

EMILE DURKHEIM'S THEORY OF EDUCATION

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Module Structure

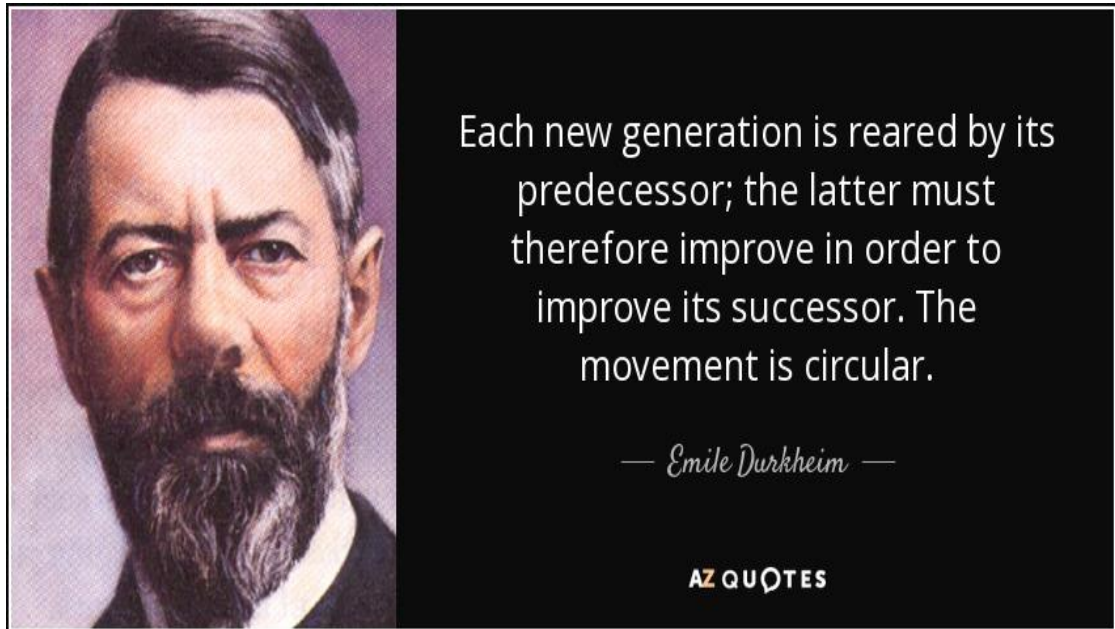
Emile Durkheim and the Theory of Education	Introduction, Major contributions of Durkheim to Sociology, Context of Sociological ideas on education, Education as a social fact, Education as the transmission of culture, Moral education, Pedagogy and sociology, The functions of educational sociology, Concluding remarks
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Description of the Module

Items	Description of the Module
Subject Name	Sociology
Paper Name	Education and Society
Module Name/Title	Emile Durkheim's theory of education
Module Id	2.b
Pre Requisites	Knowledge of social institutions and education as a social institution and the knowledge of classical sociology
Objectives	This module seeks to identify the contributions of Emile Durkheim to the Sociology of Education
Key words	Social Facts, Functionalism, Third Republic, Educational Sociology, Socialization, Moral Education, Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) is one among the three key sociologists who chalked out the substantive issues to be addressed by the new science of sociology during the early modernity. The methodological dictations given by him are still influential in sociological practice. Karl Marx (1818-1883) and Max Weber (1864-1920) are the other two modern social scientists from whom sociologists have been seeking directions. Unlike Marx and Weber, Durkheim has contributed directly to educational theory in the form of lectures delivered to trainee school teachers. Durkheim was very much interested in education. He gave courses on pedagogy throughout his career. This concern hardly appears in his major works as known to English-speaking sociologists. The historical reasons related to non-circulation of Durkheim's ideas on education will be given fuller attention later on before we consider them for elaboration. As in all of Durkheim's works there is a running thread of his ideas on the nature of social reality and the methodology to study these works. We have to first understand the often studied contributions of Durkheim to sociology and then proceed to analyse his contributions to the theory of education. His ontological preference

for collectivity and group and the use of positivist and functionalist methodology to explain social facts recur in all his works. Therefore, let us first understand his major contributions to sociology.

