

The Necessity of Critical Consciousness in the Democratic state and the Contribution of Education

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Abstract: In this paper we will deal with the relationship between education democracy and critical consciousness. The role of education is twofold, on the one hand it contributes to the consolidation of the democratic state, on the other hand it creates citizens who acquire a critical attitude towards reality. In this sense, education plays an important social role, because it contributes to the creation of the democratic citizen and the support of the democratic state.

Keywords: democracy, education, critical consciousness, citizen

Introduction

Education and democracy are inextricably linked, which means that the citizen is responsible for the government and the education he has. Education performs an important political task in the state, as it contributes to its foundation and educates citizens based on democratic values; because of this parameter, the need for education to be public becomes imperative. Certainly, in the era of globalization the role of education and the type of democracy are being re-examined, considering that the focus should be on the community and not on the individual. The citizen must participate in the social and political processes of the community, but accept society as it is. This parameter also has a pedagogical significance, because it raises the question of what young people should learn in order to meet the demands of a democratic state (Karakatsanis, 2015).

Necessity of Critical Thinking

The purpose of education is defined as instilling the political and moral principles in the citizens of a society so that the society can continue to exist. Possibly, the term we will use is not scientifically proven, but we would say that the role of the school is ultimately coordinating, since "coordinates within the predispositions of each individual the diverse influences of the various social environments in which he enters", giving the school a stabilizing task", (Matsangouras, 2009). The child, when he comes to school, is an unformed character and society, through education, aims at his transformation, developing and redirecting his strengths, in order to acquire the necessary resources that will make him an active citizen (Matsangouras, 2009). People act and is influenced by society as a whole, as Aristotle also pointed out, as he is a political being, and that is why we examine him in relation to society and education (Politics, 1264b 17-26). People being within the political framework act in the public space and operate based on it and not based on individual interest, or at least this should be the case in a healthy democracy, because "when the social character of individual mental actions is denied, it is difficult to find those that unite the individual with those around him" (Matsangouras, 1998).

Education has a future perspective as it prepares students for their future role within political society. But there is a danger lurking here, because this dimension now tends to become the main motivation of the present educational effort. We do not oppose the adequate preparation of young people for the future, but we emphasize the importance of the present, which is necessary to harmoniously intertwine with the future and ensure an interesting experience for the present of students. Schleiermacher (1957) attributed responsibility to adults through a question: by what right do adults sacrifice the child's present on the altar of the future? The philosopher draws attention to the existence of danger in the educational process, which is the threat of rationalizing everything. It is necessary for children to learn to use their logic, but not to "sell the meaning of life in the exanderapodism of rationalization" (Theodoropoulos, 1998).

A key parameter of the educational process is the development of students' ability to approach the world critically that is, young people acquire the skills of analysis, correlation and evaluation of data (Theodoropoulos, 1998). The development of critical thinking contributes to comprehensiveness, the acquisition of valid knowledge and the development of sound reasoning, laying the foundation for the creation of active and autonomous adults.

Critical consciousness is the fundamental condition of democracy and the well-being of citizens. Otherwise, unfortunate phenomena are observed, which degrade the democratic state, as in modern societies, where many of the citizens do not know their rights or give them instrumental value. Unfortunately, in our time, the economy regulates and determines politics, often bringing about consequences in the treatment of citizens, since political decisions are made based on the achievement of a positive economic result, undermining

fundamental democratic values, such as respect for the other person (Nussbaum, 2010). The foundation of a healthy democracy also depends on the citizens themselves. The democratic citizen must be governed by democratic virtues, which are cultivated and in this process the state is responsible. The manifestation of a selfish behavior on the part of some of the citizens and the adoption of the concept that appreciation comes through the accumulation of money leads to indifference to the common interest, as they believe that there is no "interdependence of the respective successes given the fact that the rest of the people pursue their own goals" (Sen, 1999). In modern societies, the following misinterpretation is observed; some people believe that the development of the economy is intertwined with the promotion of democracy, which is not the case either, it is linked to the education of citizens and their participation in political processes or the well-being of all citizens (Nussbaum, 2010).

The above does not mean that the student should not prepare for the challenges of the future society, which Potter (2002) points out in his article, arguing that the student needs to be prepared in order to approach science and technology with more attention due to the gigantic development and the consequences that come with it. The author is not apologetic towards science and technology, but he points out the necessity of developing critical skills in the face of the barrage of new developments. The author believes that the social dimension of education and the structuring of students' democratic behavior should not be neglected, because in this way a sense of identity and mutual interdependence is created (Sen, 1999).

Critical Consciousness, Education and Democracy

The question that arises is how the school educates the responsible and efficient democratic citizen of the future. Modern societies face many challenges and that is why the demands are greater and more complex. Society doesn't just need law-abiding and political-authority-obedient citizens; it needs critically-thinking citizens. The citizen who lacks critical thinking functions only within the established frameworks and cannot deal with situations outside of the established ones, moreover he lacks empathy. Critical thinking is the necessary condition for the development of a democratically oriented citizen, who demonstrates reflection on the universal issues of his time. The school prepares the citizens of the future societies, but in advance we cannot know the world of tomorrow in order to offer the appropriate supplies to the students, for this reason only with the development of critical thinking is it possible to facilitate its work education and teachers, because it ensures the individual's ability to deal with the new and the unknown based on logical processing (Sen, 1999). The creation of citizens with critical consciousness calls for the creation of a school freed from the practices of dependence and submission of the traditional school. Instead, it promotes the concepts of collectivity, equal treatment and self-regulation.

