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Students' Democratic Participation in the School Environment: from a Passive Attitude to an Active Interaction

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Author's contribution

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Policy Article

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper, a legalization procedure related to a different school function model is defined. Starting from the ambiguity of the notion related to the school democratic function, the form of hypocrisy is projected, which has already been formulated, as the dominating discourse is in favor of authenticity and validates the prevailing authority. In this perspective, new organizational student-teacher forms are suggested to formulate a biopolitical environment through new communication networks – of social and personal appeal. As a consequence, the authoritarian structures and dominating relations are transformed into democratic forms of organization, taking into account the individuals' social and cultural subjectivity in their social environment. More specifically, through the transgression of the explicit and implicit forms of power and authority, concentration will be placed on the schematic correspondence of structures and relations so that democracy will be reinterpreted under its social and political content.

Keywords: Biopolitical environment; citizenship; democracy; education for democracy; students' participation.

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1. STRUCTURAL ECONOMIC COMPONENTS AND EDUCATIONAL BOUNDS

During the economic crisis period in Greece, education is invited to deal with issues of knowledge and the individuals' incorporation [1]¹ in the social whole. In this perspective and under humanistic terms, the concepts of prosperity, success and progress[2][3]² should imperatively be re-determined. An underclass [4]³ is observed to be formulated, namely a total of individuals that do not belong to the society. Under educational and social terms, the shrinking of the opportunities structures is realized and the adjoining losses for the lower social classes are apparently insurmountable.

It is important to mention that the people that were hard hit during an economic prosperity period were less benefited by the economic, social and political system. The impressive dimensions of social inequality are also evaluated by the educational system. Public school also includes those groups of students experiencing marginalization, disdain and the cancellation of individuality along with the absence of inclusion in the social whole. During the economic prosperity period, individuals experienced a values environment in which access to the consuming society[5]⁴ was determinant to the composition of people's social existence. The latter was deemed the concept of success or failure and defined under economic terms on the material basis of obtaining goods within a system of expanded needs.

In this respect, education is invited to reformulate a values system by re-approaching, under political terms, the concept of democracy through the reconstruction of the imaginative character of society [6]⁵, by reformulating the students' experiences within a democratic school environment [7]⁶ where the concept of citizen will be redefined. Emphasis, therefore, lays within the enhancement of institutions, attitudes and behaviors related to the democratic function of school. At this point, emphasis is placed on the functional, institutional structures which have not been legislated or they have been disdained. In particular, reference is made to: 1) the Teachers' Association [8]⁷, 2) the Students' Councils and 3) the Mixed School Councils and the Out-of-School Representatives.

An advance towards a policy of organizing a democratic school becomes obvious by enforcing principles and standpoints conducive to enhancing the expression of opinion – viewpoint, standpoints to reinforce integration strategies into the social whole, under political terms, tied to participation and monitor of institutions and procedures[9]⁸. Within the educational environment, the reinforcement of political deliberation along with the

¹Quote, according to U. Beck, when conditions of uncertainty and a socio-political environment of inconsistencies and subversions are in the forefront, individuals are concentrated on personal rendering of meaning and choices (Beck, 1992).

²Quote, in a post-modern the conceptualization of reality is done on the basis of efficiency rules, knowledge commercialization and the concentration on the euphoric present (Lyotard, 1984; Lipovetsky; 1987).

³According to Z. Baumann an underclass is "a vivid representation of nothing in which people can descend, fall or be boosted and the desperate place of those ones that belong to the "underclass" is non invertible and irreparable.

⁴See (indicatively) about the consuming society model, as it had been formulated before the economic crisis, as a valued and systemic situation in Western societies (Ritzer, 2001).

⁵See (indicatively) about the association of disdaining the democratic institutions with the imposed economic crisis (Alivizatos, 2013).

⁶See (indicatively) about the promotion of the principles of democracy in the school environment with emphasis on the formulation of a democratic culture in education (Ayers, Hunt & Quinn, 1998).

