The Concept of Citizenship in the Educational System and the Views of Critical Pedagogy

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Abstract: In this paper, reference will be made to the definition and purpose of citizenship education, which aims to create active citizens. We will also refer to the critique of the theory of Critical Pedagogy and its most important representatives in the concept of citizenship. The representatives of Critical Pedagogy perceive the school as a place of reproduction of social relations, but at the same time as a place of resistance and change. Our questions are whether it is possible for citizen education to lead to social change and whether students' intellectual alertness also means that students take social action. After all, is Critical Pedagogy a vision or does it have a practical basis?

Key words: critical pedagogy, education, economics, politics, society

1. Introduction

A closer look at today's societies reveals that they are at a critical juncture, due to the crisis they are experiencing in many areas and the changes taking place in areas such as politics and the economy. This situation works erosive and touches the field of education. Human relationships, as well as educational structures, are complex, as evidenced by the behavior of young people, which is largely contradictory. People are no longer concerned with the commons, they are no longer active citizens, they are indifferent to the common good and they are dominated by conformity, since they are only interested in the individual benefit. In this context, the question arises how this situation can change and of course how it is possible for citizens to be active and gain vigilance.

The answer is through education. Education has a dual purpose, as it aims at the integration and development of the character of individuals, but also at the continuation and development of society. It seeks to socialize young people and integrate them harmoniously into society as a whole, while imparting knowledge about the laws, sciences and values of a given society. Through education, the student is immersed in the principles and values that structure his status as a citizen of a democratic society. Education develops in young people the attitudes, knowledge and skills that are necessary to fully meet the obligations arising from their role as citizens, such as being able to make the right decisions, be responsible and assertive their rights (Dimitrakopoulou, 2022).

Often, however, questions arise about the type of citizen and the characteristics to be embraced. This means that there are disagreements about the qualities of a good citizen and of course about the type and methods of his education by the political system. Modern societies, due to the prevailing economic conditions, suggest the utilitarian dimension of education and provide students with the necessary knowledge to integrate into the

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productive process, marginalizing the humanitarian aspect of education. Students are now receiving sterile and barren knowledge, which leads us to realize that the school is facing problems, essentially reflecting the problems of society itself (Communs, 2010).

2. Citizenship and Education

Nowadays, due to the enforcement of the rules of globalization in the economic and political field, states are reorganizing their education systems in order to meet the new requirements. In this context, students must prepare for a society that is resilient to international competition and, at the same time, meets the needs for the survival of the nation-state. Of course, many important questions arise, concerning the degree of influence of globalization on education, the form of the state we seek, the relationship of society with the citizen, the principles that will permeate the education system and whether or not the state will impose on the reception educational decisions. There are differing views on the extent of the impact of globalization on education. On the one hand, it is stated that, due to the high level of specialization, education must contribute to the creation of productive and efficient workers, without of course high financial demands. On the other hand, it is argued that the lack of flexibility in the education system does not favor adaptation to developments and it is argued that the state is now playing a new role. From the above we understand that public education contains a class orientation and through it knowledge is recycled. The imposition of financial conditions is achieved through education and, as Th. Adorno (2000) states, governments activate through their educational policy a class-based program that not only adapts and regulates students to become "good children", but which determines who will be the future overseers of the unequal distribution of financial resources, with the ultimate goal of reproducing narcissistic satisfaction and unilateral concentration of power in order to maintain the global market economy.

The promotion of economic development through education is not automatically linked to the promotion of democracy or the cultivation of a healthy, educated population through public participation and the exercise of power, which means that opportunities for a good life are not available to all social classes. It has been observed that many countries have specialized personnel in technology or business administration, but a large part of the population is illiterate. In other words, education for economic development requires specific skills, which are not synonymous with access to education for all citizens. That is, there are countries with high GDP or at least aiming to increase it, but at the same time there are large educational inequalities between citizens, which mean that elite with technological and business skills has been created and a very large part of the population lacks basic knowledge. Therefore, in the field of education, the challenges are visible for both the states and the education systems, because education must now combine the creation of an autonomous person, who will act in the common interest and will be guided by the authorities of postmodernism without exclusions among citizens. Unfortunately, however, the imposition of neoliberal market principles promotes individualism and individual freedom, with the result that the economy is perceived as the highest political capital, the role of the state is degraded and state intervention is rejected. The predominance of neoliberal politics causes the political distancing of citizens (Nussbaum, 2013).

Due to the changes taking place in the economic and consequently in the political and social spheres, the concept of citizenship is being reconsidered, not only in relation to education, but from a more general perspective. This is because citizens can no longer be citizens of a single nation-state, but it is necessary to appropriate the concept of the state at the supranational level due to the changes resulting from the imposition of globalization. Defining the concept of citizenship we would say that it is: "a status enjoyed by the individual — a member of the

society of the nation state. Citizenship refers to racial origin, nation and, therefore, the legal basis of 'belonging' to that society Citizenship implies the 'belonging' of the individual to the politically sovereign state. The citizen of the modern nation-state belongs to a social whole formed in terms of authoritarian sovereignty, political monopoly of the state, is a citizen of the state, not a citizen of the state" (Kontogiorgis, 2003). Citizenship, that is, refers to the type of relationship that the citizen develops with the state and is related to the rights granted to citizens by state power (Zembylas, 2011).

