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Inequality in Education. Dimensions and Solutions

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Abstract: The proposed subject is included in fundamental and operational pedagogical research, promoted by decades through educational sociology, with a major impact on education policy, educational planning and educational management – applied at systemic and educational process level. The premises of inequality in education are: economic, social and pedagogical. The economic premises are related to the material status of the family and also to the raising of quality educational costs. The social premises are related to the politicians of education concepts on culture that are promoted and don not ensure a balance between the common the specialized curriculum, between mandatory and optional curriculum, between mass and elite school, formal and successful education access of graduates. The pedagogical premises are related to teachers' didactic performance who do not ensure the particularities of their activity (lessons etc.) with the knowledge of the real potential of the pupil (scholar, psychological and social). The proposed solutions are placed at two extremes: a) radical solutions, inspired by the theory of social de-schooling of the society which is targeting the replacement of formal educational system with a non-formal educational network; b) reformed solutions, initiated by UNESCO, targeting the modification of the changing of education functioning in the line of its democracy and efficiency process. The reforming solution with chances in effective solving of the inequality issue in education is the one that emphasizes the pedagogical changing dimension, permanently connected to the general mission of school as promoter of culture and civilization.

Keywords: *inequality in education; premises of inequality; global educational crisis; school democratization; reforming solution.*

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1. Inequality in education

Inequality in education is a major theme for fundamental and operational pedagogical research. It has been launched for several decades as a special issue, defined and analyzed extensively by the sociology of education. This scientifically domain on educational field, interdisciplinary built, at the level of conceptual and methodological interdependence between pedagogy and sociology, is concerned with discovering the causes of the phenomenon (inequality in education) at the level of the functioning structure of educational system. Education, approached as a necessary social fact (Durkheim) or as a complex reality that may be analyzed within the frame of an ideal model or an ideal standard (Max Weber) reflects the inequalities generated objectively or subjectively by the global social system, identifiable at the level of the multidimensional structure of the educational system. We are considering the structure of: a) organization by levels and phases of education; b) administrative (top, intermediate, basic) management; c) out-sharing of existing pedagogical resources (informational, human, didactic-material, financial); d) relationship with society, with the cultural, economic, political, community and natural system (Cristea, 2017).

The educational system's organizational structure, by levels and phases, may provide the premises of equality / inequality in education. It is a fundamental issue with solving attempts throughout the history, proposed by the cyclically-needed education reforms, when malfunctions occur at the scale of the entire education system. Undertaken historical researches may highlight the main trends in the evolution of educational systems in different space and temporal contexts. Their analysis, on a historical, synchronous but especially diachronic perspective, offers important suggestions that may be critically valued even now. (Cristea, 2001).

Starting with the examples offered by the history of pedagogy, critically valued, the education reforms, multiplied in modern and post-modern (contemporary) era, are trying to solve the problem of inequality in education through the extension of general education duration (of general knowledge) which is mandatory until the age of 16. The proposed organization structure with a general education between one and nine (ten) grades, creates the premise of equalizing the chances of success of all pupils under the circumstances in which the general school provides the "common core of culture" necessary for the basic formation and development of the personality. Thus, the extension of general mandatory education duration, unaccompanied by a general curriculum with an improved quality, maintains constantly inequality in education, generated by a different start-up

environment, determined at grass-roots community level, cultural, economic etc.

The management structure of the education system may sustain the phenomenon of inequality in education, under the circumstances in which the relationships between managerial decisions and their application at the administrative level are not optimized. At this level, we identify the main source of the bureaucratic tendency of the education system's management that generates formal, standardized, non-contextualized procedural solutions, not linked to the actual conditions within the educational community (national, territorial, local), marked by declarations of political intentions (the pact for education, etc.) or too particular (punctual decisions, conjectural corrections and adaptations, non-critical, unconditional takeovers, external practices, empirical research, etc.).

