




## THE SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION: SCHOOL INCLUSION UNDER ANALYSIS

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### ABSTRACT

This article addresses the relationship between the Sociology of Education and school inclusion, investigating how social inequalities influence educational practices and the effectiveness of inclusion in schools. The main objective is to analyze school inclusion from a sociological perspective, considering the impacts of social structures, such as social stratification, economic, cultural and gender inequalities, on education. The methodology used was a bibliographic review of relevant studies on the subject, including analyses of pertinent legislation, sociological theories of education and inclusive pedagogical practices. The discussion reveals that, although the school has the potential to transform inequalities, it often reinforces these disparities due to institutional resistance, prejudice, and the lack of adequate training of educators. In addition, the curricular structure and pedagogical practices are often not adapted to meet the diversity of students, perpetuating exclusion. As main contributions, the article highlights the importance of sociological analysis to understand the dynamics of inclusion and suggests the implementation of public policies that consider diversity, as well as pedagogical practices that promote truly inclusive education. In the final considerations, the need for a critical look at educational practices for a so-called "new Sociology of Education" is reinforced and proposes new research on the interactions between social inequalities and school inclusion policies, with emphasis on teacher training and the construction of an equitable school environment.

**Keywords:** Sociology of Education. School Inclusion. School Practice. Education - Public Policies.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Sociology of Education, as a field of study, seeks to understand the interactions between society and the educational system, addressing the social dynamics that influence educational processes and their results. In this context, the issue of school inclusion emerges as a central theme, as it represents the challenge of ensuring that education is accessible, equitable and meaningful for all, regardless of social, cultural or physical differences. The relationship between these two fields allows for an in-depth analysis of the factors that promote or hinder inclusion, as well as the consequences of these dynamics for individual and social development.

The choice of this theme is justified by its relevance in the contemporary educational scenario, marked by growing demands for inclusion and diversity in schools. In a country like Brazil, characterized by structural and cultural inequalities, the analysis of school inclusion from a sociological perspective is fundamental to understand how social mechanisms impact educational opportunities and to propose solutions that promote a fairer and more inclusive education. In addition, school inclusion is a cross-cutting theme, which dialogues with other areas such as human rights, public policies and social justice.

To achieve this objective, a bibliographic review methodology was adopted, with the analysis of academic studies and relevant documents that address the theme. This approach allows for a broad and grounded understanding of the issues involving school inclusion, contributing to the construction of a critical and grounded debate on the subject.

The objective of this article is to analyze school inclusion from the perspective of the Sociology of Education, identifying the challenges, practices and barriers that exist in this process. It is intended to investigate how social, cultural and economic factors interact with the educational system, affecting the effectiveness of inclusive practices and influencing the school experience of students from different contexts.

## SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The Sociology of Education emerged as a specific field in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, aligned with the development of Sociology itself (Charlot, 2000). This discipline seeks to understand the relations between education and society, analyzing how the school reflects and reproduces social structures, while contributing to social transformation. According to Durkheim (2006), considered the father of the Sociology of Education, education plays the role of socializing individuals, transmitting values and norms that guarantee social cohesion.

According to Gatti (2003), the evolution of this field was marked by different theoretical approaches, such as functionalist theory, the conflict perspective and critical analyses of social reproduction. Over time, the Sociology of Education has expanded its borders, incorporating themes related to cultural diversity, social inequalities, and inclusion processes.

The Sociology of Education can be defined as the branch of Sociology that studies the relationships between educational systems and the social structure, analyzing how education influences and is influenced by social, cultural and economic phenomena (Charlot, 2000). It is concerned with investigating both school practices and teaching-learning processes in the context of social dynamics.

Émile Durkheim highlighted education as an instrument of socialization that shapes individuals to play their roles in society. He stated that education is the means by which society prepares its members for collective life (Durkheim, 2006, p. 27). Pierre Bourdieu, in turn, brought a critical perspective when discussing social reproduction through education. Through the concepts of habitus, field and cultural capital, Bourdieu (1992) demonstrated how the school can perpetuate inequalities by valuing the habits and knowledge of the dominant classes. Basil Bernstein, another significant author, focused on the relationship between language and education. His concept of linguistic codes (elaborate and restricted) points to disparities in communication and school performance, often related to the socioeconomic context of students (Bernstein, 1975).

