

The Challenges of Modern Democratic Societies and the Role of Education

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Abstract: In this paper we will deal with the challenges faced by modern democratic societies and the role that education plays or should play in order to meet these demands. Modern democracies are faced with many new demands, to which they must adapt. In this regard, education is the essential helper, because it prepares the future, democratic citizen and at the same time is the foundation of the democratic system, given that its principles and values are transmitted, through the educational system, to citizens.

Keywords: education, democracy, society, politics

1. Introduction

In this paper we will deal with the challenges faced by modern democratic societies and the role that education plays or should play in order to meet these demands. Education is an important parameter in the formation of human character and political existence, as it helps him to understand social relations and the world in general, as it frees him from the “ideological myths that dominate and direct the dominant culture” Freire, (2006). The aforementioned is also evident from the purpose that education serves, which is social and dual; education, on the one hand, contributes to the reproduction of society and on the other, it functions liberatingly, developing the critical capacity of the individual and contributing to social change Banks, (2004), Pavlidis, (2015). Education is the most important institution of society, because it contributes to the fulfillment of the dreams and expectations of citizens, at an individual and collective level. As an institution, it is the means for acquiring high social and economic status, power, and wisdom and at the same time virtue and freedom. Education has long been the essential parameter for the formation of a healthy democratic behavior and is clearly the necessary goal of the educational process.

2. The Dialectical Relationship between Democracy and Education

The relationship between education and democracy is dialectical, as the ultimate goal of the educational process in a democratic system is the creation of a democratic citizen and at the same time, education operates on the basis of the principles and values of the democratic system. Education as an institution, in order to function in a correct, fruitful and constructive way, presupposes an understanding of the era in relation to the characteristics of society, its contradictions and the perspective of its development. This means that any changes observed in politics, the economy and moral principles within the political framework affect education. Developments in democracy affect the way in which schools prepare students for their participation as citizens in a democratic society. Also, the way in which schools prepare students for democratic participation affects the democratic system (Reimers, 2023). Jürgen Habermas refers to the model of deliberative democracy, in which there is free interaction between citizens. Citizens engage in dialogue respecting the principles of equal discussion (Habermas, 1998). Participation in democratic processes sets a basic and indispensable condition, knowledge of political matters. This means that people must have political awareness and the actors of this process are, in addition to school, political leadership, because many communication problems between members of society are issues related to political ethics. Understanding these political phenomena usually leads to the transformation of political norms and social values (Birger Sagiv et al., 2022). Furthermore, the creation of political awareness presupposes a national perception and, of course, is achieved through political education. Political education has a future perspective, as it instills attitudes and values, which can lead to political transformation (Nasiwan, et al., 2024).

Dewey, in his work *Democracy and Education*, states that a democratic society must have a unified educational system, which cultivates in individuals an interest in social relations and social change, without, however, creating social disorder. The educator does not accept a strict educational system, because it does not direct the students to discipline. Democracy is the political system, which contributes to the personal development of the individual and the whole. The school helps in the democratic constitution of society, instilling democratic values in students and imbuing them “with the spirit of social service and providing them with the necessary elements for a real self-government, then we will have the surest and best guarantee that a broader society will be created that is harmonious, lovable and truly civilized”. Dewey advocated the overthrow of the previous school, which was based on memorization of school material and on the authoritarian way of

teaching. The "new school" provided a basis for the creation of future citizens who would be governed by social interest. Dewey, in other words, aimed at creating citizens who would use their acquired knowledge for the benefit of society itself (Dewey, 1926).

2.1 The challenges of modern democratic societies

Modern democracies are faced with many challenges, contradictions and objections, which often concern the very core of their creation. A basic concern is raised by K. Castoriadis, who uses the concept of the "riddle of politics" and asks how "within a heteronomous society and a heteronomous education we can create autonomous institutions and the infrastructure of a democratic education" (Castoriadis, 1999). "What applies to heteronomous societies also applies to individuals. The meaning of their lives is given, it is arranged in advance and in this way it is also guaranteed. No discussion is possible about institutions. Nor is it possible to discuss the doubt about what is worthy and what is not worthy, about what is good and what is bad, about what I should do and what I should not do. In this way, within a heteronomous or traditional society, the enclosure of meaning, and of power or value, implies that not only the political question or the philosophical question is closed in advance, but even that the aesthetic question or the moral problem is also closed in advance" (Castoriadis, 2000). In our opinion, this particular perception is partly absolute, because not all societies are the same, but they differ in the way of governance, which is also reflected in education. Not all democratic societies have the same purpose in terms of the kind of citizens they aim to create, through education, because while some aim to create passive beings, others seek to cultivate the judgment of their citizens (Kiss & Euben, 2010). This is also evident from the observations of political theorists of education, who accept that education has as its central goal the creation of a democratic citizen, but disagree regarding the type of virtues that should govern it.

