
A SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE ON THE PHENOMENON OF TEACHING*

HASMIK GEVORGYAN, SONA BALASANYAN

The order of things¹ in society is not simply given to social subjects who teach and learn how social reality actually matters. The social world unites ‘teacher’ and taught social subjects who receive ‘social lessons’ throughout their everyday life. The process of socialization goes beyond the boundaries of the intentions to teach and to learn, since social subjects normally have these intentions due to their own willingness to be familiar with the ways of becoming social and gaining social prevalence. The analysis of these intentions discloses a new sociological perspective on the phenomenon of teaching. Transferability of knowledge is important in terms of production and reproduction of the mental structures of society, which are fundamentals of social constructions.

The teaching communication resulting from the social interactions of ‘teacher’ and ‘taught social subjects’ becomes the paradigm of the social institution of education, which dominates the educational reality of the society. According to Durkheim’s interpretation the “educational” within the society cannot be isolated from the “social”. Consequently, the phenomenon of teaching in sociological terminologies generally uncovers the social reproduction of socialized knowledge. The communication, comprising of ‘teacher and taught social subjects’ is crucial in the process of the social construction of reality.

Modern sociological theories emphasize the communicational reality of society². Communication is a starting point for the social reality³, while teaching in a broader perspective (taking into consideration the massive proportion of educational processes within society) is a basic factor for the formation and organization of society. Knowledge, as every phenomenon within society, cannot be transformable without communication⁴. Henceforth the phenomenon of ‘teaching’ is the main element of the sociological analysis of education, when represented as a social communication, makes the transformation of socially important knowledge possible.

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¹ For the term “the order of things” see M. Foucault “The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences”, NY: Rutledge, 2002.

² See **Johnson, D. P.** “Contemporary sociological theory: an integrated multi-level approach”, NY: Springer, 2008, p. 8-13, 137-193.

³ See **Luhmann N.** “Social systems”, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995, p. 137-176, 405-437.

⁴ See **Berger P., Luckmann Th.** “The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge”, Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

The transformation of 'social lessons' presupposes the teaching communication of society. Sociologically, the 'lesson' is not only the academic time devoted to the teaching of a subject within an educational setting, but it also indicates the social experience gained within the frame of life events of social subjects who periodically play the social roles of a 'teacher' or a 'learner'. Thus, the redefinition of the phenomenon of teaching in sociology has to be highlighted. Within a sociological perspective 'teaching' is a social communication within which the socially important knowledge (the knowledge which is identified via social lessons) is transmitted and received. This communication takes place not only within the educational settings but also in everyday social life playing a crucial role in the formation of social phenomena. Social subjects teach and are being taught within society while education takes place within the social world, as it reproduces cultural values (Parsons), morality (Durkheim), stratification (Marx), and the circumstances of symbolic control (Bernstein).

Education is the means for understanding the social world and acting upon this understanding. The central question here is whether the social subjects perceive each other as teachers and/or learners in everyday social life. Even if they do not have these perceptions, a sociological observation of the teachers and learners brings us to the very issue of the educational assignment of the social units and/or processes⁵. The order of things, social actions and processes, social situations, social reality and in general social phenomena are to be sociologically observed as 'teachers' and 'learners' within the society because the social subjects within it teach and learn each time they envision social reality as a subject of discussion and/or exploration. This means that 'education' in sociology can be redefined as a self-productive social phenomenon that produces and reproduces other social phenomena.

Every individual within society receives the 'world' of others*. The transmission from one generation to another of the ways of thinking and acting in the social world, in a nonlinear, non-sequential way, not limited to educational settings, occurs via education, the communication of teaching and social lessons. Individuals learn to organize social co-existence which itself produces the ways of 'teaching' and 'learning' within society⁶.

Phenomenological sociology reveals that individuals are 'important others', 'collective others' for each other, meanwhile internalizing the social reality. Hence objective reality is created due to the complete subjective identification⁷. Due to the interrelated nature of individuals, social interactions and communications, teaching matters as an important educational type of social communication because the 'important others' and/or the 'collective others' are teachers⁸.

⁵ See **Parsons T., Edward S., Smelser N. J.** "Toward a general theory of action: theoretical foundations for the social sciences", New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2001.

