Education seen from above vs. education seen from below

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Abstract

Studies show that in time education was treated/approached by the great thinkers and educators of the world, by researchers and teachers from two fundamental perspectives: one from above and one from below. Each approach captures certain view points but fails to capture others. Therefore in order to have a more complex image on education it is necessary for those involved in education to give each perspective its deserved weight. This way, we can have a more comprehensive look of the educational phenomenon.

1. Introduction

During its practice and reflections from the side, education was approached from different angles. We can even be impressed by the way the great thinkers and educators of the world have understood to treat it. (Cucoş, 2001).

At a closer look, we can however realize that education was and still is viewed essentially from only two fundamental perspectives: from above and from below. According to it, those involved in the educational process act, interact, make decisions, valorise attitudes and behaviours, guide, choose methods or search for solutions.

2. Education as seen from above

To look at education from above means to allow certain distance; be it greater or smaller, it is nevertheless a distance.

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Then, it means to regard it somewhat with exigency; greater or smaller but nonetheless exigency.

The one regarding from above considers education should know certain strictness from those who know what kind of strictness is necessary and some rules from those who know what rules to impose. (Naouri, 2010; Păun, Potolea (coord.), 2002).

When we regard education form above we are detached by its convulsions, tensions and imprecision. The pupil/disciple must do or not do certain things, have or not have certain attitude and behaviour according to what the educator has determined. This one – the disciple – must fall within certain requirements, norms, standards his teacher believes in (and within which he himself was probably raised).

When we look from above we pretend to be connoisseurs and therefore we have the tendency to impose knowledge, abilities and competences on the student for his own good and of the society he lives in. We want the disciple’s soul and mind to enrich, to expand with what we, educators, consider to be valuable and beautiful in this world (according to our knowledge and wisdom).

To regard education from above means to assume a position of authority, of compliance with the rule, interdictions and permissions imposed upon them by the authoritative figure (be this authority a formal-institutional or informal-affective one).

Thus, education appears to be rather a coercive, imperative and normative action. Equipped with this approach teachers resort to punitive or persuasive measures and need a feed-back of their efficiency, according to which they continue to practice them or they try to change with more effective ones.

In education, thoughts, attitudes, behaviours, reactions and relationships cannot be left to chance. They must be oriented, some encouraged, some discouraged; anyway, they have to be sanctioned one way or another. In short, he who regards education from above offers organizing solutions and paths for the formative action. To him, there is no education without rules and regulations. His major centre of interest and therefore his main preoccupation are the judgements, assessments, requirements, criteria, etc.

When he regards education from above, the teacher views himself and acts like a finished product. He perceives himself as accomplished. Now he can make requests, he can regulate, he can impose his vision, conclusions and point of view. He has stability and self assurance. He knows what he does, what he says, what he requests. He views himself as a benchmark, a unit of measure. And even if he still has some (passing) doubts, they are secondary, unimportant. In short, he knows what he is capable of doing, knows what he wants, what he has to do. He is like a rock: immovable, strong, everlasting.

It is the same with education. Seen from above its components and joints are already accomplished, ossified. We have them as we want them, without being aware of the prior or ongoing struggles and confrontations. Now we deal with a landscape dominated by calm. Education is “bridled”, it represents a known territory that only needs to be administered and coordinated. Disciples simply follow what they are told to follow, do what they are told to do. They are at teacher’s command, on his safe hands (Cucoș, 2008).

As seen from above education does not have any problems. They are either solved or they do not exist. Everything is right and it simply needs to be systematized, guided and ruled. Education is confined within rules, criteria and standards. From our position we, the teachers, believe that we do what needs to be done. We level, arrange, align, accept or reject. That is all that can happen.

3. Education as seen from below

To look from below is to regard education in its privacy. It is seen with its tensions and its dilemmas, convulsions and uncertainties.

Now, it is seen in its state of fermentation, with its deficiencies, when facts, circumstances and things collide, with its moments of silence and revolt, consternation and victory. We are faced now with education in the whirlwind of its hesitations and reticence. Seen from below education is in a state of
pulsation and crisis. Any moment it’s possible for deviations to appear. There is always room for surprises.

When we regard education from below we are situated right in the middle of it. From this angle we can capture its organic connections with changing realities and witness its surrender or victories. In this position we gain access to the fluid world in which spirit revolves to clarify its identity and man his life meaning.

