Sociological Perspective of Changing Education

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ABSTRACT

From the sociological point of view, education means the process of the development of the character and personality of the individual by means of the social life obtaining in social institutions. The situations that arise in society stimulate the powers of the child and this stimulation brings about his/her education. Besides being a process of bringing about certain modifications in the behavior of the child, education is also a means of bringing about certain changes in the life of the society itself. In other sense education is the process of 'social learning' which is the result of social interaction and which in turn produces social interaction. It is the educative process which depends on the individual learning and the changes in group behavior through social interaction. The field of education is constantly shifting in accordance with changing economic conditions, demographic data, technological advances, and political debates. These drivers change the ways in which educationists and policy makers must conceptualize and ultimately construct curriculum and assessment. Current education practices need to consider the possible ways that future educational systems can meet, address, and re-envision the concept of education into the next 50 years. This paper attempts to outline the changes in the ways we need to think about education, highlights the possible future conditions that these new ways of thinking create, and conceptualizes a future for education and testing that reconciles new realities with assessment practices.

Keywords: Sociology of education, Education and Social Changes, Changing Paradigm of education, New Trends in education

The sociological approach consists in interpreting the facts and phenomena of man's life 'sociologically' *i.e.* as products of social influences. It seeks to explain the growth and development, the conduct and behavior, the character and personality of the individual as products of social forces and influences. As we observe that, the life and personality of an individual are influenced by the group in which he/she is born and brought up. The home, the church, the gang, the press, all contribute to the mental and moral make-up of the individual. In this way it is quite possible to allocate to the various social agencies their respective shares in the constitution and development of the individual. This point of view can be described as the 'sociological approach'. For example, the existence of a school can be explained in various ways. One may interpret it as a result of the governmental action. Another may explain it as the result of the munificence of a philanthropist. The third observer may interpret it as the effect of the growing educational needs of the community. The last explanation would be sociological. The sociologist applies his interpretation to various facts and phenomena of human life, *e.g.* the fashions of dress, modes of speech, methods of business, growth of civilization, customs of marriage, forms of architecture, etc. He tries to explain them as effects of the social factors- ideas and institutions existing in a community. He also applies his method of interpretation to education and tries to explain the existing system of education as a product of the social factors and influences. This is the sociological approach.

Sociological Approach to Education

Education is a means of the development of the individual. It seeks to impart to the individual all

those attitudes, interests and modes of behavior which enjoy the approval of the society. It transmits the culture of the community to the individual. As such, education is a process of a great sociological importance, and it can admit of a sociological interpretation and approach. There is no denying the fact that education is, at the same time, a means of bringing about certain changes in the life of the community as well. Thus education is a source of the development of the society as much as of that of the individual. Sociology attempts to explain as a result of social forces and influences. It tries to attribute the whole system of education- the construction of the curriculum, the methods of teaching, the system of examinations, the co-curricular activities, etc. to cultural factors and social institutions. It believes that education is a social process and it is in and through the total social *milieu* that the learning process is carried out. Thus it is important to study the influence of social life and social relationships in the education and development of the personality of the child. The sociological approach to education differs from the individual approach made by the psychologist and the biologist. Psychology attempts to study and explain the development of an individual and his learning with a reference to the factors existing in himself, his instincts, impulses, etc. Similarly biology attempts to explain the development of the individual as a result of his biological heredity, his organism. The outlook of the sociologist is radically different from that of the psychologist or the biologist.

Education and society

Education, as we have seen, is a process of bringing about certain changes and modifications in the behavior of the individual. Do these changes mean any changes and every changes? Certainly not. The changes and modifications that the educator decides to bring about in the individual are not any arbitrary changes but some 'deliberately planned' changes. The educator decides beforehand what changes and modifications he wants to bring about in the behavior of his pupil. How does the educator decide about these behavioral changes? Not in vacuum. Not by himself, haphazardly and arbitrarily. He bases his decision on certain considerations, and certain standards. He assesses the physical and mental capacities of the child and generalizes

about the changes that can possibly he brought about in him. This is the psychological standard or consideration. Similarly education is determined by the political and economic conditions obtaining in the country. A wealthy community may plan a costly system of education, while a poor community is bound to decide upon cheap education. While an agricultural community would need one type of education, an industrially advanced community would need an altogether different one. Likewise a free country needs one kind of education and a slave country would have a different one.