* For details on the concept of "other" see **Mead, G. H.** "Mind, self and society: from the standpoint of a social behaviorist", Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967, p. 164-173, 214, 354-379; **Berger P., Luckmann T.** "The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge", Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

⁶ See **Bandura, A.** "Social Learning Theory", Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1977.

⁷ **Berger P., Luckmann T.** "The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge", Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966.

⁸ See **Mead G. H.** "Mind, self and society: from the standpoint of a social behaviorist", Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1967, p. 164-173, 214, 354-379; **Brissett D., Edgley C.** "Life as theater: a dramaturgical sourcebook", New Brunswick, New Jersey: Transaction Publishers, 2005, p. 129-183.

It is known that education

- prepares the individuals for playing a social role and, as a social system, it reproduces the cultural peculiarities of the society (Parsons),
- is a social unit which produces and reproduces the social solidarity, morality, the means of the division of labor which is observed within the society as a whole (Durkheim),
- is a precondition for the creation and maintenance of social classes (Marx),
- is a dominant factor for social regulation via pedagogical discourse (Bernstein),
- is a means for the formation of social capital and taste (Burdie)⁹.

All of the above mentioned definitions show that education exists within the social reality as a component. Hence the teaching process appears in the framework of the communication of teaching, which constructs the meanings of the social reality. Ideally every individual who transmits socially important knowledge is a 'teacher' and every individual who receives socially important knowledge is a 'learner'. What the social 'teachers' and 'learners' transmit and receive is the socialized knowledge that exists in every dimension of society: within the family institution, the mass media system, museums, politics etc. This helps to highlight that the teaching process within educational settings is just a single appearance of the social communication of teaching. "The curriculum defines which the valid knowledge is, the pedagogy defines which the valid transition of knowledge is and the research defines which the valid realization of knowledge is" Bernstein points out¹⁰.

Teaching, as a term, has its sociological meaning and can be introduced as an important educational research object primarily because education is the social unit and/or the process that produces and reproduces socially important knowledge through the communication of teaching. This highlights the necessity of the sociological research of teaching in the sociology of education and in sociology in general.

Knowledge is a means for the social construction of reality and, subsequently, it is a subject for sociological analysis. Teaching is an indicator of the educational communicational reality in which socially important knowledge is transmitted and received. Since knowledge is socialized within society¹¹, an individual, when participating in the phenomenon of teaching reinforces human mentality as created by the social environment. The individual who is educated via the communication of teaching periodically moves from the his/herself to the self of the 'other' and vice versa.

⁹ See **Smith P. D.** "Cultural theory: An introduction", Oxford: Willey-Blackwell, 2001, p. 22-37; **Berstein, B.** "Pedagogy, Symblic control, and identity: theory, research, critique", Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000; **Bourdieu, P., Passeron J. C.**, "La reproduction", London: Sage, 1990; **Gewirtz, S., Gribb, A.** "Understanding Education: A Sociological Perspective" Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009, p. 57-82.

¹⁰ **Bernsetin, B.** "Class, Codes and Control", vol 2., London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1873 b, p 85.

¹¹ See **Schutz, A.** "The problem of social reality", Nitherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, 1982.

The reinforcement of human mentality by the social environment is realized and unrealized, direct and indirect. Everything that exists as a phenomenon may have a cognitive provenance¹². And in fact, the institution of education aims at preventing this process from remaining solely unrealized and indirect. The institution of education regulates the intentions of teaching and learning within society, presupposing the formation and the genesis of the social phenomena. Hence, the intentions of teaching and learning within society make scientific and everyday knowledge equally important for the institution of education. It is socialized knowledge that directs the mental structures of society affecting predominantly the educational institution of society¹³.

When importance is given to the question of how individuals within society have learnt to create, have realized whatever is needed for their social existence and coexistence (how individuals have gained knowledge needed especially within society) it becomes evident that the sociological analysis of the phenomenon of teaching as related only to the educational settings of society is not enough. The social institution of education is interrelated to the social reality, which goes far beyond the educational settings that are important subjects of discussion in the sociology of education¹⁴.

The 'teacher' within society is different from the teacher within the educational setting, though this does not mean that they cannot be identical. The main thing is that the 'teacher' within society are 'important others' (individuals) who teach how to behave socially and how to understand the social reality. The central question for the sociological analysis of education is hence related to the issue of the identification of the individuals, social units and processes which are socially educational and which affect the mental structures of society at large.