⁷See (indicatively) a view about the function of school as a democratic cell with a responsibilities and work distribution aiming at the socialization in a democratic environment (Blankstein & Houston, 2011).

⁸See (indicatively) about the functionality of participatory and pluralistic institutions and considerations whether the disdain of democracy and the anomic phenomena could be subverted (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2012).

simultaneous decrease of authority and messianism [10][11]⁹ attitudes, reinforced through monitoring by the educational system carriers, by encouraging typical and atypical patterns of violence, is pursued. Under Freud's terms [12]¹⁰, it could be said that the educational truth is imposed through the use of any kind of power and, under political terms, power systems are legalized along with the concurrent cancellation of democratic inter-reaction procedures. Thus, within an economic depression period, when the resources are limited[13]¹¹, the policy of rights is enfeebled while the redistribution of opportunities for the socially lower strata is confined.

The issue of participation is pivotal as involvement in procedures as well as co-responsibility and avoidance of being closed in upon individuality are the prerequisites. Therefore, an education policy about the common experience is required. In this respect, fear, under psychological terms, and the testing of integration, under social terms, into the social whole with the expected danger, pain and tribulations are evaded[14] (Sennett, 1996). At this point, reference should be made to the reinforcement of deliberation forms[15]¹², on all levels of educational procedures, so that a system of enhancing the citizens' society is constructed by bringing back the discussion related to justice and humanism.

Nowadays, even though reference is made to a liberal form of education, the function of schools is characterized as single-sided, on the basis of a legal limiting framework formulating typical or atypical leaderships through the absolute cession of controlled authorities. Within the educational environment, both students and teachers are found encircled in a model of function, where their social rights have been atypically ceded, since they act as the performers of a set of obligations. This way, students, on the one hand, have become the "consumers" of useful knowledge [16]¹³ – the one exclusively necessary to pass the exams. Teachers, on the other hand, having been disdained in the educational system, are excluded, marginalized and enfeebled, by acting in a fluid system in which both aims and objectives are equivocal, letting the educational procedure become fortuitous, eventually aligned to the broader framework of a fixed disorganization of the political system.

2. THE REFORMATION OF THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS

For methodological reasons, education is isolated from the other subsystems assuming that as a subsystem which manages, formulates and gives feedback to cognitive domains it can generate structural patterns to restart a democratic system of organization. As a result, the relations between citizen and society are more broadly redefined by reconstructing the political system and re-determining the political and social components on the basis of democratic autonomy and functional co-existence. Thus, both dimensions are elevated; the one related to the necessity of protecting individual rights which, under political terms, secure the relation between the citizen and the system. In addition, the other one reinforces the social co-existence, under social terms, by enhancing social solidarity through the demand for interventions, especially during an economic crisis period.

⁹See (indicatively) about the correlation of power, authority and messianism in the political system as components of extreme right policies (Mudde, 2007; Norris, 2005).

¹⁰See (indicatively) about the imposed forced as a means of "truth" formulation in order that the individual is manipulated (Freud, 2013).

¹¹See (indicatively) a modern perspective about the policy of rights with emphasis on a new field of framework (Dworkin, 2013: 379-400).

¹²Suggestions about enhancing the forms of direct viewpoints exchange in an open deliberation procedure are of special interest (Habermas, 1991:181-222).

¹³Quote, according to M. Gauchet's observations there is school consumerism in-and-out of school related to courses of studies and extracurricular activities.

In a mature phase, it is realized that the values framework about the individuals' political and social survival in the social whole was enfeebled by the educational system being concentrated on the performing functions of information-knowledge flow with focus on the examinations model. This way, the existential insecurity, social uncertainty and the individuals' indifference to politics was maximized.

