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Contemporary modern industrial societies and the role of education

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Abstract

Education proves to be one of the deciding factors in the development of an individual and society. In modern industrial societies the state provides every citizen with the right to education. For that aim formal institutions are organized where education is carried out systematically and on a professional level. Education today, as a rule, is general, obligatory and in principle free. You could say that the ideology of mass education is one of the key segments of the ideology of mass society. It is based on the assumption that all people have equal chances of success and that the school stimulates individuals in general to develop their intellectual, emotional, ethical and aesthetic abilities and characteristics, through a system of fair competition and objective evaluation, in which success in passing the prescribed examinations should be the basis for the distribution of social roles and social status.

Keywords: education; society; school; culture.

Education and upbringing are fundamental social processes in the creation of man and humanity on which the continuity of culture and the fate of humanity and of each individual depend. These are processes that are both expressions of human nature and of human existence. Without education and upbringing, the entire culture and civilization would have remained dead, in front of which, if he could exist, the man of the future would pass without any knowledge and understanding. Human potential, above all creativity, can develop only within the processes of education and upbringing, or, in the context of human practice, it is about social mediation between an individual and culture.

The evolution of education changed from insufficiently institutionalized towards fully institutionalized forms, from exclusivity to large scale popularity, from its marginal importance for social roles and status to its direct and decisive influence in the distribution of social roles and meeting social status.

In the beginning education was almost exclusively general, classical and humanistic, unproductive because it could have been afforded only by the highest social strata, to which it was the hallmark of their elite status. Afterwards education was put into the function of education of the governing elite.

The decisive step in the development of education was made at the time when it began systematically and continuously to take place in schools as specialized institutions, where knowledge and skills required for the performance of social roles and holding social positions are acquired, based on socially verified professional qualifications, which in itself implies adoption of knowledge, as well as building of the people's characters. That decisive qualitative leap took place in the West after the establishment of civic society, when the rapid development of natural and technical sciences started, the results of which are directly applied in practice and thus make a huge contribution to the fast-paced social development. Education is increasingly becoming large-scaled, closely-vocational and continuous. Simultaneously, it is becoming more important for the social status of individuals and social groups.

Education is thus seen as one of the decisive factors in the development of the individual and the society. In a modern industrial society the state provides the right to education to each citizen. For that purpose, formal institutions are organized in which education is carried out systematically and on a professional level. Education today, as a rule, is compulsory and generally free. It can be said that the ideology of the mass education is one of the key segments of the ideology of a mass society. It is based on the assumption that all people have equal chances of success and that school stimulates individuals to develop their intellectual, emotional, ethical and aesthetic abilities and characteristics as a whole, through a system of righteous competition and objective evaluation, in which the success in passing the prescribed examinations should be the basis for the distribution of the social roles and the social positions.

Critically oriented research, however, shows that with knowledge dominant social values are transferred too, and thus the desired type of personality is formed. Despite the fact that talented and diligent individuals are given the chance to succeed in life, education still proves to be a major asset not only for reproduction of the labor force but also of the social strata. Some studies warn of the fact that even in developed industrial societies, success in education and profession are much more connected with family background than with talent and quality. So the children of rich and powerful people acquire high skills more easily and get well-paid jobs much faster than children of poor and less powerful people, without taking into account their abilities. Actually, this fact is concealed with the worldwide myth of "meritocracy".

All this puts school in the forefront. As a relatively old and important institution, school can be analyzed from many angles and at more levels.

First, above all, school can be observed as an institution that transfers knowledge and skills to people in an organized and systematic way, developing their interests and abilities, primarily through the change of performance of professional roles, including the issuance of formal and socially recognized evidence of the necessary qualifications for successful performance of professional activity.

Furthermore, school can be observed as a powerful tool in the hands of society, i.e. as a means by which those who dominate the society realize their interests, not only by creating a kind of the required professional manpower, but also by shaping the desired type of personality who expresses readiness to give the society the knowledge and abilities in a mutually agreed relationship, and in return they receive from it material compensation and spiritual satisfaction.

School is also shown to be a significant tool in the hands of family and family groups, who, according to their own objectives, seek to ensure the future of their children, which in turn, to some extent, should ensure reproduction of social structure in a relatively unchanged form.

The school also can be observed as a significant channel for vertical social mobility and an indication of the openness of a society which does not allow the social structure to get completely embedded. Among personal aspirations, family goals and community needs it enables the transfer of capable individuals from a lower into a higher social strata, which encourages social development, but also stabilizes the existing order.

