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## **Pedagogical Ideals and School Practices: Émile Durkheim's Insights for Citizen Education in Contemporary Russia**

*Abstract.* The article examines the tension between educational ideologies and the practical methods used to implement theoretical ideas in actual teaching environments. To address this issue, the author proposes drawing on the insights of Émile Durkheim. The first section highlights the key elements of the French sociologist's work that are relevant to this topic, such as Durkheim's argument for the autonomy of the social sphere and its influence through collective representations that shape society. Additionally, it discusses his strategies for promoting social solidarity. According to Durkheim, schools serve as institutions of socialization, much like religion did in early societies. Durkheim believed that effective citizen education requires an emphasis on certain components: (1) transmitting collective knowledge about the past and the experiences of previous generations; (2) fostering respect for legitimate authority and its moral influence; and (3) instilling shared values in students. He also recognized that educational systems can be influenced by conflicts between various groups and their differing pedagogical ideals. Durkheim underscored the state's role as a neutral actor that should rise above these conflicts, giving due regard to social morphology. In the Russian context, educational programs should be designed to reflect the collective beliefs and values of the population. These programs should tap into shared emotions and ideas to foster a sense of group identity among individual students. Instead of advancing the ideals of specific groups, the state's objective should be to develop practices that resonate with the collective values and sentiments present within society. When pedagogical ideals and their practical implementation are grounded in collective representations, they can be harmonized effectively.

*Keywords:* Durkheim; collective representations; sociology of education; civic education; education in Russia; school practices

Contemporary discussions in the field of education studies implicitly suggest that the content of curricula, teaching methods, and similar factors influence the development of the younger generation and, by extension, the future of the country. These elements represent a form of “policy for the future”, with educational institutions acting as vehicles for the idea of progress (Meyer 2010). This perspective can be illustrated by the numerous theories where authors explore the transformational potential of education and its ability to overcome various forms of inequality and drive changes in the social structure (McLaren 2007; Gottesman 2016; Haapasaari et al. 2016). However, the state’s intake quotas, approval of the Federal State Educational Standards (Dobryakova, Frumin 2020; Dobryakova et al. 2018), school and university rituals (Linchenko, Golovashina 2019), the rising discussions about the need to reinstate mandatory student distribution after graduation<sup>1</sup>, the traditional nature of teaching methods, and the perception of the education system as one of the most conservative (Leonidova et al. 2018) all point to the continued relevance of the functionalist perspective, which considers education as primarily serving to reproduce the social structure. According to surveys conducted in Russia, people largely associate the effectiveness of school education with its ability to provide knowledge and skills applicable to later life<sup>2</sup>. They also see the primary function of schools as preparing students for professional activity or expanding their horizons<sup>3</sup>. However, modern research shows that

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<sup>1</sup> In Soviet history, mandatory student distribution (or mandatory job placement) was a policy implemented to assign graduates to work in specific jobs or locations determined by the state after completing their higher education. This system was designed to ensure that graduates contributed to the needs of the planned economy by filling positions in various industries, government agencies, or rural areas that required skilled labor. The state would assign jobs based on national economic priorities, and graduates were obligated to work in these positions, often for a set number of years, before they could seek other employment or relocate. – *Translator’s note.*

<sup>2</sup> School education: opinions of Russians, *VTSIOM*, 29.08.2018, available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/shkolnoe-obrazovanie-oczenka-rossiyan> (accessed September 4, 2024). (in Russ.).

<sup>3</sup> School education: who should the school prepare? *VTSIOM*, 29.08.2005, available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii->

the content and formats of Russian school curricula are outdated and do not meet social demands (Kuzminov et al. 2019). In other words, there is a certain contradiction between educational ideologies, on the one hand, and the ways in which the ideas of theorists are spread and implemented in actual teaching practices, on the other. This contradiction manifests in discussions about the role of the teacher or the educational process (Petrova, Shkabarina 2020; Torikova 2021); decisions made by administrations at various levels that cannot be implemented in real pedagogical activities; stress among school staff due to the mismatch between their perceptions of organizational requirements and their own resources (Efimova, Latyshev 2023); clashing attitudes in teachers' work; and interactions between families and schools (Kasprzhak et al. 2015; Ostroverkh, Tikhomirova 2021). All of this hinders the realization of one of education's main goals – developing a responsible citizen.

