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A Comparison between Deep Patterns of Education within Reformative Views in Contemporary Romania with Respect to Critical Thinking and Philosophical Competencies

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Abstract: Modern education has definitely entered an "age of measurement", as educational specialist and philosopher Gert Biesta put it, and there is academic research that clearly shows that this operational and utilitarian shift comes with a cost as far as humanistic education and philosophical critical thinking is concerned. The implicit premise of this view is that every educational outcome can be properly measured and that every legit educational objective can be reframed as competence with components that can be properly measured. Moreover, these objectives are seen as attainable in principle through fully controllable processes that can be supervised and kept functional during every stage of their development. In this article, we argue that this view derives from a transfer of view and motives between the domains of entrepreneurship and education that this transfer, natural as can be in these times of scientific, technological and information-based times, affects some of more conservative aims of education and can be potentially harmful for critical thinking and active citizenship competencies. In Romania, we are facing a clear shift in paradigms, replacing a model that is in its deepest forms poetic, formative and magisterial with models that favour more entrepreneurial and quantitative approaches. These later models are in principle based on attaining critical thinking skills, but we shall argue in this article that, inside this paradigm of efficiency and measurement, critical thinking has limited powers and functions and that a mixed model, that is still based on humanistic views and it's dedicated to educational ideals that go further and deeper than entrepreneurial efficiency, is better suited for cultivating critical thinking.

Keywords: *critical thinking; critical thinking skills; critical mindset; deep patterns in reformative thinking; education; reformative views on education; philosophical competencies; Romania.*

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Schools caught in utilitarian and functionalist discourse

Schools are organizations that resemble entrepreneurial organizations in many ways. They aim to obtain definite results through different techniques and processes that are measurable, projectable and ameliorable. In the same time, schools can function as environments for innovation and some components of the educational systems can always be understood as being submitted to the logic of profit. In this article, I try to identify some deep patterns of this entrepreneurial approach in education and some fundamental assumptions connected to it and show that these assumptions affect the way in which we understand education and therefore the manners in which we form the students for understanding reality in a broad sense and act inside the social environments they live in. I also try to show that a model that does not fully identify education with entrepreneurial projects can satisfy a richer concept of education and, in the same time fundament a richer and more complex dialogue between education fields and the field of business and entrepreneurship. Speaking about Romania, we can say that the Romanian system is defined right now by a composite and in the same time revolute structure that is can be rooted in the communist system that, in theory, was preparing students to become part in an economical and social system that was in the same time monistic (not pluralistic) and humanist, as communism was seeing itself as the final form of an Enlighted humanism. Right in this moment, after thirty years from the anti-Communist revolution, the educational system In Romania still seeks its way out of this social ontology, trying to connect to a postmodern world that is simultaneously pluralistic, ultra technological, plurimodal in learning and relativistic. In this development, one model that the Romanian system aims to is the entrepreneurial one, with its unfatigued obsession for measurement and amelioration.

Schools are organically connected to labour market and are nevertheless organizations that use internally entrepreneurial procedures, so it is only natural to assume that they will be run using modern entrepreneurial concepts and it is also safe to think that this affinity in nature will be reflected in the concept of education societies use and try to follow into practice. In the same time, there have been various theorists who argued that such a concept of education would a be a narrow one and would leave aside important functions that education had over the last two centuries (Biesta, 2010, 2014; Jantsch, 1968; Delvaux et al., 2015, pp. 118-119: Păun, 2017, 2022). Particularly, the distinguished author and theorist, Gert J.J. Biesta has run a deep analysis of the phenomena related to this narrowing in

the meaning of education, showing that, in the last years, the notion of accountability has "transformed from a professional and democratic notion to one that is fundamentally managerial." (Biesta, 2010, p. 6). For Biesta, a decisive precursor of these developments can be identified in the research that has been made on school effectiveness, which led to "a more narrow view of relevant outcomes and outputs (Biesta, 2010, p. 11). Other important arguments have been sustained in this book: this culture of measuring relies solely on *technical validity* while letting aside *normative validity*, the focus put on an instrumental values such as effectiveness, the societal lack of attention to the fundamentally philosophical question about what constitutes good education, the commonsensical view about what is important in education which mainly reproduce economical inequalities, the problematic replacing in the last years of the fundamental concept of education with the concept of learning and so on. On the other hand, it is important to ask ourselves if entrepreneurial models are benefic for democracy and democratic values understood as core values of our societies (Apple et al., 2022). In the same book (Biesta, 2010, p. 14), Biesta shows that, in modern times, education has fulfilled three main functions: a) preparing the student for labour market, getting him qualifications that will make him apt for earning his leaving and being useful to the society as a whole, a function that is called *qualification*; b) socializing the student, making him assimilate the values of societies and the norms of behaviour that are agreed inside society, a function that is called *socialization*; c) individuation (helping the student become a subject with interiority, an ability for introspection and a depth of consciousness, understood as a virtual place of deliberation and understanding critically in the same time personal behaviour, values and decisions and the values of the society as a whole, a function called *subjectification.* I would like to point out that a hidden premise of most educational theories is that these three dimensions can be harmonized and that every dimension enforces and sustains the others, but I would like to argue that between these dimensions we have various important tensions and the way these tensions are solved endemically affect the concept of education in itself and the main educational practices. Actually, Biesta shows that "the subjectification function might perhaps be understood as the opposite of the socialization function." (Biesta, 2010, p. 21). As it is described by the author, subjectification is not about getting inside into a social order but rather staying partly outside the social order the system of education reproduces and thinking and acting critically about it. In this, the subjectification function goes back to extremely venerable forms of instruction, such as philosophical instruction. We`ll get back to this. Among