Many educators and philosophers have commented on public education and the values it instills in students. For example, Nietzsche (1988) characterized state education in negative terms, such as "the erebus of state education, a prison of cenology and a prison of the chosen individuals" giving it an ominous dimension. The philosopher continues his criticism by underlining that state education "makes the masses incapable of finding their own way". As negative parameters of state education, Nietzsche notes the immeasurable "intellectual poverty of pedagogical thought", the absence of talents with ingenuity, the practical spirit and beautiful ideas, the absence of a combination of genius and right action, practical spirit and sobriety. His proposal is a break with the present situation and urges teachers not only to be transmitters of knowledge, but to teach young people to do right Nietzsche (1988). Theodoropoulos (1998) comments on Nietzsche's views and observes that: "education is an ontic phenomenon; it does not fall under the necessity of the struggle for the existence of poverty. It is an individual struggle for life, for elevation to a sphere of eternity. Of course, the effort is often a chimera. True education is incompatible with people with needs, greed and selfish purposes. Woe to him who uses it for a living, then he takes his way with light steps and a mocking grimace."

In the global economy, learning and education are of particular social importance because scientific knowledge is a productive force that determines the development of technology and production. We must point out that the economy is exclusively interested in highly skilled intellectual work, because it is the essential parameter for economic innovation, competitiveness and profitability, which leads to economic success (Farrell & Fenwick, 2007). Within this framework, educational institutions adapt to the needs of capitalist society, offering students specific skills in order to "support the qualities of flexibility and adaptability in the workforce" (Hirtt, 2013). Therefore, it becomes evident that education and the work of teachers need to be studied in light of the close connection of education with the system of material production, implemented through neoliberal policies. When the people remain passive, when they do not seek goals, ideals that will lead them to a new social reality, then the ideas of their everyday consciousness enjoy an undisputed mass dominance. In this case, intellectual life is mainly limited to the reproduction of established ideology (Pavlidis, 2003). Lyotard (1993) says that "the explicit or implicit question posed by the vocationally oriented student, by the state or by the

institution of higher education is no longer: is it true? But what is it for? Within the context of the commercialization of knowledge, this last question most often means: can it be sold?"

Regarding the work of teachers, the neoliberal economy causes changes and destabilization of their working conditions, insecurity, competitive evaluation and strict administrative control affecting their professional and personal lives. Political leaders tend to devalue the educational work and treat teachers as inadequate professionals (Hill, 2005). At times public education is blamed by neoliberal rhetoric for high youth unemployment and the inability to connect to the labor market and youth unemployment. This tactic is a deliberate practice of concealing the "inherent causes of unemployment and poverty, as shaped by the very nature of capitalist relations of production" (Jonna & Foster, 2016). In addition, teachers shoulder the responsibility for the educational failure of students or at other times appear as the ones who will shoulder the burden of correcting all distortions (Townsend & Bates, 2007), thus discrediting the teaching profession itself (Jonna & Foster, 2016). Another element that shows the degradation of the educational work is the fact that the teacher does not participate in the discussion on educational issues that directly concern him, such as the purpose of education, the method of teaching, the subject of teaching and the role of the school. The teacher is uninvolved, even though he himself is the recipient of all decisions and the one who will implement them. A characteristic of the capitalist economy, according to Reid (2003) is "the general law of capital accumulation forces capitalists to see how they can reduce the cost of production to increase profits". Applying this concept, the state in public education tries to reduce costs and at the same time, prepare young people with the necessary skills for their participation in the workplace (Reid, 2003). The way to achieve this is to "reduce the labor costs of teachers through realignment of their work or by hiring large numbers of paraprofessionals to support a small number of well-paid core teachers. Another way is to force teachers to do more with the same or fewer resources" (Smyth, et al., 2000). In this way, the teacher acts as a scapegoat, shouldering the responsibilities of a political, economic and social system that serves the interests of the ruling class and marginalizes the citizens. The education system is aimed at the middle class and excludes the extremes, i.e. the excellent students and the weak, with the consequence that they themselves do not find interest in being in the classroom. Therefore, being in direct contact with the student, the teacher will shoulder the responsibilities of their failure. Also, with the blessings of the state itself, the teacher is unprotected in the problems he faces and now his prestige as a professional has been irreparably damaged in the minds of the citizens, who believe that teachers are scientifically inadequate and the professional conditions are ideal. The latter, of course, contrasts with the work stress experienced by teachers and the multiple problems, including the delinquent behavior of their students that they face, especially in large urban centers. The most important thing is that their work, as the years go by, becomes more complex and takes on greater importance due to the breakdown of the family fabric. Teachers are now called upon to make up for the gap in the family, which, if it does not happen, then other parameters intervene in the student's life, such as their inclusion in various groups, violence, etc.. The teacher becomes the recipient of all these sufferings, because he also comes into contact with the ministry, i.e. he implements the government's decisions and with the parents, who usually justify the wrong actions of their students, unable to accept their own omissions in the education of their children.