DURKHEIM'S MAJOR CONTRIBUTIONS TO SOCIOLOGY

Historical background

Sociology, more than any other social science, was influenced by the social environment in which it emerged and developed. While Comte's intellectual theorising was a reaction to the intellectual ideologies of the French Revolution and Enlightenment, Durkheim's theoretical interests were rooted in the political climate that was prevalent in France between 1870 and 1895. The nineteenth century was a century of huge setbacks for France. Defeat in the Franco Prussian war, the long depression that culminated in financial losses exacerbated by obstacles in the wine and silk businesses - all these led to a decline in national unity. From 1880, France began to rebuild its national unity with stress on science and social progress and an emphasis on individualism and autonomy of individual in society. Durkheim's sociology was a reaction to the French Revolution as well as the autonomy that was given preference over the collective unity of society. Durkheim took a strong anti-individualist stance. He opined that the tendency to place the individual ahead of society threatened the cohesion of social institutions by obscuring the unifying nature of the collective order (Morrison 2006: 149).

The founder of modern sociology

While Auguste Comte is credited with being the father of sociology, having coined the term sociology, it was Emile Durkheim who gave sociology its disciplinary boundaries and methodological content. He took pains to articulate that the subject matter of the sociology was different from that of the other social sciences. During its early years, sociology was not seen as an independent academic discipline. Through his various theoretical works Durkheim proved that society is a *sui generis* reality, i.e. a unique reality that cannot be simply reduced to its constituent parts. It is created when individual consciences interact and fuse together to create a synthetic reality that is completely new and greater than the sum of its parts. Thus society cannot be fully explained using psychology, philosophy or any other social science. It is only through a scientific study of sociology that the essence of society is understood. This thesis forms the foundation by which Durkheim sought to carve out an independent niche for sociology. Hence Durkheim is accredited with giving sociology the academic standing that it enjoys today.

Theoretical works

The academic rigour that Durkheim introduced to sociology was evident in the magnitude and range of his theoretical works. These include his doctoral thesis *‘The Division of Labour in Society’* (1893), and other subsequent works such as *‘The Rules of Sociological Method’* (1894), *‘Suicide’* (1897), and *‘The Elementary Forms of Religious Life’* (1912). He also founded the first sociological journal *‘L’Année Sociologique’* in 1896. The central concern that Durkheim addressed in *The Division of Labour in Society* was, how can the individual while becoming more autonomous depend even more on society. In *‘The Rules of Sociological Method’* Durkheim outlined the legitimacy of Sociology as an independent scientific discipline. He carefully outlined what sociology studied and how it was studied (Adam and Sydie 2002: 96). Durkheim defined Sociology as the ‘science of institutions, of their genesis and of their functioning’. His work on *‘Suicide’* was a demonstration of the methodology of sociology. It was a demonstration of Durkheim’s claim that sociology had an ‘object all of its own’ in the examination of ‘a reality which is not in the domain of other sciences’ (Adams and Sydie 2001: 98). By incorporating, what was believed to be an individual act under the domain of sociology, Durkheim explained that suicide rates are a collective phenomenon and can be studied sociologically. When suicides committed in a given society during a given period of time are examined as a whole, this total is not simply a sum of independent units but itself a new fact of sui generis, with its own unity, individuality and consequently, its own nature- a nature dominantly social. By 1895, Durkheim began to develop an interest in understanding the role that religion played in social life. He became convinced that ‘religion contains in itself from the very beginning’ all the elements which ‘have given rise to the various manifestations of collective life’ (Quoted in Adams and Sydie 2001: 102). He hoped that by understanding how religion, as the essence of collective solidarity, functioned in more primitive societies he could discover how egoism and anomie, which demonstrate the absence of collective solidarity, could be alleviated in modern society.

Concepts and theories

In his various theoretical works, Durkheim gives us various concepts and theories. Concepts like social solidarity, social cohesion, social facts, collective representation and collective conscience are used to explain the various arguments put forth in his theories. One of the most important concepts given by Durkheim to differentiate sociology from other social sciences, and on which his entire sociological theorising is based, is ‘social fact’. Durkheim makes a difference between individual facts and social facts. Individual acts such as eating, sleeping, sneezing, are not social facts, and cannot be included under the purview of sociology, on their own. But he believes that there exists in society a group of facts which may be studied independently of these individual facts (Morrison 2006: 189). Durkheim’s observations that social facts are to be recognised by the power of external coercion which they exercise over individuals and by the presence of some

specific sanction against the individual's effort to violate it was pivotal in setting out the characteristics of social subject matter (Ibid: 189).

Durkheim is also credited with articulating theories like anomie. Functionalism is the foundational sociological methodology for Durkheim. Anomie refers to a condition in which there is a breakdown of social norms and guidance for the citizens of a society. This occurs when there is a breakdown of the moral community and the society has no much control on the individual's propensity to follow rules.