In his early work *Suicide*, Émile Durkheim argues that education is a reflection of society: it reproduces and simplifies social structures, but does not form them (Durkheim 1912), which leads him to two key conclusions: first, there is an understanding that educational processes are socially determined, and second, the functions of the educational system must align with the collective beliefs that underpin social solidarity.

Although this article does not aim to justify the relevance of the functionalist metaphor for the modern educational system, it should be noted that Durkheim's views on the formation of civic solidarity and the role of schools in this process appear highly relevant for resolving the contradiction between educational ideologies and pedagogical practices in contemporary Russia.

Durkheim's works on solidarity and moral sociology often receive the most attention, while his contributions to other areas, particularly education, are more frequently overlooked. However, much of his teaching was focused on pedagogy. After completing his studies at the École Normale Supérieure in Paris in 1882,

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obzor/shkolnoe-obrazovanie-kogo-segodnya-dolzha-gotovit-shkola (accessed September 4, 2024) (in Russ.); Innovations in school patriotism: pros and cons, VTSIOM, 11.05.2022, available at: <https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/novacii-shkolnogo-patriotizma-i-protiv> (accessed September 4, 2024). (in Russ.).

Durkheim began his teaching career in high schools. In 1887, he joined the University of Bordeaux, where he taught social sciences and pedagogy. In 1902, Durkheim moved to the Sorbonne, while also teaching mandatory courses on education at the École Normale. Many of his works on education and pedagogy, such as *Education and Sociology*, *Moral Education*, and *The Evolution of Educational Thought in France*, were revised lectures, including those for secondary school teachers. His ideas on education were actively supported by the government (Richter 1960; Wallace 1973) and likely continued in the pedagogical practices of his students. Durkheim himself can be considered a classic of education.

It would be an oversimplification to reduce Durkheim's sociology of education to a mere transmission of the state's views on the role of the citizen or a justification of the functionalist metaphor. Durkheim's interest in social morphology also influenced his approach. While he argued that education reflects society, he also emphasized that society cannot be homogeneous. Therefore, the clash between the educational ideals of different social groups is inevitable. Durkheim's focus on social solidarity, which is evident in his work on education, makes his ideas highly relevant for understanding civic education policy in contemporary Russia and offers valuable insights for shaping practical approaches to civic education.

The following will outline key aspects of Durkheim's sociology relevant to this topic, followed by an analysis of pertinent ideas regarding civic education, and finally, a proposal for their potential adaptation to the current context in modern Russia. The ideas of Durkheim concerning moral education, which have already been extensively researched (Jones 1993; Pickering 1979; Wallwork 1972; Watts Miller 1997; Watts Miller 2000), including in Russia (Gofman 2019), will remain beyond the scope of this study.

Thus, the first step is to briefly examine the core concepts of Durkheim's sociology that also shaped his views on education.

First and foremost, Durkheim justifies *the autonomy of society* by emphasizing the precedence of social reality over individual reality. He views society as a force that determines behavior, moral norms, and values, stressing that it does not come from us but imposes itself on us. Therefore, researchers must study the mechanisms of this force (Filloux 1977). The behavior of individuals and

groups, as well as their actions, are shaped by social processes. Social coercion is linked to societal norms, values, and expectations that guide individuals' behavior and their interactions with each other. For Durkheim, the concept of the social fact is crucial: society is made up of these social facts, and studying them empirically is the primary task of sociology (Durkheim 1995). Thus, education, from Durkheim's perspective, is a social practice consisting of social facts.

Society's influence is reflected in *collective representations*. "Collective representations, produced by the action and the reaction between individual minds that form the society, do not derive directly from the latter and consequently surpass them" (Durkheim 1995: 233). While Durkheim does not delve into the question as to where these representations originate, he does focus on the mechanisms through which they are transmitted – through rituals, language, laws, and the education system (Durkheim 1887; Durkheim 1973a; Durkheim, Deploige 1907; Misztal 2003). Regardless of their complex status, these representations ultimately shape society (Durkheim 1900).