In order to discuss real society in terms of 'knowledge society', 'learning society', and 'information society', which also presupposes the possibility of further discussion on the 'teaching society', it is important for individuals within social world to perceive each other as 'teachers' and 'learners'¹⁵. The less individuals within society perceive each other as 'teachers' and 'learners', the more likely the possibility that educational settings get the privileges and powers of production and reproduction of socially important knowledge. The more the teaching, the transmission of socially important knowledge is perceived as common to individuals and the society at large, the more the realized possibility of receiving education outside the educational settings. This

¹² See **Kant, I., Hatfield, G.** "Immanuel Kant: Prolegomena to Any Future Metaphysics: That Will Be Able to Come Forward as Science: With Selections from the Critique of Pure Reason", Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

¹³ On the scientific and everyday knowledge see **Mannheim, K.** "Structures of thinking", London: Routledge, 1982.

¹⁴ See **Hallinan, M. T.** "Handbook of the sociology of education", NY: Springer 2006, p. 15-65, 137-163, 189-213, 285-307, 345-365, 453-499.

¹⁵ See **Raggatt, P.** "The learning society: challenges and trends" London: Routledge, 1996; **Böhme, G., Stehr, N.** "The knowledge society: the growing impact of scientific knowledge on social relations", Dordrecht: Reidel Publishing Company, 1986, **Hassan, R.**, "The information society", Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008.

depends on how much individuals regard education as a component of the social reality.

United individuals within society reproduce social circumstances of thinking for separated individuals. Every social human being within society is a goal-oriented actor who has his/her reason for each action, taking into account the social unit/s in which he/she acts. The social unit/s predefine the possibilities of the actions of individuals¹⁶. This leads individuals within society to realize what they have to know and what they cannot know or cannot give importance to.

Within the framework of the theory of structuration it can be assumed that the social communication of teaching takes place in the discursive and practical levels as well as in the level of unrealized motives/abilities of knowing. There are impediments between the discursive and unrealized consciousness which exist under social pressure. They presuppose the rationality of social actions directed to the quality of education, teaching and social institutions, which are always related to the educational setting. All consequences of human actions and interactions would be different if individuals acted differently to what are considered socially appropriate thus allowing for new social possibilities. For example a mother sharing reality with her child either can or cannot realize, find it comfortable to realize or not that she teaches her child and she is a 'teacher'. Every individual, while sharing reality with 'others', frequently appears in similar situations. The institutionalization of education within society is dependent on the human realization and legitimization of the social reality which appears in accord with 'lifeworld' situations in which education is formed and applied. Giddens gave emphasis to the human actions in social terms, which can have (i) vital, central, (ii) non vital, outer, (iii) definite and (iv) vague results. The social order which is always institutional is dependant on how the social action are interpreted as having these results.

Institutional processes are deeply rooted within social time and space, which are being influenced by human actions that are in turn influencing the results of the actions¹⁷.

The exploration of the social quality of the educational institution and educational processes within a society presupposes the answer of the following question: 'why are individuals motivated to act on a daily basis as they actually do?'. Within the framework of the sociology of education it is important to conceptualize how individuals are motivated to be 'teacher' and 'learner' in order to perceive and share social lessons in their everyday life.

Social institutions, according to Giddens are a result of social practices rooted within social space and time. Social norms, values, and rules influence communication, including teaching communication much more than it may be concluded through the simple observation of daily routine. Clearly everything referring to education within society is much more complicated than it

¹⁶ See **Giddens, A.** "The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration", California: University of California Press, 1986, p. 41-45.

¹⁷ Ibid. p 16-28.

appears¹⁸. This predefines the institutional dimension of each social communication including teaching communication.

The action, according to Shultz, which is rational, gives to individuals an opportunity to resolve typical issues with typical means to reach typical goals. This happens in the framework of socially non-problematic motives, aims and means, and action choices¹⁹.

Knowledge is an important element of social existence. The knower constructs his/her social reality not by chance, but by 'teaching' and 'learning' how to co-exist with 'others'. Meanwhile, there is always something that he/she knows because of the social needs remaining as a result of the institutional order of his/her institutional existence.