DURKHEIM ON EDUCATION

Context of Durkheim's ideas on education

As noted in the beginning, Durkheim's ideas on education are not as popular as his ideas on other social institutions. His books on education were not only published posthumously but also were translated to English quite late. The extent of the unpopularity of Durkheim's writings on education has been noted by Walford and Pickering (1988) while critically presenting Durkheim's contribution to understand modern education. The opening sentences of their introduction to the edited volume on Durkheim's contribution to modern education start with noting the unpopularity of Durkheim's work on education.

“Of all the social areas that Durkheim examined, or the sub-disciplines that he developed, the least referred to has been that of education. This was the case amongst his own disciples who constituted the *Année Sociologique* group. And the same lack of interest continues amongst scholars today. The subjects of methodology, religion, morals, epistemology, suicide, the division of labour, law, and so on, have given rise to comment, criticism, praise and development. Not so the Cinderella of them all: education (Walford and Pickering 1988-1).”

To elucidate their recognition of the marginal attention given to Durkheim's works on education, Walford and Pickering (1988-1) write:

“the fact remains that Durkheim's *Rules of the Sociological Method* (1895) and *Suicide* (1897) have been far more prominent among teachers and students than say, *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1938) or a book which in many respects approaches the magisterial or even *Moral Education* (1925).”

Though his works on education were published posthumously, it must be noted that Durkheim taught pedagogy along with sociology all through his life. Fauconnet (1922), who succeeded Durkheim's academic position, has written an introduction to Durkheim's posthumous publication “Education and Sociology”. He notes that in the Faculty of Letters at Bordeaux, from 1887 to 1902, Durkheim gave a weekly one hour lecture on pedagogy. Throughout his life he dedicated two thirds of his teaching to pedagogy. The pedagogic lectures were attended by the public, primary school teachers and the students of the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*. In Fauconnet's

view Durkheim approached education as a social fact. And his theory of education is an essential element of his sociology.

The reasons for non-recognition of Durkheim's contributions to educational sociology in general and the theory of education in particular may be traced to the late translations of his works on education to English on the one hand and non publication of many of his lectures on pedagogy. When Ottaway published his seminal essay on 'The Educational Sociology of Emile Durkheim' in *The British Journal of Sociology* in the year 1955 none of his books on education had been translated into English. Notwithstanding the delay in the circulation of Durkheim's education related thoughts to mainstream of sociology of education, Ottaway (1968: 5) considers Durkheim 'the founder of educational sociology'. Though Durkheim articulated his views at the beginning of the twentieth century his writing appears fresh and contemporary. His approach to education and pedagogy act as a lively stimulus and offer a methodology to the thought and practice of modern educators (*Ibid*: 6).

Durkheim formulated his thesis on education like all his other theories with reference to the social climate of France at the end of the 19th century. The historical developments dating from the periods of enlightenment, French Revolution, Napoleonic governance, and the Third Republic (1872-1940) influenced his education related thoughts. Especially with the Third Republic the polarisation between the proponents of religious and secular education became prominent and bitter. The debate with regards to education in France was the manifestation of the social struggle between Church and State and religion and secularisation. During the Third Republic, the Republicans represented the renewal of the revolutionary ideas of democracy and secularism. The French laws enacted during this period made French primary education system 'free, compulsory and secular' (Barnes 1977:213-214).

As he lived during the Third Republic, Durkheim inculcated the ideals of democracy, secularism, and science. Like any other free thinking Republican, Durkheim felt the inadequacy of traditional religion in meeting the demands of modern society. He saw science and its methods as the tools to guide societal reform and the development of a new secularised society. Durkheim saw in education the potential of building a new social order based on secularised morality (Barnes 1977: 214).

Ottaway (1955: 213-225) under five themes discusses the linkages between Durkheim's ideas on education and his sociological thought: 1. Education as a social fact, 2. Education as the transmission of cultures, 3. Moral education, 4. Pedagogy and sociology ó the theory of education, and 5. The function of educational sociology. Let us consider in detail each of these themes.

Education as a Social Fact

In his usual style, Durkheim started to discuss the phenomenon of education by attempting to define it as a social fact. The opening essay of the book *Education and Sociology* is on *Education: Its Nature and Role* discusses the meaning of education where he considers education as a social fact. Incidentally, this was his opening lecture (1902) at the Sorbonne. He begins by considering education as something essentially social in nature, origin, and functions and therefore the theory of education relates more closely to sociology than to any other science. He opposes the idea of one perfect and ideal educational system for all societies. Education has varied in each epoch, Durkheim argues, because each society has to have the system of education that corresponds to its needs and reflects the customs and beliefs of the day to day life. Education, which is determined by the society in which it is practiced, can be studied by the scientific methods of sociology. Durkheim sees education as being composed of real social facts that could be studied like any other social facts detailed in his *Rules of Sociological Method*. Furthermore, the method Durkheim advocates to study social facts relating to the educational process is largely a historical observation approach.

