

## EDUCATION VS. SOCIAL CHANGE

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**Summary.** This paper examines the concept of education and the methodological and didactic changes that take place due to societal transformations which have been regulated by the State to the detriment of providing quality mass education.

**Key vocabulary:** Quality, social change, didactics, education and methodology.

Education is a process that enables humans to know how to conduct themselves and behave in society. From childhood they begin to create social bonds with those around them, retaining information with all those with whom they interact. That is why mankind is constantly in an educational process and for this reason, education has evolved with the passage of time. Baudelot & Establet (1975), stated that "school is part of the social network and in turn contributes to their integration and cohesion".

Education is a process of never-ending renewal, as witnessed by major transformations of pedagogical practices during the last decades of the 20th century. Some of the advances include new information technologies, professional pedagogic practices of teachers, and generally speaking, the phenomena that gave rise to massive educational access.

Juan Ignacio Lopez (2005), refers to the phenomenon of this mass access to

education in society when he says that "*there were increasingly more students of humble origin who were able to successfully complete their basic education and could, therefore, access secondary education, causing it to lose its elitist nature*" This was in response to the demanding productive sector of the era, which based the development of curriculum plans on scientific knowledge, in accordance with the needs of a historical moment for a given society.

The same author states that only a very small number of students was able to continue on to the university level. In other words, higher education was reserved for a very small minority and it was from that moment that the State took over its role as guarantor of education in response to the productive sector and as an agent for social development through a process of democratization and implementation of formal education in society.

At the beginning of the 20th Century, education experienced a growing expansion



in industrialized countries. This phenomenon of educational expansion or coverage reflected the growing GDP in each of the countries where this phenomenon was occurring. The increasing number of people entering the educational system gave rise to an issue of educational quality, and as a result, a failing system. This was possibly the result of different factors such as the failure of qualified teachers to adequately develop and articulate curriculum, and an infrastructure that was inadequate for the levels of growth and educational demand of the moment.



This peculiarity of expansion in educational coverage leads to a reflection regarding the concept of education. As Edgar Faure (1973), says in his report to Unesco, entitled "Learning to Be," the educational process should be considered as a means of autonomous and critical development for people that fosters a development that questions and challenges the world around us (scientific-technological revolution) Imbernon (1999). Furthermore, the process should enhance the acquisition of cultural values from our environment and the manner that we feel, think and act, as opposed to a process of educational coverage where the principal issue is quantity and not quality. This last

phenomenon impedes the student from acquiring the necessary skills needed to develop the personal, civil, social and cultural aspects of life.

Gimeno J. (2005), proposes the dilemma regarding the equivalence of education vs. schooling. In other words, does schooling fulfill the right to an education, or are there other forms of schooling that satisfy the right to be educated? We must take into account that not only do schools educate, but also other educating agents such as the family, mass media, and new information technologies which stimulate a rediscovery or redefining of concepts and cultures that influence the subject. That is why education must be conceived of as a process of personal and collective reconstruction through a dynamic, transformational conception of ethics and culture.

"Schooling cannot be limited to transmitting academic content, but must also strive for the overall construction of learners". This philosophical premise of Lopez I Juan (2005), implies the applicability of a pedagogical model that is based on various aspects of philosophy, education, and humanism. These concepts are considered essential and fundamental elements in an integral being; a person that exhibits coherence between thought, action and being, and where holistic, discursive, inclusive, critical, analytical and democratic education is paramount. The educational process should be seen as a means of autonomous and critical development of people, a development

that questions and challenges the world around us, the social values derived from the environment and the manner in which we feel, think and act. This discursive vision prioritizes the important role of people in their education and the understanding of education as an absolutely essential and indispensable human right (Gimeno J, 2005: 134).

Gimeno Sacristán J. (2005) in his work, "Education That Is Still Possible", analyzes educational practices in the context of world challenges and asks what would a desirable educational system be, starting with the development of a quality education with real meaning and relevance within a society.

Societal characteristics of the current century not only indicate that social constants in the coming years will center upon the developments in communications and technology, but also on the dependency and integration of nations and the profound social crises arising from inequalities that are generated as a result of accelerated developmental processes in an ever changing environment. It is in this socio-historical context, that Colombian society finds itself immersed, challenging the educational system and its institutions to create new educational processes for the autonomous citizen open to the world, who is able to address the multiple challenges of contemporary life with dignity, solidarity, a sense of belonging and ethics. This training process assumes integrated human development as harmonic, holistic and transformational in which the subject, in

interaction with the physical and social environment and through practical action and symbolic knowledge, builds himself as a social being. (Bruner, 1972).

Faure (1980), poses the need for change in the educational system and that this change transcends a simple restructuring of the curriculum, because the curriculum starting point emerges as a variable force which is key in educational innovation. The challenge of curriculum construction from a base as the one proposed, implies overcoming strictness, verticality, contradictions and yet fostering differences, participation and consensus, as it requires a comprehensive and flexible curriculum. This comprehensive curriculum is also addressed by Gimeno J. (2005), when speaking about the thesis of school institutions with sufficient autonomy to contextualize curriculum development within a flexible, educational organization.