Explicit or implicit forms of violence are apparently re-generated forcing the formulation of a particular attitude and behavior by the educational community subjects, contrary to the belief that the educational system functions within an open model of freedom. This is attained by disdaining the democratic institutions, reinforcing individual, egoistic ambitions in a game where the personal freedom of speech, action, participation, suggestions controversy and control¹⁴ of the institutions have been decayed by an uncontrollable condition having been formulated in an apolitical biosphere. Consequently, since the concept of freedom is not tied to democracy, it is elevated in an ambiguous content by which democracy is not enhanced and social inequality is not decreased. On the contrary, the privileges of those ones favored by the system become invisible while inequality is enhanced by the silence of the powerless ones, under political terms, in a system of non-democratic function.

The suggested system to reinforce democracy could be entitled "action for democracy" and could be based on three pivots: the Teachers' Associations, the Students' Councils and the Mixed In-and-Out-of-School Representatives which are all based on the democratic principle of participation and monitoring of procedures and educational environment functions. As regards the first instrument, the Teachers' Association, apart from its current typical form related to a draft of democratic organization, is ceded the responsibilities of planning the school function. A conscious attitude will be eventually formed based on participation and viewpoints exchange which, under political terms, will be conducive to organizing and monitoring the educational system by recognizing the failure of the educational model.

Under economic terms, the discussion could be based upon the creative "destruction" of the educational system and the reconstruction of another form of education through the reorganization and reconsideration of the institutional roles. The second instrument, the Students' Councils[17]¹⁵, essentially bring back and activate a typical school institution that could "construct", were it effective in its function, political structures to reinforce democracy, through the students' exchange of viewpoints and by utilizing moments of adolescence which have been overlooked by the educational system. This educational-political suggestion aims at projecting the student as an individual-citizen, being able to manage his thinking within a political environment where his discourse is acknowledged, in a real flow of knowledge about social existence. This projection could be achieved through a political existential participation in which the risk lays on the shift from personal egoistic desires to a community of values and standpoints; in other words, from moral and political apathy to the political and moral empathy.

The third instrument, the Mixed School Councils and the Out-of-School Representatives, form an association of the educational environment with the broader society, so that the concept of political community is expanded as school is placed in the "public scene". A procedure of interactive dialectical feedback is noticed through an interdependence of the "educational area" and the "public scene". In these areas self-affirmation and any form of

¹⁴See, reference is made to the concept of panoptic supervision which is not exercised by the established administrative authorities but by an authority exercised by the political subjects towards the ones exercising the political administration.

¹⁵See (indicatively) a general reference to the students' councils development with special emphasis on their role (Kalerante, 2012).

contradiction are cancelled because emphasis is placed on the function of the institutions, the subjects' liberation, through the formulated democratic experience being elevated as the individuals' end in itself. It is about a complex procedure of a pressure valve of the "private interests" with the concurrent reinforcement of the feeling of "belonging".

All three instruments are incorporated in the expanded draft related to the reformation of education being the outcome of reflection and scheduling for education in democracy in which the issue of co-existence and prosperity is defined through the inter-human groups of solidarity and co-operation. The educational discourse converses with broader Discourses which, as essential units of the political and social engineering include messages that should be evaluated and utilized by the educational community.

3. A SHIFT FROM THE BUREAUCRATIC ORGANIZATION OF EDUCATION TO THE DEMOCRATIC FUNCTION

It is well understood that in contrast to the bureaucratic model of education – in which emphasis was placed on a form of rational behavior, even if the institution of education itself was disdained – a flexible model of the individuals' functional dependence is suggested. Besides, along with the political participation and incorporation, the old educational model is deconstructed by elevating micro-social factors being in favor of maneuvers even within the oppressive frameworks of the bureaucratic system. In other words, the concept of authority is reconstructed as the educational community – with pre-scheduled, reiterated, participatory actions – invents and reinforces a pattern of "democracy of experiences". Reference is made to another interpretation of political culture, with an expanded network of possibilities, the educational procedure is redefined and structures and functional relations, usurping democratic models in an internal regulation of procedural democratic structures, are re-utilized by the individuals-groups and collectivities in the educational environment.