Education as Socialisation Process or the Transmission of Culture

The main role performed by education is highlighted by the definition of education which Durkheim gives after examining the existing definitions and the historical contexts.

“Education is the influence exercised by adult generations on those that are not yet ready for social life. Its object is to arouse and to develop in the child a certain number of physical, intellectual and moral states which are demanded of him by both the political society as a whole and the special, milieu for which he is specifically destined” (Durkheim 2011: 52).

From this definition it follows that education “consists of methodical socialisation of the younger generation”. As per this theory each of us consists of two beings: our individual being and social being. The latter is “a system of ideas, sentiments and practices which express in us, not our personality, but the group or different groups of which we are part; these are religious beliefs, moral beliefs and practices, national or professional traditions, collective opinions of every kind...To constitute this being in each of us is the end of education” (*Ibid*: 53). In all this part of his thought Durkheim appears to be describing the function of education as a means of transmitting the ways of thinking, acting and feeling as members of society which Ottaway (1968: 216) considers as culture transmission.

Durkheim would call such culture transmission as transmission of collective representations which reflect different aspects of the social reality. The collective consciousness or the collective mind, which is derived from the interaction and combination of individual

consciousness and at the same time enters into, changes, and develops the individual being into a social being. The relation between individual and the group through conscience collective becomes clear when Durkheim analysed the social character of learning. 'The individual, in willing society, wills himself. The influence that it exerts on him, notably through education, does not at all have as its object and its effect to repress him, to diminish him, to denature him, but, on the contrary, to make him grow and to make of him a truly human being' (Durkheim 2011: 58-59).

To acknowledge the development of individual through education is just one aim of Durkheim's sociology of education. Living in a society that had undergone much stress, class conflict, and disorder, his goal was to achieve social solidarity, the concept which is further developed in his discussions of moral education (Barnes 1977: 219).

Moral education

Durkheim was interested in the problems of morality throughout his life and this is evident in all his works. As a result he attached importance to the moral development of the young. The ideals of the Third Republic in France were inclined toward secularisation of the society by gradually separating the state from the church. The laws of the Third Republic between 1881 and 1901 had gradually brought about a separation of church and state in education and the school was forbidden to teach any of the principles of revealed religion. Thus if the school had to give any moral education, it had to be based on rational principles alone. Durkheim sought to discover the rational substitutes for the religious ideas that served to carry out the moral order. His procedure was to apply to education his general concepts that society is the source of all moral authority and that 'we are only moral beings in so far as we are social beings.' Just as Durkheim saw the educational process having as its primary function the socialisation of the child, so, too, Durkheim saw the school as the appropriate agent for moral education.

The function of morality is to determine the rules of conduct, and its primary element is the spirit of discipline. Durkheim places greater responsibility on the school teacher. In his opinion discipline at school must be stricter than in the home, and it all depends on the schoolmaster by whose authority the rules are revealed, who must himself be 'duty incarnate and personified'. The master is the representative of the authority of society and 'in the same way as the priest is the interpreter of God, he is the interpreter of the great moral ideas of his time and of his country' (Durkheim, quoted in Ottaway 1955: 218). Discipline in the class is not, for Durkheim, simply a method for the teacher to keep order; it is an instrument for developing morality. Discipline does not mean regulation of each and every activity of the child. It is the responsibility of the teacher to inspire the child to be dutiful from within. Only when the child comes to obey the rules willingly and only then is his compliance truly moral. Durkheim sees the role of the teacher as a primary factor in developing the spirit of discipline in the child.

With regard to punishment, Durkheim's methods are again humane and certainly enlightened for the time in which he lived. He was against corporal punishment. For Durkheim, one of the chief aims of moral education is to inspire in the child a feeling for dignity of man (Quoted in Barnes 1977: 221). Not only must we eschew corporal punishment, but all kinds of punishment that might injure the child's health must be forbidden...depriving him of the playtime should only take place with greatest discretion, and it should never be completely cut off (Durkheim 2011: 185). The essence of punishment, for Durkheim, is not to inflict suffering on the individual but for the person to receive the disapproval and blame of the social group with an intention to reaffirm the respect and maintain the authority of the rules.