Romanian theorists, Emil Păun developed extensive critiques towards these all-encompassing cultures of measurement and accountability. In his 2017 book, *Pedagogie: provocări şi dileme privind şcoala şi profesia didactică*, Păun argues that the neoliberal mindset that has invaded the educational space from the last decades of the XX century means in the same time a diminution and a shift in the relationship between the several functions school must have. Remarkably, he argued that in this entrepreneurial view, school is seen as fundamentally passive in the relationship with society, as it is asked only to deliver human products for the society`s needs. Schools aren`t just passive institutions for fulfilling the needs of the society, they are also active actors in the social field, dynamic creators of values and normative poles of human life (Păun, 2017, pp. 119-122; Senge, 2016). In his 2022 article "Viitorul şcolii sau şcoala viitorului", Păun shows that schools shouldn`t become "accounting projects" but become again "cultural ones". Entrepreneurial values such as seeking for profit, performance, efficiency can actively come into opposition with cultural values such as solidarity, self-development, cooperation (Carpentier, 2008, p. 16). Returning to Gert Biesta`s distinctions, it can be asserted that the tripartite model we have been invoking reflects in the agenda of different European and world wide models of education that are based on western democratic values. In Romania, this development is apparent in the fact that "Romania educată", the most important reformative document in the last ten years has made clear this preference for entrepreneurial and democratic model.[1]

So, the first function is to prepare student for labour market, autonomy and flexibility in a globalized and permanently changing world, in this sense, a rethinking of the principles on which the training process is based is needed (Mihail, 2022).Therefore in Europe, we can see that the values education is based on in this regard are the values of *The Treaty on European Union*, amended by *Treaty of Lisbon*[2], according to which "the Union is based on the common values and general principles of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities, stipulated in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union". But, still, the economic function in education remains the main one is defined by several fundamental documents such as *The European Framework for Key Competences for Lifelong Learning*[3], *Europe 2020 Strategy*[4] and others. In the same time, OCDE

[1] http://www.romaniaeducata.eu/

[2] https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex:12007L/TXT

[3] https://op.europa.eu/ro/publication-detail/-/publication/297a33c8-a1f3-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en

is developing project *Education 2030*, that is also a model based on competences.[5] On the other hand, UNESCO is developing its own educational lines based on principles that are rather cultural and societal than economic. Păun goes as far as saying that, in the contemporary world, we have basically two different models for understanding education: the EU + OCDE model and the UNESCO model, based on sustainable development[6] (Păun, 2022, p. 62). Of course, things are quite simple as a competence model is also culturally charged, value-based and it is rooted in a philosophical and cultural vision of the world. Competences shouldn`t be understood as solely economic competences or transmissible skills. They are dynamic, multimodal and multidimensional intellectual artifacts which include knowledge, attitudes, values and skills. But, as several researchers argued, the concept of knowledge is used differently in a competence-based model than in a knowledge-based and cultural vision of education (see the very interesting discussion in (Ungureanu, 2022, pp. 206-217). Although the discussion on competences is complex, we can affirm that the competence model is sensibly coherent with a utilitarian and economic view of education (Ungureanu, 2022; Muller, 2000; Tahirsylaj & Sundberg, 2020).

We can therefore drive some conclusions from this quick survey that are relevant for the present situation, but especially for the pre-pandemic situation. We shall see shortly how the pandemics changed things and how we can find certain opportunities for developing a larger and a more generous concept of education in the years to come:

a) Modern education in the western world has been linked since the Industrial Revolution with the economic and entrepreneurial discourse, a development that haven`t changed until recently;
b) This entrepreneurial shift in education has become increasingly powerful coming to put the other educational functions in a subordinate position;
c) The transfer of the entrepreneurial mindset and tools to schools understood as social organizations have had powerful and meaningful impact on the ways education is understood and on almost all meaningful educational processes;
d) We cannot and shouldn`t put entrepreneurial and economic discourse and methods aside, but, in the context of post-pandemic world an in the larger context of postmodernity, we

[4] https://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLET%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf
[5] https://apa.sdg4education2030.org/education-2030-framework-action
[6] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sustainable_development

shall rethink the meaning and functions of education and the relations between the various components of educational practice.