The important fact of the model suggested is that the educational system is liberated by its introversion, creating prerequisites for contact with the social whole, being benefited by the individuals and carriers' suggestions that lay outside the educational environment. At this exact point, the democratic principle of reinforcing the individuals' equality is conceptualized with the stockpiling and the concentration upon the others', the educated ones, Discourse. This is feasible through a procedure of involvement with the institutions by reducing the gap and blunting the polarization of participatory opportunities. In other words, contrary to the prevailing political system having compressed the concept of democracy into participating in the elections and the indirect representation, a procedure of political discourse dissemination is preferred. In this context, the political is redefined through the individuals' daily life. Thus, under democratic terms and on the basis of political rights, the individuals are re-determined.

Through the function of the above mentioned instruments, a system of structures, functions and relations is formulated which should be tied to a theoretical model of projecting democracy in the curriculum, in the units of cognitive domains. Moreover, it could be tied atypically to the students' everyday life and to the classroom in order that the fear of diversity, the insecurity-related concern, the establishment of violence and the disdain of the political subject is surmounted. Education for co-existence, as a choice, is brought back by education for democracy, especially during a period when the economic, political and social placement is fragile – within a fluid values framework. Authoritarian resolutions and enforcements are deconstructed by the democratic function in the educational area by disdaining submissive models and creating a "we" where, without social equality being overlooked, the lower social strata are benefited, as they are no longer invisible in the

educational environment. The benefit could stem from the opportunities structures generated in the harmonious function of democracy, not as actions of philanthropy but as political rights from which individuals with a political identity are not deprived.

Education for democracy is observed to generate experience for all social strata in a model where the concept of political moral is given meaning by interaction and security; co-existence becomes feasible through the wane of conflicts, especially during periods of economic deregulation [18]¹⁶ and values insecurity. Adjustment to the system of insecurity and uncertainty conducive to deregulation and anomy should be avoided by education at the moment.

Were education to be mislead and function in this decomposition of political values, the result would surely be a “zero” education in which ready cognitive packets would be recycled in an educational scene where the political subjects would be absent. Besides, deregulation and inequality would be maximized by exclusion and disdain while the institution of education itself would be disdained. Therefore, a question to the educational community is posed whether the entities involved desire to be the powerless of the system, those ones experiencing not only insecurity but, through their educational role, the deterioration of the situation would be managed and instrumentally reinforced by formulating a new generation of people that would be excluded. In this sense, any form of authority would be encouraged by passivity and silence as a product of ignorance.

4. CONCLUSION

Concentration is placed on the concept of political education or the concept of the political in education aspiring to a redefinition of the educational aims and objectives themselves. In this context, even if the students’ formulation to political subjects is indefinitely referred to in all educational grades, the concept of democracy is absent or is partially defined as a procedural political act being selective in pre-determined occasions. In other words, democracy is not related to the individuals’ everyday practices, with their participation in the common life of collectivity. On the contrary, the specialists, around whom a model of function under their terms and principles is formulated, seem to be assigned politics. This model is reinforced through ambiguity and the limited perception about its role and dynamics in the citizens’ society.

The distance between the political subjects-actors of authority and the others, namely the individuals-receivers of legitimate or anomic violence and the authoritarian enforcements, is typically or atypically naturalized and legalized on the basis of this rationale by education. In the first place, a post-modern perception of political education would be based on the demystification of political authority and its “de-fascination” through the legalization and naturalization of the political subjects’ power. This could be attained by creating broader fields of rationale and democratic function in a vision of discipline in which individuals, in all phases of decisions formulation and materialization, would have a “decisionistic” attitude. As a consequence, they could overcome uncertainty and insecurity; that is, the psycho-social situations on which the political status quo is based.

The confined political environment of authority is further evolved into a political body by the political function of education with broader responsibilities. This evolution becomes feasible

¹⁶Reference is made to the inequality among countries as well as to the inequality among citizens within the countries (Firebaugh, 2003).

by incorporating individuals, decreasing exclusions [19]¹⁷, stopping the upper social strata resistance, bringing back the discussion to the democratic ideals and rejecting conceptualizations about the limitation of democracy[20]¹⁸ and the privileges for exclusions that are generated.