Citizenship has two versions, first, the liberal version, which focuses on the rights and freedoms of the citizen, who participates in the political process through the exercise of the right to vote, but without his participation being mandatory. Secondly, the position of the communists is that critical of the liberal perception of the citizen. The communists focus on the development of solidarity between social groups and the promotion of social interest, which leads to the building of democratic societies, which are not governed by market principles (Papadopoulos, 2016). Both approaches focus on the main task of education, which is to prepare students for participation in political life, as it is the most important factor in the socialization and politicization of students (McLarren, 2011). Communists, in particular, focus on the fact that "capitalist relations of production and social inequalities" are reproduced through the educational system (Kymlicka, 1996).

In recent years, many researchers, as we have already pointed out, have argued for the need for a broader understanding of the concept of the state, as decision-making within the nation-state often influences the policies of other states, but without weakening power of the nation-state (Zembylas, 2011). The educational system through the common educational program, which provides to all students, can transmit the virtues of the citizen of a multicultural society, which respects diversity. In this way the identity of the citizen acquires a cosmopolitan quality and at the same time the social unity and cohesion is strengthened (Papadopoulos, 2016).

Through civic education, students are encouraged to look for the causes of social injustice instead of legitimizing the existing social order (Westheimer & Kahne 2004). In addition, students are guided to understand how power relations are structured, to perceive the various forms of social oppression, and how knowledge is socially structured. This process helps them, as future citizens, to strive to build a society based on the values of justice and democracy Osler & Starkey (2002) emphasize that citizenship education is political and therefore "controversial".

At the level of rhetoric, there seems to be a consensus that education must develop students' abilities as "good citizens". However, when we define what a good citizen is or what needs to be done to promote that citizen, consensus seems to fall apart. Doubts or objections mainly concern the ambiguous nature of the citizenship course because it is not a specific course, but mainly skills that are cultivated outside the curriculum (Frazer, 2006). Therefore, it is proposed to depoliticize the concept of citizenship, thus achieving practices of promoting democratic values (Osler & Starkey, 2002) according to the representatives of Critical Pedagogy. The role of the citizen is crucial for the stability and justice of society. Disagreement over the criteria that constitute a just regime usually leads to disagreements about the essential responsibilities or virtues of citizens. Citizen education will instill in children respect for human dignity and the appreciation of political cooperation Westheimer & Kahne (2004), referring to the characteristics of democratic education, point out three parameters: personal responsibility as a citizen, participation and the orientation towards justice. Education to make the student a responsible citizen must instill in him the virtues of honesty, integrity, self-discipline and hard work. In addition, the citizen must be able to participate and take on tasks in new and established systems and community structures. Also to be inspired by the virtue of justice, to be able to challenge and participate in the change of established systems and structures that

reproduce patterns of injustice, to criticize the social, political and economic context and to seek the deeper causes of injustice. These parameters complicate the work of teachers, as the terms and specifically the term politics are not clarified by all citizens and not everyone gives it the same importance. Also, politics is often wrongly associated with partisanship, which causes caution in its entry into the education system as a subject (Frazer, 2006). Therefore, it is proposed to depoliticize the concept of statehood, thus achieving practices of promoting democratic values (Osler & Starkey, 2002), mainly according to the representatives of Critical Pedagogy. We understand that civic education contributes to the future citizen "to know himself as a member of a living community with a common democratic culture, which implies obligations and responsibilities as well as rights" (McLaughlin, 1992). Citizenship refers to an essential education through which the citizen will promote the common good and act in the direction of social prosperity and the overthrow of governments based on authoritarian governments. In this case we are talking about substantial education and not semi-education, which serves the rules of the market (Adorno, 2000).

3. Critical Pedagogy and Citizenship

According to Critical Pedagogy, citizenship education plays an important role in the student's political socialization, as the individual becomes aware of himself and the social environment, forming attitudes and views towards social and political phenomena. At the same time, it cultivates and develops the skills of participation in social becoming (Matsagouras, 2009). As a theory, Critical Pedagogy focuses on "evaluative criteria, which enter the educational system, the philosophy and ideology that permeates the school curriculum, as well as the teaching approaches that are applied" (Matsagouras, 2009). In this way, the work of education is not perceived as an issue that concerns teachers and those who deal with it in general, but highlights the relationship between education and the social system. Critical Pedagogy, that is, does not take democracy for granted, but accepts that students must develop through education those skills that will help them control the institutions of the state and judge its functions (Matsagouras, 2009). Critical Pedagogy inevitably links the acquisition of critical ability by students with active action, the pursuit of social change based on a vision for a more democratic society in accordance with the principles of justice.

