

School and Socialization: A Comparative Sociological Analysis between Durkheim and Bourdieu

المدرسة والتنشئة الاجتماعية: تحليل سوسيولوجي مقارنة بين دوركايم وبورديو

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Received:03/05/ 2026 Accepted:11/06/2026

Published:12/08/2026

Abstract:

This study aims to highlight the contradiction between the manifest and latent functions of the school. It does so by analyzing two distinct perspectives on the school's socialization role within Western capitalist society. The first perspective is represented by the French sociologist Émile Durkheim, who viewed this function as a positive mechanism through which the school ensures social stability and equilibrium, thereby securing the continuity of society. In contrast, Pierre Bourdieu exposed the negative dimension of this function, namely the reproduction of the dominant class culture, which likewise sustains society, but through the reproduction of inequalities and class domination.

Accordingly, the study reveals the dual character of the school's functions in socialization and social control, as well as its complex nature within the social system. On the one hand, the school serves as an instrument of social integration; on the other, it operates as a mechanism of marginalization and exclusion.

Keywords: Socialization; School; Social Integration; Reproduction; Durkheim; Bourdieu.

ملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى إبراز التناقض بين الوظيفة الظاهرة والخفية للمدرسة . من خلال تحليل منظورين مختلفين لوظيفة التنشئة للمدرسة في المجتمع الغربي الرأسمالي. يمثل المنظور الأول عالم الاجتماع الفرنسي إميل دوركايم ، الذي يرى في تلك الوظيفة آلية إيجابية تضمن المدرسة من خلالها استقرار المجتمع وتوازنه، و من ثمة ضمان استمراره. فحين، يكشف بورديو عن

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الجانب السلبي لتلك الوظيفة، المتمثلة في تكريس ثقافة الطبقة المهيمنة، و التي تضمن للمجتمع استمراره أيضا، ولكن عبر عملية إعادة إنتاج الفوارق و الهيمنة الطبقية.

و عليه، كشفت الدراسة، عن الطابع المزدوج لوظائف المدرسة في التنشئة و الضبط الاجتماعي، و عن طبيعتها المركبة ضمن النسق الاجتماعي، باعتبارها من جهة، أداة من أدوات الدمج الاجتماعي، و من جهة أخرى، أداة للتمييز و الاقصاء.

كلمات مفتاحية: التنشئة الاجتماعية، المدرسة، الدمج الاجتماعي، إعادة الإنتاج، دوركايم، بورديو.

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1. Introduction

Numerous theoretical perspectives and approaches have examined the role of the school in socialization, particularly within Western or capitalist societies. From the standpoint of social integration theory, Émile Durkheim argues that the school plays a central role in achieving social cohesion by transmitting shared values, cultivating the collective conscience, and instilling discipline. In this sense, the school constitutes a fundamental institution for preserving social order and ensuring societal continuity.

Pierre Bourdieu, however, offers a markedly different interpretation of this function. He approaches the school through its latent socializing role, emphasizing its contribution to marginalization, exclusion, and the production of inequalities. Accordingly, the school participates in the reproduction of the existing social order through the perpetuation of a culture of class domination.

The significance of this article lies in its attempt, based on this theoretical divergence, to analyze the school's socialization function through a comparative sociological reading of both Bourdieu and Durkheim. To this end, the study employs a comparative method by contrasting each thinker's conception of the school's socializing role, alongside an analytical method aimed at unpacking the various dimensions of the key concepts underpinning each perspective.

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Accordingly, how do Durkheim and Bourdieu each interpret the school's role in socialization, and how can this dual function be understood in light of these two perspectives?

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 The Concept of School

The etymological origin of the word *school* can be traced to the ancient Greek term *scholé*, which denoted leisure, recreation, and the use of free time (Perrat, 2005, p. 23). In this original sense, the school was associated with an enjoyable pursuit and a space for intellectual pleasure, amusement, and aesthetic appreciation.