In Brazil, the Sociology of Education gained prominence with authors such as Florestan Fernandes and Dermeval Saviani. Fernandes (1975) analyzed the role of education in social modernization, emphasizing the need for democratic education to overcome structural inequalities. Saviani (2008), in turn, developed the Critical Theory of Education, which discusses how the school can be a space for social emancipation and resistance to oppressive structures. The contribution of the Sociology of Education in Brazil is also manifested in the discussion on inclusive education, with studies that address the challenges to ensure equitable access and quality for historically marginalized populations (Gatti, 2003).

## **SCHOOL INCLUSION: CONCEPTS AND CHALLENGES**

School inclusion is defined as the process of ensuring that all students, regardless of their individual characteristics, have access to education in environments that promote equity and full participation (Booth; Ainscow, 2011). According to Mittler (2003), inclusion does not refer only to physical access to the school space, but also to the guarantee that all



students have their needs met in a welcoming school community, so that the construction of an educational system values diversity and seeks to overcome barriers of a physical, social and pedagogical nature.

The principles of school inclusion are guided by equity, respect for diversity, active participation and the provision of learning opportunities for all. Booth and Ainscow (2011) highlight that inclusive institutions are those that identify and remove barriers to participation and learning, creating an environment that celebrates diversity as a resource. Thus, inclusion goes beyond the integration of students with disabilities, also covering issues of gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic condition and other situations of vulnerability.

In Brazil, legal frameworks and public policies have played a key role in promoting school inclusion. The Federal Constitution of 1988 establishes in its article 205 that "education is the right of all and the duty of the State and of the family", reinforcing the obligation to guarantee universal access to education (Brasil, 1988). In addition, the Law of Guidelines and Bases of National Education (Law No. 9,394/1996) includes special education as a modality to be offered at all levels and stages of education, preferably in the regular school system.

Brazil is also a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, approved by Legislative Decree No. 186/2008 and promulgated by Decree No. 6,949/2009, which reaffirms the commitment to school inclusion as an integral part of the right to education. More recently, the Brazilian Law for the Inclusion of Persons with Disabilities (Law No. 13,146/2015) reinforces the role of schools in eliminating barriers and ensuring adequate conditions for learning for all students.

However, despite the legal advances, Mittler (2003) points out that challenges still persist in the implementation of school inclusion. Among the main obstacles are the lack of adequate training for teachers, the insufficiency of pedagogical and financial resources, as well as attitudinal barriers that perpetuate discriminatory practices. As Mantoan (2003) states, true inclusion requires a profound cultural change, which involves reviewing the beliefs and practices that sustain the traditional educational system.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION AND SCHOOL INCLUSION**

The Sociology of Education acts in understanding the dynamics that permeate inclusive practices in the school context, as argued by Mittler (2003). Through its theoretical and methodological tools, it allows us to analyze how social, cultural and economic relations influence the construction of a more inclusive educational system (Mittler, 2003). School

inclusion, as a process that aims to ensure the equitable participation of all students, is conditioned by structural factors that the Sociology of Education seeks to unveil, highlighting the challenges and proposing ways to achieve them.

The Sociology of Education enables the critical analysis of pedagogical and institutional practices that promote or hinder school inclusion. According to Bourdieu (1998), the educational system is one of the main mechanisms for the reproduction of social inequalities, since it perpetuates structures of power and privilege through cultural capital. This perspective helps to identify implicit barriers in educational practices, such as poorly diversified curricula and the lack of representation of different social groups.

Furthermore, in the light of Durkheim's (1995) thought, education fulfills an integrating function by socializing individuals in the values and norms of society. However, for this integration to be inclusive, it is necessary to overcome the structural inequalities that exclude certain groups from the full educational experience. Thus, the Sociology of Education contributes by suggesting that school inclusion is not limited to the physical presence of students, but also to the creation of a pedagogical environment that values and respects diversity.

Social and cultural inequalities constitute significant challenges for school inclusion. Bourdieu and Passeron (2014) argue that the habitus of individuals is shaped by their social position, which influences their educational performance and experience. In this sense, students from less favored social classes face additional difficulties in accessing and fully benefiting from the educational system, since it is often structured to meet the interests and values of the elites.

