Original Paper

The Economic Dimension of Education, Educational Inequalities and Their Role in Shaping the Democratic Citizen

Anastasia Dimitrakopoulou[1]

[1] Department of Pedagogy, Hellenic Open University, Patra, Greece

Abstract

In this paper we will deal with the inequalities in the field of education and the way they affect the democratic society. This is a very important issue, especially in our time, because the problem is becoming more intense due to the accelerated economic competition, globalization and the changes taking place in the social fabric of the state's due to the migration of large parts of the population worldwide. In modern Democracy (Agamben, 2005) there is a strong criticism, which basically focuses on the fact that the modern state of Representative Democracy does not realize the goals set by the revolutions of the 19th century and his proclamations of equality and liberty. In today's societies, education is an important parameter in the formation of the citizen, who will then play an active role in the creation of a democratic society, which will be governed by democratic principles and values. Although all citizens and stakeholders recognize the requirement for a democratic education, its realization remains a question. Within this context, the question arises whether and under what conditions today's students can be the emancipated and critical citizens of the future society.

1. Introduction

Looking back at ancient Greek thought, we find that Aristotle dealt with the issue of education, just like, of course, his teacher, Plato. Stagiritis believes that politics, ethics and education are inextricably linked. He perceives man as a political and social being, which is why he also says that education is part of politics. The educated person becomes a good citizen, who will achieve the happy life on a personal and collective level (Aristotle, Politics, 1337b, pp. 34-35). Education, according to the philosopher, must be public, because it strengthens the citizen's bond with the city by passing on the values of the culture of the given moment to the students (Aristotle, Politics, H1, 1337a, pp. 21-26). Education, that is, is an evolving process, which adapts to the current political and social developments and is connected to the city's politics (Dimitrakopoulou, 2012). For example, the education of the citizens of a democratic state must be consistent with the principles of democracy, so that their lives as citizens are proportionate to the principles of the state and the spirit of the laws (Aristotle, Politics, 1337a, pp. 27-29, 1337a, p. 22).

We must point out that Aristotle rejects as the purpose of education the provision of technical and professional knowledge to manual workers, because such an education is illiberal and it is not appropriate for citizens to submit to purposes alien to themselves, because work destroys them physically and mentally (Aristotle, Politics, 1337b, 1338a). The citizen, according to Stagiritis, acts for the collective good and the happiness of the city, without prioritizing his personal well-being, which leads H. Marcuse (1985, p. 85) to observe that: "knowing to see the world humanly means to know how to see this reality with the eyes of your fellow man, with the eyes of all other people, from the point of view of their general, collective needs". Aristotle's views have influenced the younger and modern intellect, at least, as evidenced by the perceptions of the thinkers. The common point of all the references is the fact that the purpose of education is the preparation of citizens for participation in the democratic state, because the way in which the educated person perceives the world differs from that of the uneducated, as the latter acts as arbitrary individuality, while the former as universal, moral and free subjectivity.

2. Identify the Problem

In our time, however, the purpose of education is mainly to promote economic purposes and at the same time, strong contrasts are observed, as education is directed to the middle and upper social class without taking into account the culture and needs of the lower class.

Our question is the following: is the access of all citizens to education sufficient to lead to the halting of the ever-widening gap among social classes or are other conditions required? Eisenberg (2006, p. 9) adds an important dimension to the issue under discussion by saying that the access of all citizens to education or any other public good is not enough to ensure that all people are treated fairly, but simply "the system does its best to ensure social justice". We would, of course, speak of social justice, as long as cultural differences were recognized in the school or university space (Vincent, 2003). Educational inequality has a broad field of reference, which includes diversity and multiculturalism, which means that socially just education recognizes cultural differences as valuable (Kazazi, 2010). Therefore, we understand that universal access to education goes against the imposition of the standards of a particular culture, it recommends the recognition of a range of cultural meanings and at the same time, it perceives as an element of inequality and marginalization the imposition of a given culture. Socially just education effectively addresses the problems that concern a society, such as exploitation, marginalization and the practices of cultural imperialism. In addition, it seeks to overcome inequalities related to social origin, gender, national origin, sexual preferences, disability, etc. However, only the above is not enough, but socially just education must strengthen the abilities of individuals, "so that each individual can become and do in ways that are meaningful to his own critical self-evaluation" (Sen, 1979, p. 4).

3. Social and Educational Exclusion

Education is an active activity, which creates social and political reality and, at the same time, is created by it. Education offers the ideal of a diverse society and strives to achieve it through students. However, within the educational context, as we have already mentioned, social and educational inequalities are observed, which lead a section of students to educational fixation and subsequently to social exclusion. The question that concerns us is whether, after all, education is not only a derivative but also a producer of inequalities, which would mean that truly equal education is only possible in an equal society.