In its modern conception, however, the school is regarded as one of the most significant institutions within society. It constitutes an organized system of rules, patterns, and norms that regulate social relations. Its primary functions are to transmit and preserve cultural heritage across generations, to instill societal values and standards, and, consequently, to promote social equilibrium and stability. Within this framework, Émile Durkheim defines the school as a “miniature society” that prepares children for social life. Above all, it serves as the “guardian of human values,” functioning as society's instrument for reproducing its social order (Filloux, 1994, p. 58).

From Durkheim's perspective, therefore, the school becomes a mechanism of social integration through the process of socialization. It also constitutes a means of “logical integration,” insofar as it subjects all individuals to a shared culture (Laacher, 2005, p. 24).

2.2 The Concept of Socialization

Socialization is one of the fundamental educational processes through which individuals acquire the core values, symbols, and principal goals of the social systems in which they participate. These values are expressed through the roles performed by individuals themselves as well as by others.

Accordingly, socialization is an essential process for integrating the individual into their social environment. Its main characteristics include:

- It is a process through which the individual acquires a social dimension.

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- It is a uniquely human process, confined to human beings rather than other living creatures.
- It is a social process involving the participation of multiple social institutions, including schools, religious institutions, the media, and peer groups.
- It is also a continuous and ongoing process.
- In this regard, Durkheim defines socialization as the action exercised by mature generations (adults) upon those not yet ready for social life (children). (Eric, 1998, p.9)

Bourdieu, by contrast, addressed the issue of socialization implicitly through his analysis of social reproduction, particularly through the concept of *habitus*. Habitus refers to a set of dispositions unconsciously acquired by the individual that organize both practices and perceptions of practices. It is itself the product of an internalization process shaped by the stratified structure of society. (Boubkeur, nd, p.189) This unconscious acceptance becomes, in Bourdieu's view, a form of violence, especially when it constitutes "gentle, invisible violence, unrecognized even by its victims." (Pierre, 1981, p. 219)

This is what Bourdieu terms *symbolic violence*, within which the concept of socialization is embedded. From this perspective, socialization operates as a hidden mechanism of social reproduction by instilling mental structures in individuals that lead them to behave in ways that reinforce and sustain the existing social order.

3. The School and the Function of Socialization from Durkheim's Perspective

Socialization is widely regarded as one of the most significant functions entrusted by society to the school as an educational institution, tasked with preserving cultural heritage and reproducing it across generations. Among the thinkers who strongly emphasized the school's role in socialization was the French philosopher and sociologist Émile Durkheim.

Historically, Durkheim's work represents one of the earliest foundational contributions to the theoretical construction of the sociology of

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education. Some scholars consider him the first to treat school culture as a legitimate sociological object of inquiry, particularly in his work *The Evolution of Educational Thought in France*. His central intellectual concern was the establishment of a sociology of education (Smain,2005,p.22) grounded in the strong conviction that the school, as an institution, functions as a “magic thread” through which individuals are socially connected. It is also the only institution capable of imposing itself as a universal shared experience, one that is collectively lived and whose effects are deeper and more enduring than those of any other social institution.(Smain,2005, p.24)

3.1 The School as an Instrument of Social Integration

Durkheim placed the question of social integration at the core of sociology. From this standpoint, he devoted considerable attention to the functions of the school and concluded that socialization was not merely one of its principal functions, but rather its defining mission. He assigned the school greater responsibility for this task than any other institution, since it provides a common culture to all individuals regardless of their class backgrounds. In this sense, the school, in Durkheim’s view, is the mechanism through which society reproduces its social order.

Accordingly, Durkheim defined the school as “an organized collectivity, structured around principles, values, norms, and habits, through which patterns of behavior are transmitted with the aim of integrating the individual into society.” (Joelle,Françoise,1993,p.4)

Durkheim thus gave education a distinctly sociological dimension, particularly when he described it as a set of social actions. In doing so, he criticized the doctrine of individualism that he identified in the works of Kant, John Stuart Mill, Spencer, and others, who, in his view, frequently neglected the social content of educational actions, relationships, and practices.