The share out structure of pedagogical resources maintains the phenomenon of inequality in education, under the circumstances of unclear priorities linked to the main role of basic school system and corresponding common curriculum, which must be conceived as a "general culture base" as premise of the training and development process of all pupils in the perspective of: a) optimal school and professional orientation; b) social adaptation and integration in open economic, technological contexts; c) lifelong learning (Morandi & La Borderie, 2010).

The relational structure maintains the phenomenon of inequality in education if not conceived in an open context allowing adaptation of decisions concerning school and professional guidance and also of career guidance to socio-economic and cultural requirements of local communities confronting with a continuous qualitative transformation, determined by the development dynamics of information society, based on knowledge.

2. Educational system's functioning research

Educational system's functioning research, carried out by sociology of education, provides important information to be turned to account of:

a) education policy, establishing the strategic directions ensuring the needed correlation between general school duration, compulsory, basically and the psychologically (expressed in competences terms) and social dimension (expressed in terms of basic, theoretical and procedural knowledge), of common curriculum (core curriculum) that is the fundament of education planning (designed as fundamental curricular document)

b) education planning, for the decision making aiming to ensure the correlation between the developmental needs of the society (global and

sectorial/ on areas, territories, localities, etc., in economic, political, cultural, community, natural frames) and the pedagogical resources (information, human, didactic-material, financial) existing or available;

c) education management, establishing the decisions which are regulating the relation between the involved management (at the top, intermediate, at the base / see the management of the school organization and the pupils class) on the vertical, horizontal and transversal of the education system, in functional hierarchical plan and in network relations, technological and community.

Fundamental and operational pedagogical research of the functioning of the education system, developed within the educational / pedagogical sciences at interdisciplinary level (pedagogy - sociology / sociology of education) and intra-disciplinary (general theory of education - sociology of education - education policy - education planning - management education/ of school organization, pupil's class) allows to identify the economic, social and pedagogical causes of the phenomenon of inequality in education.

The economic premises of inequality in education are generated by the quantity and quality of existing or available pedagogical resources, requested for optimal implementation of the general functions of the education system of training and development of the pupil, psychologically (the function of cognitive and non-cognitive training-development/affective, motivational, etc.) and social – the function of civic, professional, cultural development.

The economic premises of inequality in education are related to the material status of the family and the necessary expenditures in order to design and release a quality education at the level of the whole society through the proper organization of the functioning structure of the education system.

The material status of the family creates, at the beginning of schooling, a favorable or unfavorable start line of the pupils. More specifically, using the famous metaphorical formula proposed by Philip Coombs (1968, 1989), from the beginning of schooling, and then during it, "only children who have well-chosen their parents are favored."

The material status of the family refers to: a) economic status of the family which allows/or not a desirable environment for education at home and also non-formal education background, including procurement of auxiliary materials, private lessons requested to complete, compensate, adjust, exceed the limits of school formal training; b) the cultural background of the family, reflected in the attitude towards school, learning,

training, education, but also in the spoken language used in community context that has an influence on the evolution of cognitive processes of pupils, as it has been observed at the entrance to school, this subject being approached in the sociology of education by the British author Basil Bernstein (see differences between narrow language and elaborate language) (Bernstein, 1978).

The material, economic but also cultural status of the family remains an important cause of maintaining and embitter inequality in education. This premise reflects and maintains, in different versions and proportions, context-dependent, the phenomena of reproduction of social inequality through education, obviously especially at high school and university level, as evidenced by the fundamental and operational research undertaken in the sociology of education (Bernstein, 1978; Bourdieu, Passeron, 1970).

The necessary expenses to design and realize quality education at general society level are relative high. But as UNESCO undertaken analyses show, there is a risk in maintain an even much more expensive education – the poor quality education which produces wastage, incalculable losses, forcing the society to spend extra, compensatory, increasingly, with the chance of recovering the investment that is difficult to reach in time, with negative effects multiplying in economic terms, but mostly cultural, civic, professional, with negative consequences at community level or in the natural environment (Văideanu, 1988).

Unfair investment (in relation to the general interests of the national, territorial, local education community) or unbalanced (on stages, profiles or educational institutions) maintains and amplifies the phenomenon of inequality in education, present in developed countries as shown by the research undertaken in terms of economy and policy of education (Coombs, 1968, 1989).