*Social solidarity*, which in Durkheim's earlier work was seen as a result of the division of labor (Durkheim 1996), later becomes linked to collective representations and is sustained by recurring practices (rituals). For Durkheim, "solidarity constitutes the defining characteristic of group life"; it is "the sine qua non of collective action" (Traugott 1984: 325). Rituals include not only the repetitive actions of Australian Aboriginals but also the raising of the national flag or the end-of-school-year celebrations in Russian schools. What matters is what society at that time considers sacred – be it a totemic animal image, Christian symbols, or the eternal flame and St. George ribbon. The sacred is continuously experienced as sacred through rituals; only in this way does it remain sacred: "To sustain the sense of historical continuity, a community must be provided with a set of meaningful values and emotions" (Vasilyev 2014: 156). Social solidarity can only exist when individuals share common values and norms. In this context, the state plays an important role in convincing citizens of the importance of a shared identity and value system. It contributes to the formation of public consciousness by encouraging people to reinterpret certain events and give less importance to others, thus reinforcing social unity.

In his later work, Durkheim consistently explored the theme of solidarity, in everything from his shorter articles to his most comprehensive book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, where he justified the role of rituals and religion in the creation and maintenance of social cohesion. It would, therefore, make perfect sense to speak of a Durkheimian tradition focused on the study of social cohesion and solidarity.

Thus, Durkheim's sociology, including his works on education, was based on the recognition of the autonomy of the social realm and its priority over the individual, as well as the determinative role of collective representations that constitute society. Rituals play a key role in maintaining and transmitting collective representations; however, they do not create these representations independently. Their main function is to reinforce existing ideas and norms, preserving and disseminating them in society.

Let us now turn to Durkheim's views on educating citizens. Durkheim maintained that "education, far from having as its unique and principal object the individual and his interests, is above all the means by which society perpetually recreates the conditions of its very existence" (Durkheim 1956: 123). Durkheim's argument that society is the "source and goal of morality" led him to conclude that "we cannot strive for a morality different from the one connected to the state of our society" (Durkheim 1974: 59, 61). Any pedagogical doctrine "is the result of collective work", and "each society sets up a certain ideal of man, of what he should be" and this image reflects all the features of its structure and organization (Durkheim 1956: 123).

If we consider law, language, and rituals as key mechanisms for transmitting collective representations, as Durkheim repeatedly wrote, the question arises about the institutions that facilitate this transmission. In his work *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim links the socialization of individuals and social solidarity with religion; in the modern world, however, this function is carried out by educational institutions (Wallace 1973: 3), that is, school must transmit established collective representations, which are reflected both in state policy and in the upbringing of the younger generation. Durkheim, recognizing the difficulty of defining collective representations and distinguishing them from situational and contextual emotions, experiences, and reactions, suggests fairly specific prac-

tices whose implementation would contribute to the transmission of collective representations.

Firstly, for the education of a citizen, it is important that the child “be informed about the heritage of those who preceded him” (Durkheim 1973: 247). Durkheim, as a precursor to studies of collective memory (Vasilyev 2014; Misztal 2003), discusses the role of *the experiences of previous generations in shaping the citizen*. State schools should “interpret and express the French spirit” (Durkheim 1956: 107), educate the younger generation with a belief in the moral greatness of France (Durkheim 1977). Just as “our past personae predominate in us and... constitute the unconscious part of ourselves”, educational ideals and visions of the past continue to shape our present practices and understandings (Durkheim 1977: 11). What he means is not the mechanical transmission of information, but the transmission of collective representations through knowledge of the past and corresponding practices. “The truth is that the present, to which we are invited to restrict our attention, is by itself nothing; it is no more than an extrapolation of the past, from which it cannot be severed without losing the greater part of its significance” (Durkheim 1977: 14).

Religion as “the primitive way in which societies become conscious of themselves and their history” (Durkheim 1973a: 270) is closely linked to the mythic past, which holds the key to collective beliefs, fears, and knowledge. In the future, this role is taken on by the school, which becomes responsible for cultivating a sense of continuity with past generations. Only this sense can engender national solidarity as the solidarity of society’s members, extending beyond the life of one generation or one individual (Durkheim 1973b: 246).