Being sure that actions tell something to 'others', the individual intends to express the meanings of actions (their own and those belonging to 'others'). Hence there has to be a similarity between the actions of oneself and the actions of 'other' selves. Since individuals are each and every one in the social world, every individual thinks that the meaning he/she puts into action and the meaning that the same action holds for others are identical²⁰. Thus, all social actions that create the communication of teaching are formed by the same logic. This explains how 'teaching' has different appearances in different societies, influencing the delivery of social lessons. This makes it obvious who/what may be considered a 'teacher' within a given society. This is what has to be central in reference to the sociological analysis of education.

In conclusion it has to be highlighted that social institutions have the potential for solving ongoing social problems. Accordingly the institution of education has the potential for solving the problem of the transmission of socially important knowledge. Thus 'teaching' is an important sociological category that indicates the peculiarities of socialized knowledge and the preconditions for the formation and dynamics of mental social structures.

**ՀԱՍՄԻԿ ԳԵՎՈՐԳՅԱՆ, ՍՈՆԱ ԲԱԼԱՍԱՆՅԱՆ – Դասավանդման ֆե-
նոմենի սոցիոլոգիական հեռանկարը** – Փոխանցելիությունը սոցիալա-
կանացված գիտելիքի կարևոր առանձնահատկությունն է, որը էական է
դարձնում դասավանդման ֆենոմենը հասարակական կյանքում: Հասար-
ակությունը սոցիալական փոխհարաբերությունների արդյունք է. այդ ի-
մաստով ուսուցանելու և ուսանելու միտումներն ուղղորդում են սոցիալա-
կան սուբյեկտներին փոխգործակցվելու միմյանց համար և միմյանց դեմ
սոցիալական իրականության մեջ: Հասարակության կրթական իրականու-
թյունը կառուցվում է դասավանդման հաղորդակցությամբ: Սա հնարավոր
է, որովհետև վերջինս ենթադրում է սոցիալապես էական գիտելիքի փոխ-
անցումը և ստացումը: Այսպիսով, կրթական գործընթացը տեղի է ունենում
ոչ միայն կրթական հաստատություններում, այլև ամենօրյա սոցիալական

¹⁸ See **Giddens, A.** "The constitution of society: outline of the theory of structuration", California: University of California Press, 1986, p. 5-14, 60-64.

¹⁹ See **Schutz, A.** "The problem of social reality", Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers Group, 1982.

²⁰ Ibid. p 7-10, 13-14.

կյանքում: Հետևաբար, իրերի կարգը, սոցիալական գործողությունները և գործընթացները, իրավիճակները, սոցիալական իրականությունը և մյուս ֆենոմենները կրթող գործոններ են հասարակության մեջ: Կրթությունն ինքը սոցիալական ֆենոմեն է, որն առաջանում է դասավանդման հաղորդակցությունից: Կրթության և դասավանդման նկատմամբ նման մոտեցումը ստեղծում է կրթության սոցիոլոգիական հայեցակարգման լայն հնարավորություններ, եթե հաշվի առնենք, որ դասավանդումն իր բացահայտ և ոչ բացահայտ նշանակությունն ունի սոցիալական իրականության ստեղծման հարցում:

АСМИК ГЕВОРГЯН, СОНА БАЛАСАНИЯН – *Социологическая перспектива феномена преподавания.* – Важной особенностью социализированного знания является возможность его передачи; благодаря этому феномен преподавания обретает особую значимость в социальном мире. Преподавание и восприятие уроков подталкивает социальные субъекты к взаимодействию – совместному действию, действию во благо друг друга и против друг друга. Образовательная социальная действительность конструируется через коммуникативный процесс преподавания, поскольку коммуникация через преподавание предполагает как передачу, так и получение социально значимого знания. Таким образом, процесс образования происходит не только в рамках образовательных учреждений, но и на уровне всего социума, в каждодневной практике. Соответственно порядок вещей – социальные действия, социальные процессы и социальные феномены, присутствующие в обществе, – является образовательным. Образование само есть социальный феномен, формируемый на основе коммуникаций преподавания. С учётом того, что преподавание имеет прямое и косвенное влияние на конструирование социальной действительности, можно утверждать, что такой подход к образованию открывает широкие возможности для его социологической концептуализации.