Another relevant aspect is the impact of cultural inequalities on school inclusion. As Freire (1996) points out, education needs to be an act of liberation that respects the cultures of the oppressed and promotes awareness. To this end, it is essential that schools adopt inclusive pedagogical practices that value cultural diversity and challenge existing hierarchies. The thoughts of Durkheim and Bourdieu, among other thinkers in the Sociology of Education, provide robust theoretical bases for understanding the issues involving school inclusion. Durkheim (1995), with his focus on the social function of education, highlights the need to create social cohesion that includes all individuals. Bourdieu (1998), on the other hand, draws attention to the reproduction of inequalities through cultural capital, pointing out the need to transform institutional structures to promote equity.

Freire (1996), in contrast, proposes a critical approach that values popular knowledge and promotes the emancipation of individuals through education. This



perspective dialogues directly with school inclusion by proposing an educational model that not only welcomes diversity, but also celebrates it as a transforming force.

## **SCHOOL INCLUSION AND SOCIAL STRATIFICATION: HOW TO DIALOGUE IN A NEW SOCIOLOGY OF EDUCATION?**

School inclusion is one of the greatest challenges faced by contemporary societies, especially in contexts marked by high social stratification. The social structure directly influences the effectiveness of school inclusion, since economic, cultural and gender inequalities determine the access and permanence of students in the educational system. According to Bourdieu and Passeron (2014), cultural capital is one of the main elements that reproduce social inequalities in schools, making it difficult for marginalized groups to access quality educational opportunities.

In the economic sphere, poverty and lack of financial resources hinder access to inclusive education, since public schools often lack adequate infrastructure and trained professionals. In addition, cultural and gender inequalities contribute to the exclusion of certain groups, such as girls in vulnerable situations or students from traditional communities who face discrimination for their own cultural expressions. As Dubet (2003) states, the school often reflects and perpetuates these inequalities by not questioning the assumptions that sustain such structures.

The social structure, marked by historical and systemic inequalities, directly influences the effectiveness of school inclusion. Some studies show that economic inequalities limit access to quality education, especially in contexts of extreme poverty (Bourdieu, 2007). These inequalities become even more evident when we analyze the relationship between culture and school. The hegemony of a curriculum that predominantly reflects dominant class values contributes to the symbolic exclusion of students belonging to diverse cultural groups.

In addition, gender inequalities also play a significant role in school inclusion. In many regions, girls face greater difficulties in accessing and remaining in school due to social expectations that reinforce traditional gender roles (UNESCO, 2020). Thus, thinking about effective school inclusion requires recognizing how these structural dynamics manifest themselves in the educational environment.

The school occupies an ambiguous position with regard to social inequalities. On the one hand, it is often seen as a mechanism for the reproduction of these inequalities, perpetuating established social patterns. Bourdieu (2007) argues that cultural capital is one





of the main factors in maintaining these inequalities, since the school tends to value the habitus of the dominant classes.

On the other hand, the school also has the potential to act as a transformative institution, capable of promoting social and educational inclusion. For this, it is necessary to review pedagogical and curricular practices that marginalize certain groups. The adoption of a critical education, as defended by Paulo Freire (1987), can transform the school into a space of emancipation, in which knowledge is collectively constructed and cultural differences are valued.

The school occupies a central role in the construction of a more inclusive society, being at the same time an institution that reproduces and potentially transforms social inequalities. According to Freire (1996), education should be an act of freedom, capable of questioning reality and promoting social transformation. In this sense, pedagogical and curricular practices that value diversity and promote equity can help transform the school into a more inclusive space. Arroyo (2011) observes that inclusive pedagogical practices include, for example, curricular adaptations that consider the specific needs of each student and promote the active participation of all in the teaching-learning process. In addition, valuing cultural diversity in the curriculum can contribute to the formation of a more equitable and plural school.

However, in practice, the school often reproduces social inequalities by adopting homogeneous and decontextualized curricula that ignore the cultural and social specificities of students. The concept of habitus, proposed by Bourdieu (1989), helps to understand how the cultural and behavioral expectations of the school favor certain social groups to the detriment of others. To overcome these limitations, it is necessary to implement pedagogical practices that dialogue with local realities and promote the active participation of all students.