Aristotle has linked the type of education to the way of governing the city (Aristotle, *Politics*, III. 4, 1276 b 20-35), however, modern thinkers argue on the subject. For example, Callan (2004) argues that the citizen should be a "liberal patriot". M. Nussbaum (1998) states that the purpose of education should be to create citizens of the world. G. Vaughan underlines that the views of political thinkers on education have been torn between the production of autonomous individuals and the creation of democratic citizens. We observe that thinkers, whether inspired by liberal concepts or not, have a common component, as they collectively reject the proposition that education should serve only or primarily economic purposes.

Democracy is challenged when social, economic and political inequality prevails, since the essential goal of democracy is to maintain equality between people; therefore, its legitimacy is challenged by continued inequality. A characteristic example of inequality is the participation of some citizens in the political process, due to their privileges deriving from their social and economic position, since democracy is based on the principle of coexistence and the recognition of rights for all citizens. The democratic regime also deteriorates due to political intolerance "combined with the abuse of power by elected officials who seek to undermine the political rights of their opponents, it is the very definition of authoritarianism" (Reimers, 2023). A consequence of "political intolerance is political polarization and the adoption of political identities at ideological extremes that reduce the possibility of finding common ground with people with different political views" (Reimers, 2023). The prevalence of extreme political views undermines democracy, because people who are influenced by different political perceptions are sidelined and, in addition, political compromise is impossible.

In our time, the existence of many centers of conflict between states is observed, which has as a consequence the increase of foreign influence in the internal political affairs of states, even using technology and social media and spreading false news. This tactic incites and exacerbates political passions within society and leads to revolutionary conflicts. Of course, interventions are not limited to propaganda, but are funded by political campaigns and incite distrust in the government and democratic institutions, interfering in the electoral process and bribing elected officials (Reimers, 2023). The undermining of democracy continues, as educational institutions reduce their ability to prepare future citizens of a democratic society. In this case, a conflict arises between education and democracy, when, for example, the government does not fund education, but the funds are squandered to satisfy the same benefits of political officials. Educating students in democratic values and principles can contribute to the creation of democratically resilient citizens with critical thinking and dialectical capacity against manipulation and demagoguery. Institutions should not be corrupted, so that citizens do not lose their trust in them, as it is observed that the increase in the educational level of citizens implies less tolerance for corruption issues (Reimers, 2023). Education also contributes to the fight against corruption, because it nurtures citizens who know how democratic governance works and requires those in power to be transparent in the management of the commons. Democratic education promotes respect for human rights and the rule of law, thus strengthening the functioning of democratic institutions. When people are tolerant and respect others, they are less likely to engage in corrupt practices (Reimers, 2023).

In modern societies, globalization prevails in the economy, politics and art, which also has implications for education (Jameson, 1999). Knowledge is now perceived as a productive force, which aims to maximize

economic benefit, which leads to a dead end, because education is unable to achieve its purpose, which is social emancipation (Lyotard, 1993). This phenomenon is observed at all levels of education, as “knowledge has acquired an instrumental dimension, serving the needs of the capitalist market” (Pavlidis, 2007). The way in which material life is produced determines the political, intellectual and conscious life of citizens, that is, their social existence (Craib, 2012). Although we would expect the opposite to happen, that is, the consciousness of people determines their existence. K. Niarchos points out that: “the true essence of the human being is revealed through self-consciousness and self-determination of the will. The historical mission of the “proletariat” is to activate any abilities of citizens for individual and social freedom, which is stifled within the capitalist system of governance of a country” (Niarchos, 2002).

The issue of the economy and its relationship with politics and education had also concerned ancient Greek philosophers, such as Aristotle, who in his work *Eudemian Ethics* states that man is a political, social and economic being, understanding the economy as an essential property of his political and social nature: “For man is not only a political but also an economic being ... but a social being to whom he is naturally related” (Aristotle, *Eudemian Ethics*, H 10, 1242 a 22-27). The economy is determined by politics, which is consistent with law, justice, and equity, otherwise the creation of the economy, but also of society, is impossible (Spentes, 1999). The structure, that is, economic relations, is based on the principles of the regime, aims to improve human life and is subordinate to the common goal, namely the achievement of a happy life (Dimitrakopoulou, 2021).