The post-pandemic world

Most of the critiques to the entrepreneurial model mentioned in this article have been phrased before the pandemics. I think this has a lot to do with the dynamics of postmodern world, which has been characterized by A. Hargreaves by several characteristics: a) occupational flexibility and technological complexity; b) globalization of economies, exchanges and communications that essentially collide with fixed identities, including national ones; c) moral and scientific uncertainty; d) organizational fluidity; e) personal anxiety and the need for authenticity; f) the emergence of a world of simulacra; g) the compression of time and space (Hargreaves as cited in Păun, 2017, pp. 115-116). Postmodern space, defined by intrinsic pluralism, including axiological pluralism and deep experimentalism is a space where it is problematic if a single narrative on education can be sustained, be it the pragmatic one or other narratives. To this, we can add the enormous changes that the pandemic brought, which have changed the numerous faces of education and nevertheless the ontology and epistemology of traditional learning (Oancea, 2016). The impact of the lack of critical thinking skills on the appropriate approach to uncertainty (Rotilă, 2021) and vaccination (Rotilă, 2022) offers new guiding criteria in rethinking the goals of education. In the final paragraphs, I will try to argue that the pluralistic space of postmodern world is an enormous opportunity for reinventing education as an assembly of non-uniform forms of education and for bringing back to life educational practices that have been forgotten. I will use philosophy as a case study.

The novelty of the old: philosophy and critical thinking

We should notice that, across the ages, in the Western society we cannot find a fixed and unchanged concept of education and that it is only a feature of the modern liberal educational systems to sustain all the three functions (Biesta, 2010; Păun, 2017; Cucoș, 2017). For example, in the Greek and Roman antiquity we see the socializing function treated as the main function of education (Marrou, 1997). In the same time, we can see in this period philosophical education emerging as a fundamental form of subject-education (the term I will use for the third function of education), a process that will come to culmination in the Hellenistic period, when

philosophy came to be understood as a form of self-building based upon spiritual exercises (Hadot, 1997) or techniques of the self (Foucault, 2013; Iftode, 2022). So, we can see that one of the most venerated cultural traditions of the West assumes a form of education that has a complex relationship with the socializing functions. All these philosophical models being in themselves Socratic entertain with the mainstream values of the society a tensed relationship: on the one hand, philosophizing means from the start a certain acceptance of the values of the society as only certain societies enforce the critical thinking that is involved in philosophy (Socrates choses to respect the laws of his polis after all), on the other hand the philosophical discourse has certain characteristics that put him in raw opposition to the models accepted by society: a) first of all, philosophical discourse assumes that there is no higher authority than the truth and that the only way of deciding against or for a certain value or model of life (as for the structure of nature in itself) is by arguments; b) although is always historically and culturally predefined, the philosophical clash of arguments requires a neutral logical space that can be understood as a court of reason where everything can be questioned, even the value of questioning itself; c) philosophical discourse presupposes that all dimensions (cognitive, social and personal) are relevant to education and therefore that there is a deep connection that goes both ways between the truth (or the searching of it), the social role the philosopher is playing and the personal Bildung of the student (Nussbaum, 2022). I want to add that the philosophical education, by discovering and socially constructing the ego as an object for knowledge and self-discovering, have put in the heart of any pedagogical theory that counts the very possibility of questioning the model itself. I think that the deep patterns in modern theories of education in the same time reflect but in the same time re-evaluate antique schemes. I think that postmodern space opens up both a new space for philosophical and critical thinking, but both a place for authenticity and self-creation in an aesthetic, non-metaphysical manner (Iftode, 2021; Iftode et al., 2022). In Romania, philosophical education is marginal at this moment, as, although is *de jure* connected to its implicit axiology, it is not de facto connected to it. If our analysis is correct, we can expect that in the following years its role will remain marginal or it will be reinterpreted in the light of the cultural passing to entrepreneurial views as we described it.

Conclusions

Romania, as a country that both adopted the European Model of Competences and the UNESCO Model of sustainable development has the chance to choose in its reformative efforts between the various models of education that are available, using in the same time the institutional experience of Europe and of the Western World. Romanian education stands now at the crossroads, trying to connect to modern technologies and the latest know how in educational field to objectives stated in national strategies and laws of education. Developing transversal competencies like critical thinking is inseparable from adopting deep patterns of educational interaction and a holistic view of instructional processes that cannot be reduced to deep patterns of entrepreneurship. We strongly believe that Romanian reforms shouldn`t be uncritically mimetic but take into account both global exigencies and local and endemic particularities of Eastern Europe and that that critical thinking is inseparable from all these developments. If we accept that Romania is situated, from the perspective of mentality, between the West and the rest of the world (Rotilă, 2015) then probably the approach of critical thinking skills should share a similar situation. Nevertheless, we consider critical thinking as inseparable from larger philosophical competencies.

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