Most likely, when Durkheim spoke of transmitting the experience of previous generations, he referred not only to teaching history in schools but also to school traditions and rituals that demonstrate generational continuity, as well as fostering a sense of national culture and pride in one’s country among students.

Secondly, schools serve to foster respect for legitimate authority and its moral standing, while also teaching children to embrace the “religion of law”, with school discipline being regarded as something sacred (Durkheim 1919: 191-192). Unlike rituals, which are performed periodically, the educational process must instill these qualities consistently and systematically.

Thirdly, a community is built on the foundation of shared core values. These values should not be invented from scratch but collected and selected from those already present in the public consciousness and rooted in traditions, because it is through such values that the collective representations of a community are expressed. Educating students with a focus on common values fosters solidarity.

It is also crucial to examine *the state's role* in educating citizens. The structure of pedagogical ideas is historically specific, shaped by the political context, and evolves within the conditions of collective life, often requiring the suppression of individual autonomy. The prevalent modern notion that working with youth shapes the country's future contradicts Durkheim's perspective: "education, therefore, can be reformed only if society itself is reformed" (Durkheim 1912: 514-515). In other words, new educational programs or teaching methods are meaningless if the social order remains unchanged. Reforms in education should follow changes in collective representations, not dictate them. The purpose of school is to transmit established traditions (Walford, Pickering 1998: 5), not to generate new ones.

At any given point in history, Durkheim notes, there is a prevailing and regulating form of education, and any deviation from it would encounter significant resistance from society (Durkheim 1977). In other words, school is a reflection of the society in which it functions and cannot be completely independent due to its authoritarian structure and economic determinism imposed by society (Walford, Pickering 1998: 6).

The *state*, interested in maintaining social stability and unity among citizens, initiates various practices to strengthen these values, influencing the process of identity formation. Durkheim's argument that society is the "source and goal of morality" led him to conclude that "we cannot strive for a morality different from the one connected to the state of our society" (Durkheim 1974: 59, 61).

Each educational doctrine is the result of society's efforts; it shapes the image of the person that society wants to create, and this image reflects all the characteristics of the social organization (Durkheim 1956: 123). In other words, Durkheim subscribed to the idea that Wundt defended in his ethics (Wundt 1886), namely that the morality, religion, and law of different peoples are the culmina-



tion of collective, slow, and unconscious developments (see: Durkheim 1887: 119-123).

“Since education is an essentially social function, the state cannot be indifferent to it”, on the contrary, education should play an active role in order to ensure that the majority should not systematically “impose its ideas on the children of the minority” (Durkheim 1956: 81). Education should not be “abandoned to the arbitrariness of private individuals” (Durkheim 1956: 81); this does not mean, however, that the state must necessarily monopolize education, but rather that it ensures the equal distribution of this crucial public good and prevents it from falling under the control of any specific group or class.

However, it would be an oversimplification to argue that schools are simply transmitters of the state’s concept of citizenship, raising citizens who fit the state’s needs at any given moment. Society itself is not homogeneous, and therefore, educational ideals can come into conflict. Durkheim illustrates how the conflict between advocates of elite education and proponents of broader access to education (such as the Promethean doctrine expressed in the Rabelaisian ideal of education and the gentlemen’s doctrine described by Erasmus) shaped the development of the French education system (Durkheim 1956: 81).

Another type of conflict arises from real challenges, such as the collective representations of the population and the ideas of educational policymakers, which do not align with these representations but emerge from the views of certain individuals or groups. Durkheim criticizes traditional pedagogy for concentrating on theoretical ideas about education without providing methods for putting them into practice. This gap between theoretical concepts and the actual practice of education can lead to contradictions and hinder civic education.

In addition to the conflict of educational ideals, Durkheim also draws attention to social morphology, emphasizing the need to consider not only the public sphere but also the family, social movements, leisure practices, and to assess the internal logic of these structures and their contributions to social integration, individual autonomy, and voluntary community. The socialization of the future citizen, Durkheim argues, depends not only on the state’s position but also on various social activities – from parent committee

meetings to national debates and public activities. In other words, the upbringing of a citizen is not determined solely by the state, school, or the teacher's work; educational ideals are formed through dialogue and conflict between various actors, and socialization is differentiated, with the influence of its structures depending on whether they are "institutionalized or are in the process of being institutionalized" (Cohen, Arato 1992: X).