Situated in the nether regions of education we are located in its twilight zone. We are tense, restless, undecided and unsure whether to sit and wait or to go forward. Here we are always at crossroads. Each step is about assuming an option, making a decision, following one direction form several other possibilities. We live with the hope that what we have done is for the better. Nothing is certain, nothing is complete. It is like always standing on guard.

In short, education is approached like a living organism, in a continuous state of becoming.

Looking at education from below means, therefore, looking at things as they are, in their continuous motion and continuously attempting to understand them as best we can in that very moment. We feel education like it is the very fabric of our lives. We may as well say that we are – actually – in the common world of the educator and disciple, inside its very core; we want to have a closer look to what is going on (Savater, 1997; Bronson, Merryman, 2011). Of course we know that there is always something going on, but we are also aware that we will never know everything.

In this world we see teacher and disciple face to face, continuously intersecting in their searches; we see how the experiences of the educator come against the disciple’s immaturities and as a consequence a new path is created.

When regarded from below, education is rather a permissive action, attention to details, situations and their accompanying feelings, to the unique states of mind of teacher and disciple. In other words, we are always connected to their messages and attitudes.

At the same time the student feels that the teacher tries to sympathize, to be closer, to make him feel he is not alone, make him feel that he does not face a cool judge, a tough player. In short, we are inside an uninterrupted and challenging dynamics of the shaping of the human being.

The one who sees education from below regards it with openness and caution. He knows some things but he also knows that every experience teaches us something new. He decodes the tight relationship between education and learning. The teacher regards it with modesty knowing that he cannot comprise everything and that nothing is or can be completed. Actually we all learn from each other.

When we look at education from below we are together with our disciple in an attempt to find – both of us – a way to express ourselves and be in the world. We have points of view, statements, revelations but also doubts, returns, relative clarifications and periodical reruns when the tension of the process requires a new conception, a new synthesis.

Therefore, it is obvious there is no time for regulations because we cannot regulate the torment, partiality, the imperfect. We cannot regulate what is not yet completed. From this angle there are only two things we know for sure:

• that it never exists an end to education. It is a permanent eruption ready to overflow its lava over our thoughts, beliefs, habits and certainties. She always asks concentration, connection, commitment and sacrifice. The world of education is in continuous motion: trials, obstacles, defeats, conquests, more trials, more obstacles, more retreats, more victories, etc.
• the second thing we know for sure is that the teacher is aware of his imperfection. And, knowing he’s not accomplished, he is aware of his continuous transformation, till the end of his life. Therefore, there is no unit of measure (for anyone).
4. Conclusions and recommendations

As we have seen education was and may be regarded from two perspectives. These have influenced the way we formulate our ideals, objectives, the way we select our working methods, contents, the way we approach planning, evaluation, didactic communication, our relation with students and their parents. Also, it influences the way we see ourselves, educators.

As the teacher can regard education from both points of view, the dynamics of the relation between them becomes interesting. There can be moments in our teaching career of obvious imbalance between these two fundamental approaches. More precisely, we can encounter the following situations:

- one of them is when we manifest an excess of regulation. We are (or we believe we are) entitled to regard education from above, ignoring, minimizing or rejecting its view from below. We want to mould. We believe regulation is the supreme gesture of education. We thus risk remaining locked in our own rules against the torments and turmoil of education. Regarded solely from above, it remains an empty theoretic discourse, purely formal and a burdensome act for the student.

- the other situation is when we manifest an excess of fluidization of education. We are in the position of the one regarding from below, ignoring, minimizing or rejecting its view from above. We are trapped inside the turmoil and whirlwinds of education, of its unending transformations. We thus risk failing in indecision, ambiguity and confusion. Regarded solely from below, it remains a torment in itself, a troubled approach without a meaning.

Therefore it follows that:

- regulation always comes after the experience of education seen from below. We cannot claim the rule but after we have lived the “drama” of education. We need a preliminary “ordeal” of decantation and separation of the fundamental from the non-fundamental, of the perennial from the ephemeral, of what is dignified from what is undignified for a human being

- also, it is shown that we cannot remain in the incandescent lava of education without offering a direction, an ideal or a finality. From within turmoil a meaning is (re)born. It is necessary to regard from above to see where we are, what we have done and what is yet to be done, to see what we cannot see from below and to know where we are heading. Therefore we need partial regulations, momentary requirements and a direction.

Consequently, either seen from above or below, the teacher is moving into the world of education. He is always at work having the opportunity to unveil a truth or delimit some principles or rules more or less stable, but nevertheless necessary for human development. Absorbed in his work, the teacher will always be vigilant not to be captured from one of the two fundamental approaches of education, but give each its own weight

References