The social causes of inequality in education are analyzed especially by sociologists of education at the level of some fundamental pedagogical researches that led to the elaboration of theories located in the area of "macrostructural paradigms with microstructural openings": a) the theory of socio-cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, Passeron); b) the theory of educational transmission (B Bernstein) (Petrescu, 2014, pp. 122-177).

The theory of socio-cultural reproduction (Pierre Bourdieu; Jean-Claude Passeron) analyzes the causes of inequality in education at the level of the functions of the education system - communication, inculcation of a legitimate culture, school selection and social legitimacy. These functions, as a whole, reflect the "system of relations between the education system and the structure of the class relations". Here is the "central point of the theory

of the education system", which allows to identify the "objective effects produced by the conscious and voluntary educational action of individuals or groups" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, pp. 9, 10).

3. The solution proposed for the inequality of education

The study proposes several operational concepts that may be turned to account at the level of "school socio-pedagogy" (Paun, 1982): a) symbolic violence, generated by the cultural capriciousness imposed by the authors of the school and university curriculum; b) pedagogical action subordinated to cultural capriciousness reflected in the school curriculum as formal, official pedagogical authority; c) pedagogical communication, depending on how the teacher transmits the objectives and the contents included in the curriculum; d) the pedagogical habitus, the product of the internalization of cultural capriciousness, initially transmitted at the level of primary socialization (through family, kindergarten, primary education), later at the level of secondary socialization (through secondary and higher / university education).

The social factors that generate and maintain inequality in education, objectively and subjectively (through internalization at the level of pedagogical habitus), are the following: a) the position in the economic and social hierarchy of "education actors", especially parents and pupils; b) the habitus of the class of pupils; c) cultural and social capital.

School inequality is amplified by combining these three factors, a combination that in some situations may generate the phenomenon of "school mortality". At this level there are involved a number of indicators, such as: a) the low linguistic capital of pupils; b) the academic phraseology style of teachers, not adapted to pupils; c) the direct link between the social origin and the low level of linguistic competence of pupils, unchanged over time a consequence of persistent deficiencies in the design and realization of the school curriculum (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, pp. 89-113).

The persistent structural premise is inherent in educational systems that emphasize the external functions of cultural and social reproduction, of self-reproduction of cultural capriciousness, of homogenous training of teachers, prescription of school work, etc. (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1970, pp. 72, 73). Under these circumstances there are ideologically legitimated the hidden inequalities through different pedagogical slogans, excessively formalized norms, bureaucratic procedures, multiplied statistics, manipulation techniques, etc.

Authentic solutions, linked to pedagogical science and art, must be researched at fundamental and operational level, in the area of internal mechanisms of pedagogical action. The sociology of education may thus contribute to the improvement of the process of elaboration and transmission of training contents, assumed not by the social "dominant culture", but by the general culture of the scientific domain, which offers higher formative determinants, especially in the case of the construction of the common curriculum (core curriculum, common pillar of general knowledge) designed and achieved in general-compulsory education system.

A special issue occurs reconsidering the operational concept of chances of school success, defined from a double perspective: a) objective, depending on the social class the pupil belongs to, which determines the quantity and quality of cultural capital, reflected also in a linguistic plan (theme to be developed especially by Basil Bernstein); b) subjective that engages the social responsibility of the educational community (national, territorial, local), of each manager and school teacher.

Globally, there is needed a new outlook on school organizational culture, testable through education policy decisions that lead to the optimization of the relations between the common curriculum and specialized curriculum, between the compulsory curriculum and the optional curriculum, between the mainstream school and the elite school, formal access to education and the real school and social success of graduates.