Rawls recognizes that the political decisions of one generation at the economic level also bind the following ones. This specific proposal has a moral dimension and is related to the perception of justice and the institutions that govern society. Extending Rawls's thought, we would say that any incorrect decisions, not only at the economic level, but also at the political, social, etc. level, go against the interests of future generations and make evident the moral decay of politicians - but also of the citizens of this particular society. The settlement of the economic issue and the way in which the state's money is managed have an impact on all areas of human activity, such as culture and education, which means that they either transform or degrade them. Of course, the author does not defend extreme situations from the point of view of current citizens living with selflessness and self-sacrifice, taking care of the well-being of future generations. Extremes must be avoided, because they are not consistent with justice. As the author characteristically states, generations develop over time and real economic benefits flow in only one direction. What citizens have a duty to ensure for future generations is not a trust of money, but a system of justice, which will govern the lives of citizens and will lay a solid foundation for the political life of the state (Rawls, 2010).

According to A. Gramsci, ideology contributes to the maintenance and reproduction of the system of class domination. In this sense, “the hegemony of a class within society is linked to the ability to maintain, through ideology, the cohesion of a coalition of contradictory socio-political forces” (Pavlidis, 2003). Ideology ensures the unity of social transformation. Therefore, if the dominant ideology expresses and reproduces the dominant social system, then the relationship between education and social change depends largely on the relationship between education and the dominant ideology. S. Bowles and H. Gintis argue that the educational system in capitalist society functions as a mechanism for reproducing the dominant social relations. In fact, the power-coercion relations between teachers and students during the educational process reflect the power-subordination relations between workers and capitalists in the sphere of social production (Bowles & Gintis, 1976). It is possible that 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 socio-class stratification” (Pavlidis, 2003), but they constitute the minority.

Everyday consciousness, however, is not a substantial knowledge of reality, but fragmentary and distorted, due to the existence of stereotypical perceptions and the emotional approach to things (Pavlidis, 2003). In this sense, everyday consciousness is found in what Plato called *doxa*, that is, opinion as opposed to knowledge, which requires special intellectual effort, critical disposition and reflection. Everyday consciousness is ultimately the personal experience that a person acquires in his daily practical activity and the experience that is transmitted to him by other people. The educated person does not accept reality uncritically, because he has critical reflective thinking. As A. Gramsci notes, “common sense is not something rigid and static, but is constantly mutating, enriched with scientific ideas and philosophical views that have entered everyday life” (Gramsci, 1971). On the contrary, people who perceive the world in the context of everyday consciousness are unable to distinguish general and universal links, as well as their interactions. In addition, they cannot grasp the totality of various situations and processes, which means that people perceive only parts of their situation “which they do not see as interacting components of the whole, then they cannot truly know this reality” (Freire, 1977). These people acquire a limited perspective of reality. Which is limited to ensuring their personal interests, since the common sense they possess is locked in serving the everyday and empirically tested reactions and attitudes of people. Man, identifying with his biotic activity, treats the world fatalistically: “consciousness at

this level is extremely fatalistic and thus people remain inactive. We can do nothing” (Freire, 1977). This attitude results in the inalienable subordination of man to the dominant social relations (Pavlidis, 2003). At this point, the responsibility of citizens becomes evident, because their passivity and the absence of social purpose in their lives lead to massification and the acceptance of the established ideology (Pavlidis, 2003). Undoubtedly, the role of education is essential in the formation of human character and political existence, as it helps him to understand social relations and the world in general, freeing man from the “removal of ideological myths that dominate and direct the dominant culture” (Freire, 2006).

For the current situation in the field of education, the example of Lyotard is striking, who states that “the explicit or implicit question posed by the professionally 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?” (Lyotard, 1993).

Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon seek the intervention of the political element in economic life, in order to ensure the imposition of rational order. This perception is consistent with the logic of later thinkers and politicians, who advocate that politics must serve the economy, without interference and limits. For example, Adam Smith believed that the wealthy state is at the same time civilized, as it has assimilated the capitalist system, which leads to progress. Therefore, hoarding is considered the supreme value (Smith, 1999). In the same way, Hegel defends the dominance of the logic of the market, which also determines the political existence of man, as he says that he who does not have individual property cannot be free (Hegel, 1991). The fundamental difference in the way wealth is perceived between the ancient Greeks and the later ones lies in the fact that for the former, wealth is the means to achieve a happy life, while for the latter it determines their life. For this reason, the transformation of institutions is sought, so that economic interests are served in the best possible way; at the same time, politics is committed to facilitating the smooth functioning of the economic field (Dimitrakopoulou, 2021).