Critical Pedagogy believes that education should encourage the development of individuals in a more democratic culture and active participation in the political process, because in this way the student will learn to respect diversity, heterogeneity and multiculturalism. Education is linked to democratization and changes in social relations on the basis of equality and social justice. This is inevitable to happen, as any change taking place in the educational space will inevitably have an impact on society (Rimon-Or, 2005).

A key element in public education, according to Critical Pedagogy, is the development and utilization of students' critical thinking. Also, the role of the teacher is highlighted, which is crucial, as he must be fully informed, mediator and have fully understood the social data. The aim of his work must be the change of society and the effective action of individuals within the social context at local and global level. Giroux points out the importance of teachers' work and says it can make students think critically and engage in witty discussions, which contributes to the essence of political life, as it defends democracy and helps students realize power which have as persons and social bodies (Giroux, 2002).

McLaren (1994) argues that critical thinking boosts people's willingness to transform society and, of course, social change. This can be achieved, according to McLaren (1995), if: "Pedagogy acquires a political character and

teaching methods conflict with the ritual procedures and codes of the dominant culture and power relations". The author states that it is possible to develop critical thinking and even suggests various ways, such as the study of popular culture and the study of the way in which power is intertwined "in the formation of individual subjectivity and identity". In general, the representatives of Critical Pedagogy perceive critical thinking as a political act, which directs students to emancipation, spiritual acuity and transformative action in society, as a perspective for the future (Westheimer & Kahne, 2004). The representatives of Critical Pedagogy present critical thinking as an important aspect of education for citizenship, using the argument that through reflection and evaluation the development of personal positions is allowed and thus the student-citizen is thus prepared to face the deteriorating conditions of democracy, such as racism, poverty, social inequality, etc. Furthermore, the student learns to behave in a democratic and critical way, since the consultation and the participatory process presuppose the critical ability and the demonstration of democratic behavior. All these are elements that build an effective and active citizen (Giroux, 2002).

The representatives of Critical Pedagogy perceive the school as a place of reproduction of social relations, but at the same time as a place of resistance and change. Such an approach provides the tools to examine the relationship between power and dominance in education (Walker & Unterhalter, 2007). Critical Pedagogy politicizes the school and connects school life with the student's reality, proposing the enhancement of critical thinking, always with the assistance of teachers, who are called to awaken students. This type of education is based on the principles of dialogue and aims at demystifying, providing knowledge that reveals reality, cultivating critical thinking, enhancing reflection and action based on reality (Freire, 1993). In the educational process, according to Critical Pedagogy, teachers play an important role in state education, as their actions can contribute to social transformation by focusing on the principles of justice, freedom and democracy. This can be achieved if teachers apply educational practices aimed at shaping students as active citizens. In our opinion, this is an optimistic perspective, which can activate students, but the question that arises concerns the dynamics of this activation, i.e., it is possible to strengthen students' independent thinking to such an extent that they connect events, movements, social, economic and political conditions? Is it possible for the teacher to be informed in depth and to have the skills to guide the students? We believe that the results of the educational practices used in the school may be uncertain, as there is a risk of creating critical thinking citizens, but not the transformational capacity required to change social data. This means that perhaps through education the emphasis should be on the development of critical thinking, but that social and political action should be set aside, with the consequence that education becomes one-sided, as it will not have a practical orientation. Therefore, we are talking about superficial critical approaches to reality (Matsagouras, 2009), since they are not accompanied by social changes, with the consequence that society lacks new visions.

Critical Pedagogy promotes as teachers' task the development of classroom processes, which will aim at promoting values and beliefs, which promote the democratic, critical and participatory way, as well as the teacher-student interaction. This process requires the removal of selfish and individualistic ambitions, but it does not mean that individualism is abolished or eliminated altogether for the sake of serving the common interest. We are talking about creating a balanced situation between the defense of the individual interest and the development of the social interest. Since education is based on a specific perception of pedagogy, it is necessary for pedagogy itself to differentiate and change its values and beliefs about the way education is perceived. Through the changes promoted in the educational process, students learn to become more effective in their study and at the same time develop social skills through collaboration and contact with other students (Giroux & Penna, 1980). The role of the teacher is not just to impart knowledge he is active and has a dialectical relationship with his students. Teachers need to

develop the necessary forms of knowledge and social practices in the classroom to use the experiences of students in schools, even those from the lower social classes. Thus, the cultural capital of the students will be related to the study programs and a significant part of the student population will not be marginalized.

4. Conclusion

Concluding the present study, we would say that the biggest difficulty of the educational project is that no one knows the results. These will become visible after a few decades and the situation in which society will be. Therefore, it is difficult to evaluate the educational project, which means that the education for the state cannot know if it is possible to bring about social change. However, with the development of students' critical thinking and the cultivation of their inclination towards learning, conditions will be created in schools that can lead to the formation of new forms of learning and social relations, so that in the long run there will be a change society, which will now base on the values of justice and respect.

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