinary relations [25]. The concept of the individual in itself is found fragmented across the humanitarian sciences and various biological fields: The psyche is studied by one field, the brain by another, the organism by a third one, the genes, culture, etc. These multiple aspects of a complex human reality can be meaningful only in case they are associated with the reality, instead of ignorance (Hargreaves [26]).

Morin underlines the fact that we cannot dissolve what has been generated by the scientific fields in view of the idea that a scientific field should be open and close at the same time [27]. The major problem is not to be entrapped only in one single approach which will be unproductive. The issue is to track the way that will lead to the association of various disciplines which do not only hold their own scientific parlance, but also their own conceptual tools.

6. RECOMMENDATION

It can be inferred that sociology of education has long focused on school forms of socializing and learning and develops a deep understanding of

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

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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