From the above, we understand that the educational work faces difficulties and challenges. The work of the teacher is thorny, especially in modern, capitalist societies, due to the fragility of some democracies. Many teachers experience futility in every effort they make to change political and social conditions, which means that their choices are given; they must either compromise or try in vain. Their situation refers to Socrates, who was exterminated by the fragility of the democracy of his time (Plato, *Apology*, 36 b). Socrates' fate was predetermined, due to the morbidity of the democratic regime. In a corrupt regime, such as the democracy of his time, one had to either compromise and suffer his moral death or persist in his views and be physically exterminated (Plato, *Apology*, 36 b). Teachers, although they are not the exclusive bearers of the transmission of knowledge and the formation of the moral education of students, are obliged to reflect on the content and method of their teaching and to contribute to the formation of the aims and objectives of education (Aronowitz & Giroux, 1986). It is appropriate, that is, to have critical thinking and to think according to sound reason, in order to adequately respond to their work. Therefore, teachers, in addition to their scientific validity, need to be aware of the role they play. However, many of them are content with adopting a conformist lifestyle, rejecting critical evaluation of their teaching.

3. Democracy as a way of behaving

The democratic states of the Western world differ in the way they operate, but they accept certain common fundamental principles in terms of their structure, such as the equality of all citizens, the guarantee of basic human rights and the way political decisions are made. Acceptance of these ideas presupposes the existence of democratic citizens, who accept the principles of the specific regime, act on them and know the principles on which it operates (Alvén, 2017).

The above observation led Dewey in his work *The Public and Its Problems* (1927) to formulate the proposition that democracy is an “invitation to rebellion and revolution”. This view is also accepted by P. Kovacs in his study “Education for Democracy: It Is Not an Issue of Dare; It Is an Issue of Can” (2009). Attempting to comment on the proposition, he says that: “It is important that democracy is not static. As individuals engage, reflect on, and critique the worlds they inhabit, democracy itself evolves. And he quotes Z. Bauman (2001) commentary: “democracy is expressed in a continuous and unceasing critique of institutions; democracy is an anarchic, disruptive element within the political system: essentially, a force for dissent and change. One can best recognize a democratic society by its constant complaints that it is not democratic enough.” Also, K. Castoriadis (2000) echoes the aforementioned notion and observes that democracy is the only creation of human history “that enables a given society to question itself.” We share the above perception and would add that the issue of democracy does not only concern the ruling class but all citizens, because they must ensure that politicians do not exploit the citizens' votes and do not act in an arbitrary manner. Citizens must be controlling towards their governments and not allow them to manage power in an arrogant manner. The key element is consistency, as the elected government must implement what they made in the pre-election period as

their commitments to the people in order to be elected; otherwise we are talking about common liars and deceivers of the public conscience. In this way, politicians behaving in a hypocritical manner leads to the erosion of the public conscience, primarily due to the educational role they play. The educational system is necessary to prepare students for the future challenges and problems of the society in which they will live. At the same time, students must be taught that all issues are resolved through dialogue and not violence. This is possible if the students' consciousness is developed and they come into contact with the problems of societies, such as social inequalities, the gap between rich and poor and the differences between underdeveloped and developed countries. Children with a developed consciousness have the ability to perceive the changes that occur in social events and people's behavior, to structure their identity, to assimilate knowledge and to acquire emotional connection with other citizens. The development of consciousness pushes the individual to the complexity of life, which is in a constant transformation. Consciousness becomes evident from the individual's behavior and choices. This is precisely what education and educators should do, namely to instill political consciousness in citizens and develop their critical thinking. J. Dewey rightly does not limit democracy to political governance, but gives it a broader meaning by saying that it is "the way of social life of a jointly transmitted experience" (2017). Citizens, regardless of economic and social background, must have access to an education that is based on democratic values: "the highest duty of a democratic state is to provide all its citizens without exception with a general education that is fully representative of the fundamental social requirements and ideals of democracy" (Dewey, 1982). Democracy, that is, is a way of behaving, which radiates in the social life of citizens, who act on the basis of democratic principles and values (Dewey, 2017).