Pedagogy and Sociology – The Theory of Education

Durkheim distinguishes education from pedagogy. For him education always meant the active process of educating the young or the influence exerted upon children by parents and teachers. But pedagogy consists not of actions but theories, and is a reflection upon education. It is a methodical thought applied to the process of education.

Ottaway (1968: 9-11) outlines Durkheim's approach as follows. As a process education can be studied from different vantage points. The totality of practices which make up education can be studied historically. Also one can study the types of education in different countries anthropologically. They can also be studied scientifically and interpreted and explained by the methods of psychology and sociology. All these constitute a science of education. But pedagogy, educational theory, is not this science, nor is it an art. The art of education lies in doing it, and is the skill of the actual teaching and handling the pupils. The teacher is the artist. But educational theories have as their object not to describe or explain what is, or what has been but to determine what should be.

The educational theorist reflects upon the practice of education and aims to guide it, to enlighten it, to evaluate it and to remedy its inadequacies. Theories he propounds are not abstract, they are programmes of action, and as such they resemble the theories of politics and medicine, or strategy. Durkheim proposed to call them "theories pratiques" which can be translated "theories for action". They represent a mental attitude somewhere between art and science. He was concerned with the practical issue of considering education as an applied science like medicine or engineering. He was faced with the question; upon what pure sciences can the practical theories of education depend in order to validate their operations? His answer was: upon the true sciences of psychology and sociology. However at the turn of the century in which Durkheim lived these two sciences were still developing. So from the start his educational theory ran the risk of being based on insufficient or inaccurate data (Ottaway 1968: 10).

While proposing the implementation of educational theory, Durkheim expresses his desire for social reform. He maintains that we should think as systematically as possible about the

phenomena of education with the aim of controlling its development. Education must change. We cannot afford to wait until any science is more complete, because our system is out-of-date and out of harmony with modern ideas and needs, and we must set to work courageously with the knowledge available to us. Change must be based upon the existing national culture with its history and traditions. He considers the goal of sociology as the study of society and providing the data on which educational theories can be based (Ottaway 1968: 11). Ottaway (1955: 223) in one of his earlier essays had considered such an appeal by Durkheim stressing on the moral choice as falling outside the scope of scientific determination.

The Function of Educational Sociology

Though one can reasonably consider Durkheim as the founder of educational sociology, as mentioned in the beginning, his ideas on education received very little attention, outside France for many decades after him. In line with his methodological principles Durkheim had prepared a programme of action for sociological studies in the field of education. Commenting on these lines, Ottaway (1955: 223-225) has identified four such functions of educational sociology which are based on practical principles in line with Durkheim's methodology. These are, in fact, research problems from the functionalist vantage point.

1. Determination of the present social facts of education, and their sociological function.
2. Determination of the relation of education to social and cultural change.
3. Comparative sociology of education.
4. The study of the school itself as a social group, and in relation to other social groups.

Apart from these functionalist research questions identified by Ottaway, functionalist orientation to education is useful for answering questions relating to the role of education in modern society and the relationship between education and other social institutions in modern societies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Among the three classical sociologists discussed in this chapter, Emile Durkheim had shown direct interest in the institution of education and he has rightly been addressed as the founder of educational sociology by Ottaway. Among the various themes on which Durkheim wrote, education has been the most neglected. During his lifetime, Durkheim's publications on education were meagre. However, after his death, lectures and lecture courses appeared in the form of books ó *Education and Sociology* (1922), *Moral Education* (1925), *The Evolution of Educational Thought* (1938). All these, whose titles are given in English, were not translated into that language until after the Second World War. The fact that they were translated relatively late, compared with the English translations of other books by Durkheim, only emphasizes the fact why of all the social areas dealt with by Durkheim, was education the most neglected?

Central to Durkheim's teaching on educational theory and practice was the subject of morals which refer to rules of various sorts. He applied his structural functional method of analysis to show that morals and educational ideas and practices were socially determined. Education for Durkheim was 'the means by which society perpetually re-creates the conditions of its very existence' and it involved 'a systematic socialisation of the young generation' (Durkheim quoted in Thompson 1982: 161). In continuation of the ideals of the Third Republic in France Durkheim saw reformatory potential in education to provide for the inculcation of secular morality in place of Church based morality.

The proponents and opponents of the functionalist method find his lectures on education useful, for he gives several guidelines for functional examination of the educational system. Though Durkheim's theory of education addressed pedagogic issues pertaining to the French society of his time, his ideas may be used to interpret contemporary modern education also.

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