2.3 Moral Authority as a Mechanism of Socialization in Durkheim’s Thought

If the school’s primary function is socialization and social normalization, it can fulfill this role only by reinforcing social order through authority. Accordingly, the educator or teacher within the school, as a

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representative of society acting in the name of the state, occupies, according to Durkheim, a legitimate position of authority vis, à, vis the student, given the nobility of the teaching mission and the significance of its social functions, which are embodied in the following tasks:

- Establishing the rules of order by training students in discipline, obedience to regulations, and respect for laws.
- Cultivating a collective spirit among students through the use of the inclusive notion of “we.” (Françoise, Joelle, 1993, p.131)
- Developing the autonomy of the will by leading students to comply with social order consciously, willingly, and out of conviction, without the need for external supervision.

These three elements constitute the foundations of school, based socialization in Durkheim’s view and render school authority a legitimate moral force insofar as it rests upon moral superiority. (Emile, nd, p.152)

From this perspective, the teacher confers legitimacy upon the coercion he or she exercises, particularly when deeply committed to the educational mission and aware of the grandeur of that role. Such authority also requires strength of will grounded in self, confidence, as well as the teacher’s inner conviction that the authority exercised is internalized and emanates from an authentic personal commitment. Moreover, the teacher must be just; otherwise, authority loses its moral significance. (Emile, nd, p.131)

4. The School and the Function of Socialization from Pierre Bourdieu’s Perspective

Pierre Bourdieu is regarded as one of the leading sociological thinkers of the contemporary era and a major intellectual figure in French cultural and academic life. He is also among the most prominent sociologists to have offered a critical analysis of the school’s role in socialization. Rejecting the functionalist conception that views the school as an instrument of social integration, Bourdieu instead considered it a mechanism for reproducing social inequalities, insofar as it does not provide equal opportunities for success to all social groups. Consequently, he foregrounded the issue of

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equality of opportunity and examined the role of the school in reproducing relations of domination.

4.1 Bourdieu and the Critique of Equal Opportunity

During the 1960s and 1970s, the issue of equality of educational opportunity generated extensive intellectual and philosophical debate across diverse theoretical perspectives, particularly regarding the selective function of the school. Although schools had formally opened their doors to all, they did not offer equal chances of success to everyone. This raised a series of fundamental questions: Who benefits most from education? Who is able to invest in it? Who obtains academic credentials, especially advanced degrees? Who secures employment, particularly prestigious positions? Ultimately, who gains access to life opportunities? In response, Bourdieu argued that continued access to education is primarily available to those who possess the capacity to persist within the system, thereby reinforcing, in the final analysis, the principle of survival of the fittest or the most advantaged (Asaad, 2003, p. 177).

Within this context, reproduction theory emerged as a comprehensive explanatory framework, asserting that the mass expansion of education did not reduce social inequality. Rather, educational inequality itself contributes to the reproduction of broader social inequalities. In this sense, the school is neither “neutral” nor “innocent,” contrary to common assumptions (Bellat, 2001, p. 47).

Pierre Bourdieu is widely regarded as one of the foremost representatives of this perspective. His analysis drew heavily on the Marxist approach within the framework of what came to be known as critical sociology. This perspective gained prominence as the gap between educational institutions and society widened, particularly when the capitalist school was transformed into a site of social and class struggle. As equality in opportunities and life chances receded, the school increasingly became a privileged arena of selection and class, based discrimination.

2.4 Schooling and the Reproduction of Inequality

Bourdieu examined the functions of schooling through the framework of reproduction theory, which argues that educational systems in capitalist

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societies operate as spaces for the perpetuation of social inequality and the reproduction of relations of domination.

From this perspective, Bourdieu contends that although schools ostensibly fulfill a socializing function, they simultaneously perform latent roles that render them spaces of exclusion and marginalization rather than genuine inclusion. Consequently, the school's fundamental role becomes the reproduction of existing social hierarchies. As a social institution, the school, in Bourdieu's view, is dominated by elite culture. As a result, the greatest chances of academic success are afforded to students from families whose cultural background closely aligns with that of the school.

By contrast, students whose cultural dispositions differ from those endorsed by the school are often penalized. In most cases, these students come from disadvantaged social backgrounds and are denied recognition because they lack what Bourdieu terms *cultural capital*. This frequently leads to academic failure and eventual withdrawal from schooling. Accordingly, Bourdieu regards the school as a privileged site of selection and class, based discrimination.