According to Rousseau, citizenship requires an education, which will direct the development of the society in which man lives. Rousseau made the aforementioned proposal clear by reprimanding: "those cosmopolitans who spend a lot of time in their books to discover duties, are not worth fulfilling around them", but "the main thing is to be good to the people with whom one lives" (Rousseau, 1979). Love at a distance is less necessary.

3.1 Democracy and Artificial Intelligence

In recent years, there has been a great deal of discussion about artificial intelligence and the impact it can have on democracy and education. If we wanted to define the concept, we would say that artificial intelligence is "the creations of smart – intelligent systems, which can and do automatically perform tasks that would normally be performed by humans" (Weforum, 2015). The application of artificial intelligence in education can be a useful tool for students and teachers. This means that they can draw on a wealth of information, create the knowledge that interests them in the time that they determine themselves and in this way solve learning problems. The application of artificial intelligence in education is carried out in various ways and individually, that is, it follows the capabilities of each student. Special machine learning algorithms analyze the student's data and train them according to their needs and cognitive level. The integral is the help of artificial intelligence in special education, because it contributes to the social integration of students and responds to their abilities. In addition to the cognitive domain, artificial intelligence develops within the educational process and skills, such as collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, decision-making and digital skills. In addition, artificial intelligence helps teachers in the evaluation and grading of students, saving time, as there is software that can evaluate regular text in real time (Gilens, 2001).

The inherent risk lies in the fact that teachers and students become recipients of a large volume of information, which makes it difficult to process it and adopt the appropriate ones. A healthy democracy presupposes that citizens have the ability to be correctly and objectively informed about the actions of politicians. The media is biased and influences the election outcome, since citizens are informed by it. The risk is intensified by artificial intelligence, resulting in a threat to electoral integrity (Przeworski, et al., 1999). For example, the use of Chat GPT makes each user equivalent to a natural speaker, who may use the technology to create spam websites and flood them with lies. Through artificial intelligence, it is possible to produce propaganda without making it obvious that it is not a human creation, causing disinformation in a society and making it more effective in influencing the election outcome, (Goldstein et al., 2020) as it distorts "the way voters perceive the actions and performance of elected officials to such an extent that elections cease to provide a real accountability mechanism, since the assumption about what people vote for is itself questionable" (Little, 2020). The development of artificial intelligence can allow the production of disinformation aimed at specific social groups (Kreps, 2022). Propaganda spreads further when the electorate is polarized, because then political views are entrenched and there is no room for political persuasion to prevail (Donovan et al., 2020) In addition to the prevalence of propaganda, another risk is the lack of trust in the media, which "is already low, and the proliferation of tools that can create inauthentic content will further erode this trust. This, in turn, could further undermine the dangerously low levels of trust in government. Social trust is essential glue that holds democratic societies together. It fuels civic and political participation, strengthens trust in political institutions, and

promotes respect for democratic values, an important bulwark against democratic decline and authoritarianism.” Trust goes both ways; politicians want to know that voters’ messages reflect their wishes and are not the result of manipulation to promote a particular point of view. For the electorate, trust is the motivator for engagement and participation in public affairs and for demonstrating democratic participation. Unfortunately, trust in the media and trust in government are intertwined, and this trust could easily be eroded by false content from artificial intelligence, undermining trust in the media, as well as in government.

The information that is channeled on the Internet is often not controlled by citizens, because they themselves accept any opinion as long as it fits their political perceptions. In addition, there are citizens who are led to political nihilism instead of healthy skepticism, because they consider that everything mentioned on the Internet is false, prefabricated and created by evil, which means that everything is questioned. Citizens must trust the information agents and at the same time verify the information and news that they follow or read in the media. All areas of human life can benefit from artificial intelligence, despite the political risks it entails, which can be averted or reduced, provided that the necessary safeguards are in place. Therefore, the cooperation of political officials and stakeholders is necessary to ensure that artificial intelligence operates in accordance with ethical and value-based norms.

4. Conclusion

From the above, we understand that the work of education and the teacher has become complex and in particular the role of the teacher is being redefined. Therefore, the existence of a critical education is necessary and as De Lissovoy (2010b) points out: “not only teaching methods or approaches to the curriculum are being questioned, but also the most basic senses of who the teacher is”. This change, as P. Kovacs argues, is not a matter of boldness, but a matter of will. The development of citizens who have the disposition and ability to question society contributes to the consolidation of the healthy form of democratic society, because there are citizens who control political power, so that it does not manage power in an arrogant way.

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