Gatti (2003) and Mantoan (2003) argue that among the main barriers to school inclusion are prejudice, institutional resistance, lack of teacher training and inadequate resources. Prejudice, in its various forms, generates exclusion and marginalization of students who do not fit into the predominant cultural or social standards. According to Lima and Carvalho (2016), institutional resistance is another factor that limits inclusion, since many schools still have conservative structures that hinder the implementation of inclusive policies.

The lack of adequate teacher training also poses a significant challenge, as many educators are not prepared to deal with diversity in the classroom. According to Veiga-Neto (2007), it is essential that teacher training includes the development of skills for inclusive



education, such as diversity management and the adoption of differentiated pedagogical practices. In addition, the lack of material and human resources prevents schools from implementing effective measures to ensure inclusion.

Despite legal and political advances, school inclusion still faces several practical challenges. Biases, both institutional and individual, remain a significant barrier to building inclusive educational environments. Studies show that resistance to inclusion is often linked to a lack of understanding about diversity and its benefits for the educational process (Silva, 2018).

Nevertheless, in order to overcome the challenges of school inclusion, it is necessary to build a new Sociology of Education that prioritizes equity and social justice in its analyses and proposals. This new approach must consider the social and cultural dynamics that impact education, promoting pedagogical practices that respect diversity and ensure the participation of all students.

Freire (1996) offers a fundamental contribution to this perspective by emphasizing the importance of a critical and dialogical education. For him, education should be a process of awareness, in which students are encouraged to question reality and act to transform it. In this context, it is essential that educational practices are planned and implemented in order to promote inclusion and equity, breaking with the logics of exclusion and discrimination that still predominate in many schools. Freire (1987) then proposes a dialogical education, which values the experiences of all the subjects involved in the educational process. For Freire, education should be a political act, committed to social transformation and the construction of a fairer society.

As Giroux (1983) observes, it is necessary to create educational spaces that value cultural diversity and stimulate the development of critical thinking. A new Sociology of Education must, therefore, articulate theories and practices that contribute to the construction of a truly inclusive school, capable of meeting the demands of a plural society in constant transformation. To this end, thinking about a new Sociology of Education must also incorporate intersectional perspectives, recognizing how different dimensions of oppression intersect to affect the educational experience of vulnerable groups. This approach allows us to understand the complexity of inequalities and propose more effective solutions

## **FINAL CONSIDERATIONS**

This article addressed the relationship between the Sociology of Education and school inclusion, highlighting the influence of social structures on educational practices and



on the process of inclusion of students in contexts of inequality. Through the analysis of the challenges and barriers faced by the school, such as prejudice, institutional resistance, and the lack of adequate teacher training, it was possible to perceive how economic, cultural, and gender inequalities directly impact the effectiveness of a truly inclusive education.

It was highlighted that the school, in many contexts, ends up functioning as a reproducer of social inequalities, instead of being a space for transformation and overcoming these disparities. Pedagogical and curricular practices, when not adapted to meet the diversity of students, can reinforce exclusions and social stratification, contributing to the perpetuation of the marginalization of historically discriminated social groups. The sociological analysis of education, therefore, is fundamental to understand the dynamics that shape these inequalities, allowing a critical reflection on the roles of the school and educators.

The contribution of Paulo Freire and other thinkers in the field of critical pedagogy points to the need for an education that is inclusive in all aspects, not only in the sense of guaranteeing access, but also of promoting participation and recognition of differences. Teacher training, the implementation of pedagogical practices that consider diversity, and the creation of a curriculum that dialogues with the local and cultural realities of students are some of the actions that can contribute to more effective school inclusion.

In addition, it is essential that public educational policies, at the local and national levels, be developed based on a critical view of school inclusion. It is necessary that policies not only focus on infrastructure, but also on teaching conditions, the continuous training of educators, the reduction of material inequalities and the creation of a school environment that values the diversity of all students. In this sense, policies that promote gender equality, the fight against racism, and the promotion of multicultural education are essential to ensure a fairer and more inclusive education system.

Finally, it is suggested in this study that future research continues to explore the complex interactions between social structure and educational practice, focusing on the ways in which different social groups experience school inclusion. It is also a fertile field for new studies to investigate new educational technologies, their potentialities and limitations, as well as teacher training policies that favor an inclusive approach, are promising directions for new studies. The sociological analysis of education is a powerful tool to transform the school reality and to contribute to the construction of a more just and egalitarian society, where all individuals, regardless of their social conditions, can have access to quality education.



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