The concept of social exclusion initially appeared in France in the 1960s and had the purpose of describing the deviation displayed by the socially dominant class from those who remained marginalized in the economic field and in earnings (Papadopoulou, 2002). This concept attracted objections because it was considered that social exclusion includes a wide range of goods and is not confined to the existence of material goods, but is related to socio-political rights and to the absorption of public wealth, to which not all social groups in the society have access same degree (Tsiakalos,

1998). Social exclusion, in other words, consists in "preventing the absorption of social and public goods ... the lack of which usually leads to economic poverty and marginalization" (Tsiakalos, 1998, p. 184). All citizens of a democratic society must have access to basic goods such as education, participation in social and political life, health care, employment and a decent living. Social exclusion is a consequence of social, political and economic data (Venieris, 2006) and it is a continuous process, which perpetuates the inequality of citizens in the field regarding social participation and the possibility of social integration. In this sense, individuals are unable to exercise their rights, lack self-confidence and believe that they are incapable of completing their obligations without the help of other persons (Kautantzoglou, 2006), with the consequence that social pathology phenomena appear, such as isolation, deviant behavior, social exclusion, stigma, poverty, marginalization, man becoming an indifferent being for the collective good, individualistic and selfish, who does not possess knowledge in depth but superficially (Estivill, 2003).

In the 1970s, the study of the relationship between education and social inequalities began. Cultural heritage has been found to play an important role in school success and, of course, in the ability to access higher education. Through the educational system, the cultural inequalities of the social classes are perpetuated, which means that some students are favored by the educational process, while some others are led to educational fixation (Bourdieu & Parsons, 2014). At the same time, the perception was expressed that the school does not understand the social factors that lead a person to a lower position in the social stratification and the view is adopted that "poverty and inequality ... are consequences of individual choice or personal inadequacy and not a natural consequence of our economic institutions" (Boweles & Gintis, 1976, p. 26). This practice results in students with high scores being perceived as capable, while the rest are seen as less capable. In this way, the responsibility is transferred to individuals for the social, economic and educational situation in which they have fallen, which serves the ruling class, as through education the hegemony of the ruling class is imposed, so as to maintain state power (Sarup, 2006). Through the educational system, students are indoctrinated and nurtured in the ideology appropriate to the role they will fulfill as adult citizens. However, the transmission of the dominant ideology through the educational process cannot be accepted, as it is: "a symbolic violence, understood as the imposition, on behalf of an arbitrary power, of a political arbitrariness" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, p. 19).

The aforementioned views, in our opinion, are timely, due to the challenges faced by modern societies, which change the lives of their citizens in a decisive way. Giddens (1993) emphasizes that in traditional societies life has a moral character, associated with morals, customs and religion. On the contrary, in modern society the characteristics of the traditional era are missing, which makes the life of modern people monotonous. As a consequence, this fact brings about the transformation of the moral values of the citizens; modern societies are formed on the basis of individuality and at the same time, interest in the collective good is limited. This practice leads to the isolation of the individual and, therefore, to the

46

development of sharp contrasts within the social context, leading citizens to passivity and political apathy. Crouch (2006) observes that the post-democracy of contemporary post-modern societies defines the concept of citizen in a different way, setting new parameters. These parameters are the intense movement of populations, whether they are refugees or immigrants, the globalization of the economy, changes in the law of Western countries and other elements, which shape the concept of the modern citizen, but also of the democratic state. The modern citizen experiences many problems in his daily life, such as unemployment, the reduction or even the abolition of fundamental rights, the forced migration of young people and in general there are changes that overturn the most basic aspects of human life, the economy, politics, the state, the family.

In particular, in the area of education, the dominance of the ruling class is perpetuated and competition between social classes is promoted, which serves the necessity of adapting future citizens, i.e., today's students, to the prevailing social, political and economic situation. In support of the aforementioned proposal, we will mention the opinion of H. Matsangoura, who claims that even the group forms of teaching, carried out during the educational process, do not aim at the development of solidarity within the social context, but at the development of the skills of cooperation, which "the modern socio-economic conditions require" (Matsangouras, 2003, p. 28). Students as citizens, that is, they will serve the needs of the globalized society and the prevailing economic situation, accepting the situation in a passive way.

4. Education, Democracy and Economy

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 related to the perspective from which M. Nussbaum approaches modern educational systems, in her book *Not for Profit*. In this particular paper, the author formulates the proposal for the necessity of redefining the role of education, because now emphasis 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 result that education does not favor the development of individuality and creativity (Nussbaum, 2013). 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, 2013). The one-sidedness of education consists in the creation of competent employees who will serve the needs of the global economy, which is the stake for democracy, because under these conditions the disadvantages of this

particular state are intensified.

The question that arises is whether the existing situation in the field of education could be overturned. First of all, the necessity of changes in the existing educational systems is presented, in order to further support democratic societies and to educate the citizen with the corresponding principles and values of the democratic state (Nussbaum, 2013). Secondly, it is recognized that education is a "moral and political act", because it determines individual and social autonomy, as well as the responsibilities of the citizen. This means that all citizens must participate in political, economic and social goods, as well as create citizens who are emancipated and do not simply serve the interests of the upper class. Only in this way, society will be led to justice and the safeguarding of citizens' rights (Petrou, 2010).