A limitation of Durkheim's sociology of education is that it does not explain how educational institutions can become conduits of social determinants. Teachers are not regarded as key contributors in shaping concepts that hold significance for the state. According to Durkheim's core principles, collective representations reflect the natural civil order and, as such, cannot be interpreted within the framework of political discourse. At the same time, education aimed at fostering both citizenship and individuality exists outside this natural order. Rather, it is essential for teachers and the school to understand (or internalize) this order and convey it. The transmission of collective representations – specifically, the values and moral norms they reflect – forms the foundation of civil order and promotes social solidarity.

It should be noted, however, that despite his belief in the deterministic power of social processes, Durkheim "stands for the autonomy and full development of the individual. The highest point in the process of evolution is the emergence of the individual. An individual must be free to be the person he or she believes they can become. Education encourages each individual to advance to the degree she or he is able. The point is that this cannot be achieved apart from the social" (Walford, Pickering 1998: 5). Education, which prepares an individual for life in an "adult" society, must be closely linked to the current conditions of that society and its demands at a particular historical moment. Social connections play a key role in shaping human nature. The new type of integration mentioned by Durkheim means that individualism in modern society is a reflection of the collective conscience.

Thus, the school becomes a replacement for religious organizations as the primary institution for socialization and the formation of solidarity. Durkheim believed that the future of a cohesive society depends on maintaining a moral code of social obligations and duties that benefit both the individual and society. It is important to

recognize that the educational system itself is often shaped by conflicts, which makes this process even more complex. For Durkheim, formal or systematic education was a way to create and maintain consensus and solidarity in a complex, specialized, and diverse society.

Paradoxically, although Durkheim wrote about national values and patriotism, he believed that the society of the future would not be bound by national borders. In the long term, patriotism, as respect for the nation's values, would necessarily be replaced by an international religion shared by all humanity (Wallace 1973: 9). Every citizen has duties to their country, but as Durkheim emphasized, these duties should not outweigh duties to humanity as a whole.

Despite some limitations and contradictions in Durkheim's views on education, his ideas can still be applied in modern Russia.

First and foremost, the formation of a citizen should be based on collective representations, which, as Durkheim demonstrated, define the content of individual consciousness and to a greater extent shape society rather than simply reflect it. The conflict between educational ideologies and the methods used to apply theoretical ideas in practice can be resolved if both ideologies and practices align with collective representations. The success of patriotic education programs and related activities, as well as the achievement of goals set by methodologists and technologists, depends on how well the collective representations in society were considered when designing these programs. It is impossible to reform the entire education system or introduce plans for patriotic education without considering the changes in society as a whole, as education, including the education of citizens, is merely a function of broader social processes. Recognizing the complexity of distinguishing collective representations from social constructs, Durkheim suggested practices in his lectures for teachers to pass on past experiences, promote respect for legitimate authority, and share common values. The teacher must follow these practices and is not required to distinguish between collective representations and manifestations of current trends.

Secondly, to form social solidarity, it is important to purposefully engage the shared feelings and ideas that unite people (Lukes 1973: 166-167). It is not enough to perform formal actions whose necessity may be unclear both to those advocating these actions

and, even more so, to the students who are required to perform them. Rituals – whether for Australian Aborigines or modern Russian schoolchildren – must reproduce collective emotions, relying on the existing system of representations. Following Goffman, it is worth noting that Durkheim often uses traditions, customs, or rituals, including school rituals, as examples of social facts, attributing to them the qualities of being compulsory and existing externally to individuals (Goffman 2015: 127).

Thirdly, one of the main goals of citizenship education is that students must learn to relate their identity to that of the group. Thus, from Durkheim's perspective, the focus should not be on revealing the personal qualities of students, but rather on interpreting education as a process through which the natural person becomes social, with the teacher acting as a guide to the group's objectives. This does not mean that each student's individual characteristics are unimportant, but rather that only within a group, in accordance with social and moral norms, can the student express their individual qualities.

Fourthly, the current education system is often shaped by conflicts between different groups and their educational ideals. Instead of focusing on fulfilling the ideals of one specific group, the state should develop practical methods that align with the collective emotions and values of society, as only these can be successfully implemented.

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