The theory of educational transmission (Bernstein) analyzes "school as an institution that reproduces cultural values created in a specific context and under specific historical circumstances." These values "distribute the power and principles of social control" (Bernstein, 1978, pp. 5; 40). Education, approached as socializing process must relate to "linguistic codes" of pupils, depending on the socio-cultural belonging of the subjects. Curriculum design and of the messages that ensure educational transmission, in order not to induce or maintain inequality in education must have in mind the existence of the two linguistic codes, distinct, reflecting the socio-cultural assets the child comes with to school, following the family accumulated experience, community experience etc.:

a) Poor linguistic code - limited vocabulary; simple speech, un-contextualized, stressing out the imperative rules of the reference group (family, local community etc.), multiplied in any contexts.

b) Complex linguistic code – extended vocabulary; particularized speech, contextualized, stressing out individual initiative, creative, adaptable on open contexts; (Bernstein, 1978, pp. 66, 67).

Under the circumstances of the two linguistic codes/socio-linguistic, the pupils' roles are diversified. There must be observed that they are socially determined. Thus, statistically, "the normative systems corresponding to the middle class probably give rise to elaborated linguistic codes; those associated with some fractions of the working class produce individuals limited to a restricted code" (Bernstein, 1978, p. 73).

Not-knowing, ignoring, unobserving the two socio-linguistic codes generate a permanent source of inequality in education, displayed both at the institutional level (in organizing the education system by levels and phases, in promoting certain types of schools, in the construction of certain types of school curriculum) as well as in didactics, planning and transmission of educational messages. The solutions envisaged by the sociology of education aim transition from:

a) "stratified schools – with a single, vertical structure, established by reference to a fixed criterion" - to "differentiated schools", where "the social purpose of education tends to be more directed towards training the diversity of economic and social functions" (Bernstein, 1978, pp.145-147);

b) school curriculum elaborated by assembling, which handles the disciplines separately, in closed contexts, to the integrated curriculum that fosters the interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary relations, carried out in open contexts (Bernstein, 1978, p. 162);

c) directed educational transmission, reproductive to the pedagogical communication that is permanently reconstructed according to the peculiarities of the pupils' socio-linguistic codes, which may be used in relation to the existing concrete situations.

The pedagogical premises of the phenomenon of inequality in education may be identified at the level of the uniform, impersonal didactic performance of teachers, who do not provide customization/differentiation of the training activity (lesson, etc.). Training customization, realized with efficiency, according to the requirements of curriculum design, focused of the training-learning skills development, lifelong necessary, requests a complex knowledge of pupils' personality. We are referring to certain types of knowledge: a) pedagogical – of previous school performances (accomplished through initial evaluation strategies, with a predictive role); b) social – of socio-economic environment and cultural familial background (and of local community) and of the social learning capacity of each pupil, in the classroom, in groups, in formal and non-formal context; c) psychological – of cognition resources (sensorial and logistic, rational, intellectual) and non-cognitive (affective, motivational, and personal) skill- and attitudes-related. The complex knowledge of the student aims at identifying positive

aspects and emphasizing them in school and extra-curricular education, with openness to the informal experience accumulated over time within the local educational community.

The economic, social, cultural, pedagogical premises that maintain inequality of education, cumulated and amplified over time are obvious within the phenomenon of the global crisis of education, a socio-pedagogical reality defined by Philip H. Coombs (1968). This operational concept, used in the education economy, education policy, education planning, education management, is "interpretable as a model of analyzing the premises of the reforms of the education systems in the modern society" (Cristea, 2015, pp. 685-692).

The expression of education world crisis, obvious in developed countries also, as it is shown by Philipp H. Coombs, has a structural and psycho-social nature.

The structural manifestation is proven at the level of functioning of the education systems in the modern society, having several contradictions that explain the phenomenon of inequality in education. Phillip H. Coombs highlights the contradictions between:

a) the "quantitative" influx of beneficiaries (pupils, students, etc.) to education, an expression of demand and of the high need for quality education, and the impossibility of the school to effectively deliver quality education in all fields and schools at all levels and educational phases, due not only to the "resource shortage" but also to the bad manner of capitalizing them;

b) the increasing mobility and dynamism of the global social system, of economic, political, cultural systems, etc., and the immobility, rigidity, lack of flexibility of education systems, unable to adapt to an economic, professional, cultural, political demographic world in constant change and transformation;

c) the rise of the real costs for each pupil, which means increased investment in education, and the inadequate results obtained over time, as the products of the educational system, the graduates, "do not meet the demands of the time and the circumstances in a very rapid evolution" and "they are also not properly used in a genuine development effort ";

d) the need to renew education and training practices and school inertia and efficiency where "academic sclerosis" and teacher traditionalism prolong conservatism, the decline of quality, "always acting as before with all the cries of alarm launched from all sides" (Coombs, 1968, pp. 240-243).