Religious ideas and inventions of science influence the system of education no less. More than the consideration of the child's native endowment the educator is guided by the consideration of the needs of his community. The educator is an agent and missionary of the community; the community is the taskmaster and paymaster of the educator; the educator has to dance to the tune of the society and carry out its mission. He is charged with the responsibility of modifying the pliable child into a serviceable member of his community. The community dictates to the educator certain standards of cultural life and requires him to 'socialize' the educed into these standards. Thus, more than anything else, it is society and its cultural needs that lay down the educational standards, the subjects to be taught and the methods to be followed by the teacher for educating the pupil. For every discussion of a new movement in education, it is especially necessary, according to Dewey, "to take the broader or social view, otherwise changes in the school institution and tradition will be looked at as the arbitrary inventions of particular teachers…. The modification going on in the method and curriculum of education is as much a product of the changed social situation, as much an effort to meet the needs of the new society that is forming as are changes in the modes of industry and commerce,"

Classroom in New Times

The introduction of technology into the classroom is changing the nature of delivering education to students, is gradually giving way to a new form of electronic literacy, more programs. Education materials are made available in electronic form, teachers are preparing materials in electronic form; and students are also generating papers,

assignments and projects in electronic form". Video projection screens, books with storage device servers and CD ROMs as well as the emergence of on-line digital libraries are now replacing blackboards. Even exams and grades are gradually becoming available through electronic means and notebooks are starting to give way to laptops. Also, students can be examined through computer managed learning systems and do tutorial exercises on a computer rather than in a classroom. Such developments in education portray that there has been a shift from

Industrialization to information-based societies. Subsequently, technology is foreseeing a change in the education environment towards a reliance on electronic sources to deliver material. With such changes and the emergence of video conferencing and the Internet, the barriers of distance are being broken down at a rapid rate, due to the key aspect of globalization. Children and adults can now learn in a variety of ways and no longer have to be physically present in an education institution in order to learn, a definite advantage of flexible delivery systems. It allows for exploration of new areas of learning and thinking. The rapid growth of television services, with their immense influence as media of mass communication, has been very relevant in the technological shift. Other large contributions to this shift include the transistor and space satellites. Communication and information based technology over the years is the Internet, which is a massive network of computers located throughout the world. These computers maintain libraries of text, images, computer software, and other forms of data that can be accessed by anyone, anywhere, at any time. This implementation of technology and communication to be successful and to educate a society, both the students and teachers need to be technologically literate. Communication technology is offering new challenges for students of all abilities as they can discuss issues of concern with their fellow students from around the world, thus developing communication and interpersonal skills, fostering a mutual understanding across countries and cultures. Developments in the delivery of education is allowing for individuals to explore new areas of learning and thinking that could not be done with pen and paper. They are discovering knowledge through inquiry and experimentation rather than memorizing facts in a teacher dominated classroom setting. In fact, students no longer need to be physically present to learn as education material is becoming readily available over the Internet, through video conferencing, and tape recordings. Institutions are now turning towards the use of the Internet to deliver courses to students. A shift in education is becoming evident where more responsibility is being placed on the individual for his or her learning, instead of solely on the teacher. Subsequently, the teachers themselves also need to be highly technologically literate, needing the competence and confidence to prepare students for a global information society.

Changing Educational Scenario

"The relationship between the school and the community will depend very much on the type of social relationships prevailing in the country concerned. In a closed and hierarchically segmented society, it will be very difficult to establish participatory relationships between the school and the community. (Hallak, 1992:9)

In order to change, institutions must want to change. Clearly, many innovations related to increased collaboration in education have been successful because individual schools, clusters, and administration wanted to provide better education and were willing to work collaboratively to achieve it. More particularly, the following norms and the resulting administrative 'climate' seem to be critical in the development of more participatory approaches to education.

Institutional and individual openness

The institutional and individual openness means openness to the outside world, to new ideas and new ways of doing things, and to change. Such openness should characterize individual schools and their staff, the education system and the administration which supports it, and ultimately the national political and cultural environment.

(a) The national political and cultural environment

Nations differ in the extent to which a dominant cultures and the existing political and social system permit or welcome pluralism involvement with the world outside of their borders, unfettered research and the free exchange of ideas and information within and across society, and experimentation with

innovative approaches to the solution of traditional problems. They differ particularly in regard to the kind of structural openness permitted; e.g., laws and practice related to the existence and nature of political parties, non-government organizations, and civic associations.

It is important to make clear that any description of the relative openness of a system should not be done judgmentally. Different cultures and political systems, at different periods in their evolution, are characterized by different degrees of complexity and stability. They therefore have, and require, different degrees of openness, transparency, permeability, and flexibility. These differences are reflected in a variety of political and bureaucratic systems. The important thing for policy-makers and planners wishing to facilitate more participatory approaches to educational development is to recognize the nature of the systems in which they work, to be able to analyze the current 'openness' of these systems as characterized above, and to see where and when 'space' exists for an expansion of participation and collaboration in education.