School, finally, can be observed as a relatively independent institution and organization that following certain enlightenment - rationalist ideals and hiding behind them, retains hierarchy and authoritarianism as its essential characteristics, then through forced processes of success - reward and failure - punishment establishes a standard type of personality which is characterized by obedience, discipline, diligence and value, thus creating "neat people" who without resistance accept their social roles and also without resistance take their assigned positions. Authoritarian training, passive and mechanical memorization of stipulated facts, the diploma as an ultimate goal of any educational process - all this should create a quiet useful expert whose professional knowledge will come to its true expression only if they are affiliated with cooperativeness and obedience.

Because of such nature school was under attack of fierce criticism. Its most radical critic, Austrian sociologist Ivan Illich, published the book "Down with schools" at the beginning of the seventies of the XX century. He proposes society to be without schools, because most people acquire knowledge outside school. Ivan Illich is of the opinion that school does not satisfy the educational ideals, and that it remained a repressive institution which indoctrinates students, stifles their creativity and turns them into conformists who calmly accept the interests of the powerful.

According to Ivan Ilich, the essence of education is in research, creativity and personal initiative. The individual should explore, create, use his/her own initiative and reasoning, and freely and fully develop his/her abilities and talents. These educational ideals, according to his opinion, cannot be met by school because it is a repressive institution that indoctrinates students, suppresses their creativity and imagination, it imposes conformity and makes them grow stupid, and so, eventually, they are willing to accept the ruling social order and serve the interests of the powerful.

Michelle Lobro and other significant researchers pointed to the negative dimensions of schools. He pointed to the difference between manifest (adaptation of a young man in society) and latent (pressure on a young child to accept the desirable ideas and values) features, after which the child usually gets negative experience in work, in interrelationships with people, which in a certain sense diverts it from work, learning and people.

Based on all this Lobro is of the opinion that school is now seen as something foreign and external. School is belittled and despised and, with it, every intellectual effort and spiritual life also become unwanted, which is manifested in the disgust towards everything that is abstract and theoretical and has the character of instruction. School causes weariness and repulsion and contributes to perceiving human relations essentially as authoritarian. The school system is contributing to the increasing fear of school, thus creating specific mechanisms of defense which in later life are often manifested in the form of a dependent and authoritarian behavior.

Michelle Lobro Ivan Ilich and other researchers rightly pointed to the negative side of institutional education in contemporary society and thus they contributed to the rejection of the enlightenment - rationalist ideologized misconceptions about school as "shrines of knowledge" and enlightenment centers, and about people in school as an embodiment of spirituality. Their criticism contributed significantly to the start of serious consideration of the long-term and gradual change of the situation in education. That does not necessarily mean that changes will be fundamental and take place without resistance and wondering.

However, such radical demands contain a utopian dimension within. Because the gist of the problem lies in the basic assumptions on which modern industrial societies rely, and they cannot directly change with the changes in the educational system which is only one derivative of such societies.

In order for school to meet the challenges of time, to overcome its own rigidity and formalism, to get out of the pattern and face the truths of life and with tolerance also enable children and young people to express the necessary full social and civilizational changes. The road to the new society is mediated by culture. Therefore, the today's young generation has the civilizational task and a moral obligation to create a new culture. And that assumes a critical valorization of the current values and benefits of industrial civilization.

Culture, however, is the result of education, in the same manner as education, on the other hand, is the constitutive factor and instigator of cultural change and the spread of culture, but with a possibility to sometimes impoverish and suppress it. This is especially seen today when analyzing school curricula that are full of technical and economic content at the expense of cultural contents and artistic and humanistic education. Based on all this, there is general agreement that schools should be open for the contents of culture, that it should be removed from the pragmatic education that insists on the division into humanities and natural-scientific contents, and to make it sensitive to the needs of local, national and global culture.

Today two directions in the culture of the modern world whose dilemma should be resolved in the 21st century have been crystallized as follows: on one hand the growing globalization of culture and education, and on the other the need to protect diversity of culture. Education must nurture multiculturalism, understanding and tolerance between cultures in the world that lives in more interdependence.

Because of all this education today must be conceived more broadly in relation to culture. The expansion of media culture makes our organization of knowledge and our systems of communication systems completely obsolete. Today knowledge is acquired more outside classroom than inside it, and education is increasingly interlacing with work and continues throughout life.

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