The psychosocial expression is the consequence of the intensification of these time-multiplied contradictions, which, through

pressure at the level of the collective subconscious, and also internalized at the level of pedagogical consciousness of society, generate the most serious world crisis of education, the crisis of mistrust in education itself (Coombs, 1989). Under these aggravated circumstances also by the cyclical resumption of sectoral crises (economic, political, financial, moral, etc.) with global effects, inequality in education is almost perceived as an objective phenomenon, hard to eradicate as long as "school continues to favor only children who have well-chosen their parents " (Phillip H. Coombs).

Recognizing the global education crisis, with its chronic manifestations of phenomenon of inequality in education, has stimulated the fundamental pedagogical research needed to develop viable solutions. The proposed projects are situated at two extremes which confront the solutions based on socio-pedagogical deconstruction, respectively those based on social-pedagogical reconstruction (Paun, 1982). The solutions based on socio-pedagogical deconstruction are radical solutions, inspired by the theory of de-schooling of society, which aims replacing the formal education system with a non-formal educational network of services (Illich, 1970). These solutions are remaining in the area of pedagogical utopia, on the historical line launched by J.J. Rousseau, beyond the pertinent criticisms and the didactic and extra-didactic innovation exercises, turned to account of realistic projects, based on the socio-pedagogical reconstruction of the education system, not on its destruction.

Solutions based on social-pedagogical reconstruction are reforming solutions initiated and promoted by UNESCO from the 1970s to the present. These solutions are referring to the modification of the functioning of the education system at its organizational, management, resources partition and society connective level. Such a complex reform (of reconstruction) is necessary in order to increase democratization and efficiency of modern education system through opening towards an "educative society", conceived as an "educative demos" (Faure, 1974; Lengrand, 1973). In the postmodern (contemporary), knowledge-based information society, such a reform must be positively felt at the level of education process through the consolidation of the values of education - which substantiates the school and university curriculum - defined in terms of competencies: to know (knowledge) To know how to do (abilities and skills); to be, to become, to work in a team (attitudes towards knowledge, society, community, learning, work, creation, etc.) (Delors, 2000).

The analysis of education reform results in globalized informational society is realized often from political and managerial perspective.

From a political perspective (education policy), the inequality issue corresponds, in many situations, to human rights legal support of the democratic process of modern education systems. At this level, there appears the risk of a rhetoric and only quantitative approach of school democratization issue (through access in entering the educational system), neglecting quality perspective (concerning the real school and social success of graduates),

From a managerial perspective, the inequality issue in education corresponds to the decentralization of the education system, associated with: a) "gradual withdrawal of state in favor of local communities"; b) the trend of "standardization" centered more on results "and less on equity issues"; c) the "market economy logic", which needs to be adapted to the pedagogical specificity of the school in order to avoid and eliminate the "marketization of the school" (Păun, 2017). At this level, there remains the risk of overlapping of economic function or even de political function of education system over the cultural function, specific to the education system. In extreme cases there may be resumed, with new shapes, the older technicity trends or even of ideologically ones, more or less hidden or transparent.

The reforming solution with chances in effective solving of the inequality issue in education is the one that emphasizes the pedagogical changing dimension, permanently connected to the general mission of school as promoter of culture and civilization. Thus is allowed the optimizing of the relations between equality, equity and quality promoting a common curriculum (core curriculum), build on a "common pillar of general knowledge" (Morandi & La Borderie, 2010), applied on permanent basis in schools which become mandatory, equally effective, pedagogically and socially, irrespective of the community environment (urban, rural, ethnic, inter-ethnic, etc.).

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