(b) The education system

Within a given society, individual systems and sectors both reflect the nature of the macro-political and cultural system and may differ within it. Bureaucracies and institutions carry their own socio-cultural norms and reflect different levels of openness, transparency, permeability, flexibility, and 'readiness' for change. They have different capacities to adapt and adopt new forms of work behavior, new skills, and new ways of relating to others, and different abilities in gathering, listening to, and being influenced by new ideas and actors inside and outside their particular system. Such different capacities may derive from historical factors (e.g., the legacy of the colonial period and whatever reactions to this period ensued during the move toward independence). The education system, as often a major 'holdover' from a colonial administration, may be particularly influenced by this legacy. Especially important in the analysis of the openness of the education system are four things:

❐ The extent of openness to input from, and collaboration with, other sectors of development, such as health and agriculture;

❐ The extent of openness to ideas and actors at

lower levels of the system (at the district office, clusters, and schools) where genuine change needs to take place;

❐ The extent of the system's adaptability to the local context in which education takes place to working towards a match between delivery content of schooling and local values and needs, economic constraints and cultures; in other words, a willingness on the part of the system's managers to "modify their conceptions of what a school must be like" (Williams, J. 1992:55); and

❐ The extent of openness to change and innovation. In this regard, a system can more actively publicize the need for innovations, loosen regulations that prevent them, actively hunt for innovations, stress the need for innovation in training programmes, provide incentives for innovations in the system's career track, and make available small grants to start innovations and facilitate expansion of small-scale projects (Williams, J. 1992).

(c) Schools

"Schools, in the pursuit of excellence and relevance, should be encouraged to develop a more complex picture of their community. On the one hand are the parents who supply children. On the other hand are firms and government services which will employ the graduates of the school system. Both parties should be invited into the schooling process as supporters and decision- makers" (Cummings, 1992:27).

Individual schools, too, can reflect, and also differ from, the dominant political and administrative behaviour of a given society. The extent of this reflection or difference can depend both upon the particular a region or area in which they exist, and also, very much, on the particular personalities of the school personnel. There are several important issues in this regard, including the extent to which schools:

❐ are 'welcoming' to parents and the community and seek to have a dialogue with them in order to understand each other's conditions and needs, or rather 'disqualify' community experience and so are seen as places to which parents 'surrender' their children at the age of school entrance;

- are open to the "gaze, support, and appropriate intervention" of parents and the community (Naik 1991:104);

- are 'permeable' listen to, accept, adapt, and experiment with ideas coming from other sources, especially those which may be more non-formal or non-traditional in approach; and

- get involved with the community, other educational programmes, and other development sectors.

One potential benefit of opening the school to the community is to establish more clearly and directly the link between good education and greater parental and community demand and support for education.

Inventory of Emerging and Anticipated 21ˢᵗ Century Concerns

The education enterprise and its processes are very likely to continue to change in the 21ˢᵗ century in response to and in incorporation with several concerns, including:

- The many major developments in measurement theory and technology over the past century;

- Emerging technologies for the amplification of human senses and the capacities of the human mind and body;

- The declining centrality of long-term memory and recall in an age of electronic access to and processing of information;

- Changing conceptions of the transactions by which teaching and learning proceed;

- Growing recognition of the importance of attributional, existential and transformational processes to human behavior, consciousness and intentional performances;

- Recognition that all life experiences are educative and productive and should be assessed;

- The continuum of knowing, understanding, adjudicating relationships, reconciling contradiction, judging, and acting wisely;

- Growing awareness of the roles of context, situation, empathy, compassion and perspective in human learning, thought and performance;

- Recognizing the tension between using

assessments for accountability and using assessments in developing teaching and learning strategies, and emphasizing these latter purposes more;

- The growing use of assessments in summative evaluations and their decreasing role in providing information for the improvement of teaching and learning, and formative evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

Education is a preparation for life. It has to enable the individual to adjust himself to his society and live a happy and successful life. It does so by training him for the ideals and values accepted by his society. Certain values, beliefs and attitudes are accepted as supremely desirable by the society. Therefore all its members have to accept them as most highly valuable. They have to realize them. The educator teaches them and enables them to realize them. Thus education is a means to train the individuals to realize the socially accepted values. Society, specially in the modern times, is dynamic. It is changing constantly. Social changes may be political, economic, moral, religious, or scientific. Social values are also not static. They are constantly changing. New values are visualized and created. Some of the existing values may be discarded. Education has to model and re-model itself according to the changes in the social appraisal of values. Educators should plan their school curricula and programmes in such a way that they should encourage a critical appraisal of the existing cultural pattern with a view to improving it. Certain new subjects may have to be introduced in the school curriculum because their study is indispensable for the realization of certain new values. In this way, a change in the cultural life of a society necessitates corresponding changes in the system of education. Educational systems are built for a time, not for all time.

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