According to some critics, the crisis in education is due to laws that have lengthened education and reduced the development of curriculum content. In this context, the teaching profession affects the organization of content. Furthermore, it also affects the manner of building awareness from different perspectives and the manner of thinking about events that processes in teaching and learning come to play in the formation processes. This at the same time, dictates that more adequate pedagogical practices be implemented, such as those that emerge from a participatory understanding of epistemological



approaches. These teaching and learning strategies from a participatory perspective are valuable tools for interdisciplinary and even trans-disciplinary development.

This involves going beyond the simple transmission of knowledge and the need to pursue the understanding of educational phenomenon. It is necessary that teachers have methodological and practical teaching knowledge, as well as a social, psychological, institutional, and individual knowledge of those they teach.

Coombs (1971) defines education as a set of educational activities which constitute a system consisting of different levels, which is in turn articulated by its social environment or what he refers to as a social system, in which individuals enter and leave after being educated. This approach requires a staff motivated by their professional duty, knowledge of their environment, their students and understands how to incorporate life experiences into the teaching-learning process according to the needs of the students.

New demands from society, which demonstrate a process of internationalization and globalization in the economy and of knowledge, offer challenges to its citizens in accordance with the dramatic changes taking place. This means that the traditional is not in sync with these changes and therefore falls into de-contextualized situations. Ángel Pérez (2003), states that schooling becomes obsolete given such changes due to the

manner and models that served as the basis for such a long time and which do not now provide answers for the societal transformations and needs of the future.

Against this background, it is necessary that the school educate and train new generations according to those needs. This education must form individuals with skills adaptable to change and the ability to be proactive and efficient in situations of ambiguity. The educational and socialization challenges posed by A. Pérez stress the modification of the contents, codes and requirements of educational institutions as the first step with the objective that the information be used as knowledge. In this way, the construction of a critical and transcendent position is possible which enables the learner to be the generator of personal and social change.



In Colombia, education is governed by Law 115 of 1994, established by President Cesar Gaviria and Maruja Pachon as Minister of Education. It stipulates that "Public service education serves a social function according



to the needs and interests of the family, the people and society". Equally, Law 715 of 2001, reformed during the presidency of Andres Pastrana establishes: "Which organic standards dictate regarding standards for resources and competences according to articles 151, 288, 356, 357 (Legislative Act 01 of 2001) of the Political Constitution and enacts other provisions to organize the delivery of services in education and health, among others." The first has been interpreted as a reformatory law in education, focusing primarily on the educational process in educational establishments of the institutional educational project. The second focus is the educational counter-reformation which devalues education and emphasizes tax savings. Law 115 of 1994 appears as one of the "modalities of educational assistance to the population", together with the educational proposal for people with limitations or exceptional abilities, education for ethnic groups, rural education and education for social rehabilitation.

Legal recognition is not enough for education to achieve strong State support. Decree 3011 of 1997 codifies the education of young people and adults in Colombia and indicates the necessity to create relevant and contextualized curriculum and educational proposals. It proposes strengthening the flexibility of education for young people and adults through independent, open and distance learning methods.

The Revolutionary Education Plan (Uribe's Term 2002-2006) is based upon a

policy of extending coverage, centered on the acquisition of statistics. However, this extension does not constitute a solution because securing a position does not guarantee the right or quality of education. With the above in mind, it is clear that the policy of increasing resources and directing them based upon market criteria policies didn't render the desired results. Resources increased more than school attendance and more than two-thirds of the student population is not in the system or receiving a poor quality education.

Within this framework, it is important to observe this same phenomenon of coverage regarding higher education. We refer neither to the offer nor the few positions available in public universities but rather to identifying and analyzing the impact of a specific higher education coverage program for lower socio-economic groups. The program <sup>1</sup>CERES (professional training program for people with difficult access to higher education) is spearheaded by the Presidency of the Republic and executed by the various District Education Departments throughout the country. The main objective is to make higher education institutions available to the less favored classes with technical, technological and professional academic programs that meet the needs of the productive sector.

In Cartagena, this program is currently being offered in ten Ceres. According to data provided by the District Department of

<sup>1</sup>CERES Program (Source: Information furnished by SED together with the socialization of the project's reach).



Education, though its Coordinator Dr. Ramiro Ensuncho, there are 9,400 spaces available through the first period 2010, of which only 2,171 spaces have been utilized. It is hoped that the figures for the second period of 2010 will reflect the full utilization of the 7,000 available spaces in the District of Cartagena. Double check this last sentence with the Spanish below.

It is also necessary to point out the attrition rate for this program, which is currently in the order of 28%. The remainder of the students in the program, according to data provided by HEI in the District of Cartagena, present great deficiencies in elementary and middle academic development, which has led HEI to implement training projects with the intent of improving this aspect.

As we have argued in this paper, education is much more than mere literacy or simply amplifying educational coverage. The educational process goes beyond learning how to read and write. In a population such as Colombia's, education is a social problem, and as a consequence, it implies marginalization, social exclusion and poverty. Quality education and true access, not optimistic figures from the Government, are basic necessities for learning as well as social inclusion for vulnerable youth and adults who wish to access the educational system.

Education in Colombia, as shown above, presents a number of shortcomings that are not being resolved through the current public policy. Real change regarding

government intention and action is expected, so that the future for present generations ceases to be overshadowed by despair and instead glows with the light of knowledge.

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