Education is the greatest political act and therefore must be the concern of politicians and organized society. The departure from the study of humanitarian objects led to the disorientation of citizens from the purpose of the city, which consists in the prevalence of humanitarian values. Humanistic education has been replaced by professional education, which has a difficult effect on the moral and intellectual development of young people. The current situation can be reversed, as long as the reduction in the teaching of theoretical studies stops, because as Plato argued: «πᾶσά τε ἐπιστήμη χωριζομένη δικαιοσύνης καὶ τῆς ἄλλης ἀρετῆς πανουργία, οὐ σοφία φαίνεται» (Plato, Menexenus, 347a). Societies need citizens who are virtuous, free, have critical thinking and responsibility.

5. Conclusion

Education and democracy are inextricably linked and the breaking of this relationship belongs exclusively to man. For this reason, in recent years, a great debate has begun regarding the political knowledge and learning offered at the levels of education and, in particular, the political and social role, which has been shouldered by the higher education level. Education should be democratic and public, serving the democratic state. Therefore, it must involve the student in activities aimed at cultivating political competence and a sense of community, motivate them to participate voluntarily and promote the acceptance of the other, equality and loyalty. However, citizens should not attribute responsibility only to factors other than themselves, because everyone is jointly responsible for the situation. As Papanoutsos (1984, p. 98) rightly underlines: "man is an imperfect being, moving in an imperfect world. Neither, we ourselves nor the society around us as a psychological, economic, political, etc. regime are shaped, as our mind, feeling, desire would like them to be. In this world, which does not obey our claims, which is not subject to our control, we will live and write our small or large history. Of necessity, not as we wish but as we can, to attempt, then, the impossible is at least futile. Responsibilities will only be asked of us, if we do not exhaust all the leeway that has been given to us, to remain clean in soul and hands. But we will be held accountable if we remain inactive because of fear. The paths of good and evil cross. We must choose the best from the worst, the choice of which will judge our moral quality".

References

Agamben, G. (2005). Homo sacer. In *Sovereign power and naked life* (P. Tsiamouras, Trans.). Athens: Scripta.

Badiou, A. (2005). *Metapolitics* (J. Barker, Trans.). London, N.Y.: Verso.

Bourdieu, P., & Passeron, J.-C. (2014). *Reproduction, Evidence for a Theory of the Educational System* (G. Karabelas, Trans.). Athens: Alexandria.

Bowles, S., & Gintis, H. (1976). *Schooling in Capitalist America*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Crouch, C. (2006). *Post-democracy* (A. Kiupkiolis, Trans.). Athens: Pending.

Dimitrakopoulou, A. (2012). *Aristotle's Teaching on Education*. Athens: Ennoia.

Eisenberg, N. (2006). Prosocial Behavior. In G. G. Bear, & K. M. Minke (Eds.), *Children's needs III: Development, prevention, and intervention* (pp. 313-324).

Estivill, J. (2003). Concepts and Strategies for Combating Social Exclusion: An Overview. *Journal of Social Policy*, *35*, 521-523. Portugal International Labor Office. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279406250037

Giddens, A. (1993). *Introduction to Sociology* (D. Trianataphyllopoulou, Trans.). Athens: Odysseus.

Karakatsani, D. (2004). *Education and political education. Knowledge, values, practices*. Athens: Metaichmio.

Karakatsani, D. (2008). The Role of the Educator in the context of Social and Political Education. Professionalism, self-development and teaching strategies. In S. Balias (Ed.), *Active Citizen and Education*. Athens: Papazisi.

Kavtantzoglou, I. (2006). *Social Exclusion: Outside, inside, and under*. Athens: Savvalas.

Kazazi, M. (2000). *Educational Sociology*. Athens: Ellinas.

Marcuse, H. (1985). *Denials* (Z. Sarikas, Trans.) Athens: Ypsilon.

Matsangouras, H. (2008). *Collaborative Teaching and Learning*. Athens: Grigoris.

Papanoutsos, E. (1984). *Practical Philosophy*. Athens: Dodoni.

Petrou, A. (2010). Education, Education, Ethics of Emancipation. In M. Sakellariou, & A. P. Zebylas (Eds.), *Ethics and Education* (pp. 112-152). Athens: Critique.

Satup, M. (2006). *Marxism and Education* (F. Kokavesis, Trans.). Athens: Epicenter.

Sen, A. (1979). Equality of What? In Mc Murrin (Ed.), *Tanner Lectures on Human Values* (pp. 197-220). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Tsiakalos, G. (1998). Social Exclusion Definitions, Context and Meaning. In K. Kasimati (Ed.), *Social Exclusion: The Greek Experience* (pp. 39-65).

Venieris, D. (2013). *European Social Policy and Social Rights the End of Anthems*. Athens: Place.

Vincent, C. (2003). *Social Justice, Education and Identity*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203464939