The concept of *cultural capital* is central to Bourdieu's explanation of educational inequality. He developed it alongside the notion of economic capital. Cultural capital encompasses a wide range of cultural dispositions and resources, including language, religion, and artistic practices. According to Bourdieu, such cultural practices are shaped by social determinants rather than by the autonomous choices of individuals. (André,1999,p.63) This dynamic is what he describes as *symbolic violence*, a subtle form of domination transmitted through school curricula and institutional practices.

As a consequence:

- Children from lower social classes tend to leave school at an early stage.
- They rarely progress to higher levels of education.
- They seldom gain access to prestigious academic tracks.

Bourdieu further argues that socially valued fields of study are, in most cases, reserved for students from bourgeois backgrounds, who

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disproportionately occupy elite faculties such as medicine, pharmacy, and engineering.

It should be noted that, in Bourdieu's view, the influence of social origin and class affiliation is manifested not only in academic success and the attainment of credentials, but also in access to employment and occupational opportunities. He argued that when educational qualifications are equal, children from dominant social classes derive greater returns from their school credentials in the labor market than their counterparts from popular or disadvantaged classes.

In his analysis of the school's selective role, Bourdieu emphasizes the theory of self, selection, grounded in an unconscious internal intuition. According to this perspective, the student anticipates failure in advance, and such expectations often lead to early and definitive withdrawal from schooling.

This conception falls within deterministic theories that reveal how what is internalized within the individual plays a decisive role in shaping educational and professional destiny. Individuals are influenced by cognitive dispositions they have acquired and assimilated, which guide their behavior spontaneously and without conscious reflection once these dispositions have become deeply embedded through the process of socialization. Within this framework, Bourdieu developed the concept of *habitus*, by which he refers to the acquired dispositions and representations that shape an individual's behavior and perceptions of both self and world across diverse social situations and institutional settings, including the school environment.

Accordingly, Bourdieu approached the function of socialization through the ideological function of the school. In his view, the latter is merely one dimension of the school's socializing role, insofar as ideology is closely linked to normalization and the preservation of established social structures.

Thus, based on Bourdieu's analysis, the school cannot be regarded as a neutral institution. Rather, it socializes individuals into accepting their social conditions through unconscious determinisms embedded in their internal cognitive structures and transmitted through curricular content.

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From this perspective, socialization becomes, in Bourdieu's thought, one of the most consequential and potentially dangerous functions of the school.

5. Conclusion

Based on the foregoing analysis, it can be concluded that both Durkheim and Bourdieu affirm the school's socializing function, albeit from two distinct perspectives. Although they agree on the school's role in social control, through which individuals are trained to respect social order and habituated to obedience, they differ in their interpretation of the nature of this control, as well as its objectives and consequences.

Accordingly, the school appears, in the analyses of both Durkheim and Bourdieu, to perform manifest functions consisting primarily in the socialization of individuals into societal values and norms. These functions belong to the publicly recognized and institutionally endorsed roles of schooling. At the same time, the school also performs latent or hidden functions, notably the reinforcement of social inequalities through the dissemination of the dominant class culture.

This divergence in the analysis of the school's functions within capitalist society reflects the differing theoretical orientations of the two scholars. Durkheim, as a functionalist, viewed the school as a social system that contributes to social equilibrium and stability. Bourdieu, by contrast, adopted a critical perspective influenced by Marxist thought, regarding school socialization as a central mechanism for legitimizing unequal opportunities for success among social classes, both within and beyond the school system.

This apparent opposition between the two approaches should not necessarily be understood as a contradiction, but rather as an expression of the plurality of the school's functions. Such an interpretation is consistent with what sociologists William Ogburn and Robert Merton described as the dynamic nature of institutions and the transformation of their functions in response to changing social environments.

In conclusion, regardless of the diversity of theoretical approaches explaining the roles of the school, the function of socialization remains one

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of the most fundamental and enduring responsibilities assigned to it across historical periods, given its essential role in consolidating societal values, norms, and standards.

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