Were it to be accepted that power and authority are based on asymmetrical interpretations of power while social inequality is tight, every time when reference is made to democracy and to education for democracy as real tactics, the shift of power would be pursued. Therefore, principles, ideas and standpoints should be assimilated intellectually and activated interactively. A body of knowledge, ideas, attitudes and predispositions is consequently generated putting forward the democratic system and even, under liberal political terms, the political co-existence, the economic, destruction and social enfeeblement would be redefined. Under individual terms, the experienced disdain superiority or inferiority would be transformed through a shower of knowledge and procedures in a democratic discourse of self-fulfillment [21][22]¹⁹ and expression of political claims to bring back political rights.

To sum up, it is underlined that the reinforcement of democracy and the study of principles and standpoints during this period is a one-way path for the educational community which should be liberated from the stigma of alienation, marginalization and deconstruction of political rights [23]²⁰. Should U. Beck concentrate on the individual resolutions which, in systemic contradictions, are chosen by the individuals, education is invited to perform another role through a policy usurped within a corpus of current economic and social components through the reformulation of the student and teacher relations. Thus, there is a shift from chimerical relations to viable relations by eliminating the worn view of democratic values. Reference should absolutely be made to the reinforcement of the extreme right trends and to the school environment [24][25]²¹ related to the entire model of elimination of democratic values, the legalization of violence and the authoritarian forms of dominance.

Within the educational biopolitical system [26]²², the economic, social and political conditions are interrelated even if its function is scheduled to re-generate inequality structures, legalized authority and violence. All educators, carriers and any other entities that are responsible for knowledge should not be conducive to this end by relaxing on their vigilance in the naiveté of apathy or on the reinforcement of policies to end up democracy within a non inverted and irreparable enforcement of political violence and social exclusion on the basis of strict, non regulated and enforced relations of power. Taking into account a post-modern consideration and evaluation of the systems, concentration on democracy could work as a

¹⁷Quote H. Giroux's views about the anti-democratic trends developed in the world's new order in which scenes of wealth and geographies of exclusion are formulated.

¹⁸Quote, according to G. Agamben's terms limitations of rights to confront assumed "situations" of emergency are more obvious in modern societies.

¹⁹Quote, according to D. Smith when social acknowledgment is decreased, individuals experience rejection and humiliation which, under social terms, is a cancellation of their rights for projecting desires and fulfilling expectations.

Quote, according to H. Chang's observations, education is important but its value lies within the individual's personality development and the fulfillment of the right to live a full and independent life (Chang, 2012).

²⁰Under P. Bourdieu's terms (1992), the educator should, perhaps, intervene in the political field as an intellectual were he to maintain autonomy both for himself and the educational community and to be conducive to monitoring authority.

²¹See (indicatively) recent researches on issues of the educational community related to the extreme right wing as well as more general issues about the principles of the extreme right political party of "Chrisi Avgi" in association to education (Kalerante, 2013a, Kalerante, 2013b).

²²See (indicatively) P. Askenazy's (2011) viewpoints about issues of collective responsibility related to the political choices that affect and determine the youth's uncertain future.

new paradigm compressing principles of the past in a projection towards the future. This could be achieved by setting educational determinations in which there is a shrinking rationale against the monetary, globalized capitalism [27]²³, the optimistic view of educational authenticity and humanistic conformism [28]²⁴ in a politicalization of social reality against the de-modernization, the economic performance and the partial aestheticization of pleasure.

The objective is to re-imagine schooling as a laboratory for democracy with its objectives achieved – despite the reaction, within the bounds of a different intention, by socializing the individuals in the policy of participation, dialogue and reaction.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

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²³See (indicatively) about the exchanges and the economic networks as they are formed in the monetary capitalism (Castells, 2001).

²⁴Quote, according to P. Lipovetsky's observations, "collective utopias are fading out, the pragmatic techniques – scientific attitudes of anticipation and prevention are being intensified".

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