Critical Consciousness, Education and Liberal Politics

Through education, citizens are created, who will establish a better world, and that is, education is the transformative force that will bring about social change. In modern societies a contradiction is observed on the one hand, there is a significant percentage of literacy and on the other hand, a new form of illiteracy is observed, which is concentrated in the fact that many citizens are unable to think critically, understand and claim their rights or possess in depth their mother tongue.

In ancient Greece, education had a social goal and concerned the well-being of society as a whole, as it prepared citizens for the political process of electing and being elected. On the contrary, in modern capitalist society, knowledge and intellectual creation have been commoditized, which becomes evident both with scientific research and with educational programs (Pavlidis, 2012). The economy now determines the goals of politics and therefore education, with the consequence that educational and research institutions, even state ones, are oriented towards commercialization and the satisfaction of financial benefits. All levels of education are determined by the concept of practical utility, even if it is the theoretical sciences, whose practitioners must demonstrate the usefulness of their research for the collective interest, otherwise their research is not funded or published in scientific journals. In this sense, knowledge is not an end in itself but, as Lyotard (1993) said, is subject to the concept of exchange. In this way, citizens acquire skills in order to serve the neoliberal economy in an optimal way and of course, they themselves successfully participate in the economic process (Pavlidis, 2012). Bowles & Gintis (1976) in their book *Schooling in Capitalist America*, argue that the social relations that are created within the school environment correspond to the relations of the economic environment, which means that education is perceived as a passive reflection of the world of work. In our opinion, this point of view

is relevant to the perspective from which M. Nussbaum approaches modern educational systems, in her book *Not for Profit*. In this specific work, the author formulates the proposal for the necessity of redefining the role of education, because now weight is given to economic growth and at the same time the other aspects of the human condition are neglected. Man needs to be treated as a whole and not in an isolated and fragmented way. The author considers that the situation internationally is hopeless, with reference to the education of the citizen in Primary and Secondary education, because critical thinking, imagination and empathy are not sufficiently evaluated, with the consequence that education does not favor the development of individuality and creativity (Nussbaum, 2010). In addition, social inequalities are not taken into account or evaluated in a specific way, so that all children, on the one hand, experience an interesting educational experience and on the other hand, are prepared to fulfill their role as citizens in a proper way (Nussbaum, 2010). The one-sidedness of education consists in creating competent employees who will serve the needs of the global economy, which is what is at stake for democracy, because under these conditions the disadvantages of this particular state are intensified. The utilitarian approach to education and knowledge leads to the discrediting of the school and the educational process, while at the same time its role as a provider of education is degraded. Unfortunately, the effects of this tactic are seen after some years within the social context, as these students will be the future citizens.

According to Bowles and Gintis (1976), the educational system in capitalist society functions as a mechanism for the reproduction of dominant social relations. Power-coercion relations between teachers and learners within educational institutions reflect the power and subordination relations between workers and capitalists in the sphere of social production. In the same way, Miliband (1984) states that the education system imparts to working-class children values and principles which are considered fundamental and essential for the maintenance of social integrity and objectively foster the acceptance of the capitalist order of things. And Altousser (1983) argues that the educational system is responsible for spreading and enforcing the dominant ideology, which is that of the ruling class. The imposition of the dominant ideology through the educational system is the safest way to instill it in the citizens, because at this age, children, being unformed characters, find fertile ground and becomes their experience. Therefore, as adults, they perceive it as a given reality which, to a large extent, was the exclusive experience, as there is no reference to any other direction during the school years. In this way, the dominant ideology becomes the consciousness of the people. Of course, apart from education, everyday life is an important factor in the formation of human consciousness. Possibly in a society there may be different consciousness's, which "maintain a compromising attitude towards the dominant social-class relations and, therefore, towards the dominant system of social-class stratification" (Pavlidis, 2003), but they are the minority.

Critical consciousness is distinguished from everyday consciousness, i.e. experience, which is usually a distorted depiction of reality. "It is characterized by the existence of stereotyped perceptions and prejudices, by a frivolous and emotional view of things" (Pavlidis, 2003). Man, who has a critical consciousness, is able to distinguish the general and universal links, the causal relationships of things and perceives reality in its entirety (Freire, 1977).

Conclusions

Concluding this study, we would say that there is a need for changes in the existing educational systems, so that students are educated with democratic values and democratic societies are further supported. The provision of essential education works liberatingly and in this direction advocates the development of the critical consciousness of citizens, which is the necessary condition for the development of a democratically oriented citizen with an interest in the social and political issues of his time. A basic feature of the education of modern democracies must be the fight against illiteracy and the cultivation of essential education, which will be based on the humanities, otherwise democracy will experience a constant threat (Tsatsos, 1996).

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